
CAST YOUR BURDEN ON THE LORD

Psalm 55
Jason Brodehl

PSALMS: A QUICK NOTE

As I continue to grow in my understanding of the Bible's comprehensiveness and complexity, I have most recently been impacted by its intentional design and unity. Every letter, word, chapter, and book have been intentionally placed in its particular position. Creating a beautifully designed mosaic of the Bible's storyline, pointing us to Jesus.

So how do we interpret and understand the largest book in the Old Testament? It seems as though it is merely a collection of poems, prayers, and songs. One where we can open to any page and read, in poetic form, some of man's deepest struggles in life and highest praises of God. While this is true, it also has an intentional design and structure.

There are 150 psalms. Psalms 1 and 2 act as an introduction while the last five psalms, 145-150 are commonly referred to as the "hallelujah" psalms. I'll address what that means in a moment. Psalm 1 opens with "Blessed, or happy, is the one who delights in the law of the LORD (in other words the Torah). On His law he meditates on it day and night." It is teaching God's people the lifelong practice of prayer as they strive to obey God. Psalm 2 is a poetic reflection on God's promise to King David, that one day a Messianic King would come and establish God's Kingdom over the world. He will defeat evil and rebellion among the nations. It is then divided into five books. Each with its own theme. It culminates into the five-part hallelujah conclusion which I mentioned earlier. These are psalms 146-150. They are the hallelujah psalms for each one begins and end with the word hallelujah, which means praise Yahweh.¹

In addition, the psalms fall into two primary categories. Either psalms of lament or psalms of praise. Psalms of lament are predominantly found in the first three books. They express pain, confusion, and anger about how horrible the world is and the affects it has on the poet. Psalms of praise increasingly grow in number in books four and five. They express joy and celebration drawing attention to God's character, His goodness in creation, and the goodness as experienced by His people.

What all this structure and the two categories tell us, is that while we are exiled from our home, we are to walk in this life looking forward to the future return of Jesus and His kingdom. In the meantime, we must wrestle with ourselves and the fallen world in which we live. As one author puts it, "They are poems for exiles who are learning to live by God's wisdom and to seek God's justice in the world as they hope for the coming Messiah and the Kingdom of God."

Now, our psalm this evening falls in Book 2 where the overarching theme is covenantal failure on the part of the people of God. While the faithful wait for the future Messianic king, they experience pain, loss, and betrayal. This is where we pick up in Psalm 55.

¹ The following information was taken from the Bible Project's video on the Book of Psalms (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9phNEaPrv8&t=127s>).

HIS REFLECTION (V.1-3)²

Before we begin this psalm, let's read the context behind this psalm. Follow along with me as I begin in verse 12:

¹² *For it is not an enemy who taunts me—
then I could bear it;
it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—
then I could hide from him.*

¹³ *But it is you, a man, my equal,
my companion, my familiar friend.*

Commentators believe David wrote this psalm in response to Ahithophel's betrayal. Let me remind you of Ahithophel. The narrative is recorded in 2 Samuel 15-17. David's son, Absalom is revolting against his father, to set himself up as king. Along the way, Ahithophel, David's friend and companion, turns on David, to attach himself with Absalom. So, with that in mind, Let's start from verse one now.

¹ *Give ear to my prayer, O God,
and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!*
² *Attend to me, and answer me;
I am restless in my complaint and I moan,*
³ *because of the noise of the enemy,
because of the oppression of the wicked.
For they drop trouble upon me,
and in anger they bear a grudge against me.*

Last week, Pastor Dale brought us the message regarding bringing our complaints to God. If you recall, using Jeremiah, we learned the LORD is the righteous judge; He is the powerful creator; He rules and ordains; He is our wise sustainer; He knows us, loves us, and cares for us; He plans and He redeems. David is doing exactly what we were encouraged to do last week – he is taking his complaint to God. This prayer is an act of faith in and of itself. For prayer is a type of profession of faith. When we come to Him in prayer, we exercise faith in that we believe He is the one who hears and has the power to impact our situations.

Note first with Hebrew poetry, repetition reveals emphasis. Three times David calls out to the LORD. He says, "give ear", "attend to me", and "answer me". While initially it sounds as though David is commanding God, we soon find that his plea is for mercy. He knows that he is in no position to demand anything from God because the Lord is the Sovereign ruler over David's life.

His situation, betrayal, is causing David restlessness. He is moaning and there is disruption in his life. Those who are pursuing their own agendas, rather than God's, are continually adding weight to David's soul as he bears their anger against him. He is begging for God's intervention. Have you ever been there? You feel as though you have been stabbed in the back. It wasn't a mistake either. No, it was a deliberate choice to turn on you. It will weigh you down. Sleep eludes you all the while your mind is racing, rehearsing all that's been said and done. But even worse, you begin to add to the narrative by wondering and anticipating what you think they may have said and what they might say in the future. You were so worried about what someone has done to you that you can't even focus on what you are doing? Even if it is daily responsibilities. Listen to David's response. Have you ever felt that way? Let's read David's response.

² The following message was adapted, with expressed permission the author, Russ Kennedy, from his book *Perplexities*, specifically the chapter, When I am Betrayed. Some lines I have used verbatim as I found his words best described the message of the psalm, but I have not noted it in all circumstances.

HIS RESPONSE (V.4-8)

- ⁴ My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
- ⁵ Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.
- ⁶ And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;
- ⁷ yes, I would wander far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness; *Selah*
- ⁸ I would hurry to find a shelter
from the raging wind and tempest

FEAR (V.4-5)

Listen to these words: anguish, terrors of death, fear, trembling and horror. What comes to your mind when you hear those descriptors? In our modern-day vernacular, this may be a panic attack. If you have not had the pleasure of experiencing one, this is what it feels like. Fear overwhelms you. Your heart pounds. Your hands tremble. You feel dizzy. And you begin thinking, "This is it. I am going to die." Nothing is more frightening than to feel as though you have lost all control of your emotions and thoughts. It's one thing to be ill and able to receive a medical treatment. That is tangible. But it is completely different when there is no tangible cure. What we learn from David, is that he freely confesses his emotions before the Lord. He is not critical of himself. He is not apologizing for his lack of faith or trust. No, he brings all that he is thinking and suffering before the throne of God.

OF PERSONAL EXPOSURE

But how does betrayal incite such panic and fear? First, personal exposure. The "friend" has intimate details of your life, your strengths, and your weaknesses. This is so for David. Absalom, his son, is seeking to take his life. And standing at his side whispering in his ear is the man who knows David best and whom David trusted most. What is his friend saying? What weaknesses will be exposed? These fears are real. It makes one feel completely naked, exposed, and completely vulnerable.

OF THE FUTURE

Then there is fear of the future. The question is, "Who's on my side? Do I even have any allies left? Who can I trust now?" These questions invade our minds. They can take us captive. This is even more prevalent in our society today. It is hard to recover from false accusations in our social media culture. Almost every form of communication is stored for public record. Giants are taken down by a simple email or text message string. Today, it is more costly and damaging to fight for your innocence than it is to arrive to some undisclosed plea deal. The problem with that, among many others, is that it leaves doubt in everyone's mind for years. You become a marked individual.

FLIGHT (V.6-8)

When betrayal strikes and there is no hope for resolution, all you want to do is run and hide. Look back to verses 6-8. Once again, we have repetition. He wants to fly away, wander off, and hurry to seek protection from the raging storm of this affliction. Flight speaks of a swift escape to a place high above the troubles of the situation. The wandering refers to disappearing to a place of solitude. Finally, he seeks protective shelter from the turmoil. Have you ever felt this way? All you want to do is run. You wish you could just get a on plane and get out of here. Or you wish for solitude? You want to hide and get away. Or you seek place of refuge until the affliction passes?

We too think if we change locations, jobs, or even spouses, it will resolve our problems. What this says to us, is that these are common human responses to these situations. This is the beauty of the psalms.

HIS REQUESTS (v.9-15)

Now David turns his attention to the Lord in voice. It is futile to fear and flee. So, he faces the reality of the situation and focuses his petitions on both the temporal and the eternal.

- ⁹ Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues;
 for I see violence and strife in the city.
- ¹⁰ Day and night they go around it
 on its walls,
 and iniquity and trouble are within it;
- ¹¹ ruin is in its midst;
 oppression and fraud
 do not depart from its marketplace.
- ¹² For it is not an enemy who taunts me—
 then I could bear it;
 it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—
 then I could hide from him.
- ¹³ But it is you, a man, my equal,
 my companion, my familiar friend.
- ¹⁴ We used to take sweet counsel together;
 within God's house we walked in the throng.
- ¹⁵ Let death steal over them;
 let them go down to Sheol alive;
 for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.

First, he asks for God to deal with their tongues. He pleads to God to confound and divide their words of counsel so that it is ineffective. This petition is one that we all can echo. When we are betrayed or even less, misrepresented, what is our first inclination? Is it to rally others to our side? Is it to lash out on social media or defend ourselves? I love how David relies on God's sovereign power over all things and come to Him who has made "man's mouth" to confound the word of those who are against him. Rather than relying on his own strength and worldly wisdom.

Given David's situation, his son's betrayal and rise to power, it's not surprising the city would be in turmoil. This is a place of anarchy and rebellion. There was violence, strife, destruction, oppression and deceit. That is to be expected.

However, what is staggering to him is the deep pain by the friend who betrays (v.12-14). If it were an enemy, someone who hated him, it would be bearable. But it was a dear friend, a companion. It was someone he sought advice from and friendship with. It was someone he had worshipped with in sweet fellowship. They had often walked together to the house of the Lord and worshipped with the community of saints. There is no betrayal quite like this kind. God answers

David also saw their evil in the light of eternal judgment (v.15). This was not just immediate pain and sour grapes. This was a deep cry for justice. When, with little cause, friends will turn on those who love them, they are placing themselves directly in front of the anger of God. God answers David's prayer in the way Ahithophel's counsel was

heard by Absalom ultimately revealing the pride of Ahithophel's heart. Hear the end of the story on the betraying friend, "When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried in the tomb of his father." (2 Samuel 17:23)

HIS RECOGNITION (v.16-21)

David now moves from verse 2, "I am restless" to verse 16, "I call to God."

- ¹⁶ But I call to God,
and the LORD will save me.
- ¹⁷ Evening and morning and at noon
I utter my complaint and moan,
and he hears my voice.
- ¹⁸ He redeems my soul in safety
from the battle that I wage,
for many are arrayed against me.
- ¹⁹ God will give ear and humble them,
he who is enthroned from of old, *Selah*
because they do not change
and do not fear God.
- ²⁰ My companion stretched out his hand against his friends;
he violated his covenant.
- ²¹ His speech was smooth as butter,
yet war was in his heart;
his words were softer than oil,
yet they were drawn swords.

In battling the fear and anxiety within his soul, he directs his thoughts to the unchangeable character of God. Listen to David's affirmations here, "the LORD will save me", "he hears my voice", "He redeems my soul", and finally, "God will give ear and humble them." David has found his refuge and escape that he was seeking. He found in the Lord! God hears and He is the righteous judge. The Lord heard his cry for mercy and he heard it throughout the day (v.17).

After the "Selah", there is a shift to referring to the conduct of his betrayer (v.19b-21). The first phrase is ambiguous. It is almost a kind of fade out on a changeless God and a fade in on an ever-changing man. So while David honors God, the betrayer does not fear God. The lack of fearing God is seen as one of the causes for his sin. All through the Bible, a reverential respect and holy awe of God restrains sin and motivates service. It reminds us of Genesis 4 in reference to Cain, "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." His companion did not rule over it. This is what happens when we wage the war in our own flesh and not at the throne of God.

See the graphic portrayal of the betrayal. There was an attack that violated promises. From a heart that was at war, there came smooth buttery words that melted into David's heart. There was an unsheathed tongue that pierced deep. Here is the very falseness of his friend: with speech smoother than butter and words softer than oil, he attacks his friend and breaks his covenant.

HIS RESOLUTION

In the closing stanza, David brings everything to a resolution, to a sense of finality, not only for himself, but for his enemies and for the people of God (v.22-23).

²² Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved.

²³ But you, O God, will cast them down
into the pit of destruction;
men of blood and treachery
shall not live out half their days.
But I will trust in you.

In the midst of trouble and turmoil, of friends who betray and tongues that wound, cast your burden on the Lord because He is a God who sustains. Here David exemplifies living a life of faith and obedience in a fallen world but not by the ways of the world.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Prayer is the pathway in which we process our pain before the Lord. We are tempted to go to people to process. This temptation, (running to people first), can set us up for failure because we are tempted to seek support and justification for our anger and disappointment. Now I want to place an asterisk here. Our walk with the Lord is to be done in community. Seeking help from others to process our pain may be wise. We ought to be ministering to one another to help carry one another's burdens. But make sure those people you are seeking help from, are speaking Bible to you. Bibleless counsel is shallow, hallow, limited, weak, and empty.

The psalms speak the language of God. They are there for us to lament to our great high priest and to praise Him. They give us words to help us biblically process our emotions, our pain, and our suffering.

Learn from David. ¹⁴ *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Learn from Jesus. He was betrayed with a kiss by one of His own. But He saw the plan of God from the highest point of view. He rested on and entrusted himself to the loving Father. ¹⁹ *Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.* And, *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* ⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* ⁷ *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

Learn from Paul. ²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* God is sovereign. The purposes of is to conform us to the image of His Son. It may entail walking through door of betrayal and walking the path of suffering, but rest assured, it has purpose.

The way of discipleship is one selflessness. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. We are to love our enemies and pray for them. This path can only be traveled by casting our burdens upon our Savior. He will sustain us. For those who have committed sins against us, such as betrayal, we are to entrust our souls unto the faithful creator. He will make all things right. If it is in the discipline or in punishment of evil, He is executing every detail of our lives. Rest in Him. And be able to say with the psalmist, "But I will trust in you."