

Psalm 61

Introduction – Many psalms are written in times of distress, and we have another one here. The psalm-singer is overwhelmed (v2) and this Hebrew word has a broad range of meaning including “*to shroud, to cover from darkness, or to hide.*” This psalm may be written during the time David was exiled from Jerusalem by Absalom’s rebellion. These were hard days, filled with tribulation and threats of murder. This is a psalm for the day you wake up and you know it’s going to be a hard one, another hard one. Your heart is so burdened, you are overwhelmed and weighed down and would rather just pull those blankets over your head and hide from the world. Now remember: God doesn’t inspire prayers He doesn’t like. He wants us to pray like David when we are overwhelmed. And that would mean as well that He wants to answer such prayers.

A Cry of Desperation... (vv1-2) – This short prayer is full of passion and desperation. The psalm-singer cries out from “*the ends of the earth,*” whether geographically (exiled) or spiritually, circumstantially (“where am I? Where is God”). He is overwhelmed, like a lost ship tossed at sea, capsizing. He knows there is a rock somewhere above the storm, but he doesn’t know where. He needs that higher rock and He needs the Lord to lead him and place him there.

When we are at “*the ends of the earth,*” it is not enough to pray. We are to cry out for answers. We want prayers answered. It may be the end of the earth, but it is never the end of prayer. Wherever you are, God is immediately there (Psalm 139:7-12). There is a Rock, a Stone, which is the foundation of all salvation, hope, and security – the Chief Cornerstone (Rom 9:33). Christ was that Rock in the Wilderness (1 Cor 10:4) and He is that Rock in your wilderness. Even Christ Himself sought the Father in His distress (Mark 14:33-34). How much more should we cry out to be placed upon the Rock in ours. Wherever you are, whatever your anxiety, God is there in His sovereign goodness which means you are always as close to the place of answered prayer as you could be. And if it’s big enough to trouble me, it’s big enough to bring to God – whatever the trouble: “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” Ask to be led to the Rock and ask to be placed on it; tell God it is too high for you.

...to a God Proven Faithful (vv3-4) – The psalm-singer knows Who he prays to; he knows how faithful God has been and therefore will be. If David has been king for some time, he can recall how many times God answered prayers for deliverance from Saul and other enemies. So David prays from past remembrances to future hope: “*You have been a shelter...*” to “*I will abide...I will trust,*” from “*You, O God, have heard... have given,*” to “*You will prolong...*” Recount previous answers to prayer, remember and celebrate past deliverances, study God’s stories of salvation. God does not change. And God loves cliff-hangers; “just in time” deliveries. His hard providences are often tangled and messy, beyond our understanding. But He is always faithful.

When his heart is overwhelmed, the psalm-singer know exactly what he needs. Notice the five different word pictures: “*lead me to the rock that is higher than I...*”, “*a shelter for me...*”, “*a strong tower...*”, dwelling in “*your tabernacle (home)...*”, and “*the shelter of your wings (the mercy seat).*” Word picture after word picture describing where that safe place is for every Christian – abiding in Christ. This is just what Jesus taught and promised (John 15:1-11). It is when we abide with Him in prayer that our anxieties are relinquished (Phil 4:6-7). It is when we abide in Him that our hearts and souls meditate rightly (Phil 4:8-9). It is when we take His yoke upon us that we abide with Him (Matt 11:28-30). And it is in Christ, our fortress, where we are furnished with invincible arguments by which we can victoriously oppose and blunt the force of every temptation which Satan launches against us (1 Cor 10:13, 2 Cor 10:3-5).

A Cry of Confidence...(vv5-7) – The Psalm turns, as if the Lord was near and answered that prayer to be that refuge, and the cry of desperation turns to cries of confidence. This section is bookended with “vows.” These are vows, a response of praise, because of what the psalm-singer lists in 5b-7. David’s heritage was great. The Greater David’s heritage is even greater. His reign was prolonged. The Greater David’s reign is “*as many generations*” - forever. These verses sing spectacularly about Christ and His endless reign (Psalm 110:1, 1 Cor 15:25). And because we abide in Christ, we join His abiding with the Father, reigning with Him as His body upon this earth (v7, Eph 1:22-23, 2:6, Matt 28:18-20).

We share in the inheritance of all the saints (v5). Imagine our delight in that final day to sit at the same table of fame with David and the saints of old. List them in your mind. You will be with them – and you will be with the One Who saved them all (Psalm 16:5-6).

...with Praise Unleashed (v8) – As I mentioned, the “vows” here are the response of praise, and this is the echo of Christ as well (Psalm 22:22). In this short Psalm we move from singing of our heart overwhelmed in the storm to a heart overwhelmed with praise. Can prayer do this? Can psalm-singing do this? But you haven’t kept your vows, you say? Well, Jesus has and you abide in Him – you are invited to abide in Him. Jesus was buried with your broken vows and rose from the dead keeping all His vows.

We want God glorified in our story, but we want more than that. We want to be glorified in the story because we were found on the Rock that is higher than us (Psalm 30:12). Which is another way of saying that we want to be glorified in our story because of our salvation. And so, every time you are overwhelmed, fly to Jesus. Fix your eyes upon Jesus (Heb 12:1-2).

Overwhelmed but not in Sin – Notice that it is not an immediate sin to be overwhelmed. This life is full of troubles, for all of us. Financial troubles, marriage troubles, child-rearing troubles, job troubles, neighbor troubles, health troubles, expected troubles and unexpected troubles. Troubles you know you deserve and troubles you have no idea why God sent. It becomes sin when we stay faint-hearted and become anxious rather than turning to the Lord in this and so many other prayer-psalms. That is Paul's point in Phil 4:6-7.

And the other sin is to be more concerned for the deliverance than the Deliverer. If your ultimate goal in life is to be delivered out of these troubles rather than to be with the One Who is the Deliverer, then the "rock" you are searching for becomes an idol, impersonal, cold, mean. No, you want to flee to the Rock from which flows living water and will ultimately deliver you from all your troubles.

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