

Psalm 6 “Save Me for the Sake of Your Steadfast Love”
Psalm 5
2 Thessalonians 1

November 2, 2014

Since I’ve preached on Psalm 5 before, I won’t repeat that in this series.
But because Psalm 5 helps set up Psalm 6, we will sing it this morning!

Psalm 5, verse 3 speaks of the morning sacrifice.
The Psalm may have been sung
 during the morning sacrifice as the king came into the temple to worship God.
But it would be appropriate for any Israelite who participated in the morning sacrifice

The point of the Psalm (as of the morning sacrifice),
 is that our first thoughts of the day need to be directed toward God.
The daily morning sacrifice was to orient all Israel to the fact
 that the Lord was the center of their lives.
This is why the early church and the reformation church
 frequently maintained daily morning and evening prayers
 (parallel to the morning and evening sacrifices in the temple).

Psalms 3, 4, and 6 all speak of trusting in God as you go to sleep,
 Psalm 5 calls you to call upon the LORD in the morning!

The Psalmist declares that we may enter the temple of the Lord
 and bow down and worship before him,
 because we come through the abundance of HIS covenant faithfulness (or steadfast love)
This is why God sent Jesus.
 And as Jesus sang this Psalm,
 he understood that it was the covenant faithfulness of the Lord that upheld him.

Sing Psalm 5
Read 2 Thessalonians 1

I’ve often heard people say that in the OT it was okay to ask God to destroy your enemies,
 but in the NT, that is no longer permitted –
 after all, Jesus says to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

But then what do you do with Paul here in 2 Thessalonians 1?
 Certainly we should pray that God would convert our enemies!
 We would far rather see them as brothers than as enemies!

But think about Paul’s famous line, “vengeance is mine, says the LORD, I will repay.”
 That means that vengeance belongs to the LORD.
 Or, as Paul says here in 2 Thess 2:8,

God will inflict “vengeance on those who do not know God
and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”
God will *avenge* all the wrongs of this age.
God will make all things right!

That’s part of the *good news* of the gospel.
It is *good news* that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead –
because if Jesus never returns,
then that means that nothing will ever *really* change.

And if nothing ever changes – then sin and death will win.

And that would be something to mourn about!

Psalm 6 teaches us the art of lamentation.

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith.^{la} A Psalm of David.

“According to the Sheminith” could be translated, “according to the eighth”
(which is probably a musical term – perhaps even identical to our word “octave”).

The early Fathers recognized here the principle of the number eight.
After all, there are seven days in the week,
and so the eighth day is the first day of the new week.
Likewise, there are seven notes in the scale,
and so the eighth note is the first note of the next octave.

There are two Psalms that use this designation:

Psalm 6 and Psalm 12 – both of which are laments.

The octave – the eighth note – is particularly appropriate for a lament,
because the octave signals a new beginning –
and a lament recognizes that something is fundamentally wrong,
and so we *need* a new beginning!

We’ve talked a lot about *complaints* – and the importance of complaints.

A complaint is where you recognize that something is wrong,
and so you bring a complaint to someone who can do something about it.
In that respect a complaint takes a legal form.
Here’s the problem – here’s what I want you to do –
now please do it!

A *lament* can be connected with a complaint.

Here in Ps 6, the language of lamentation and complaint woven together.
But the lament does not need to include a complaint.

Job 3 is the classic lament.

Job spends a whole chapter lamenting his birth and his life –
but there is no complaint in Job 3.

The book of Lamentations includes some complaints,
but is largely taken up with lamentation – weeping – wailing over Jerusalem.

Psalm 6 teaches us how to lament – how to weep over our sin
and over the corruption that is in the world because of sin.

We start with the “art of lamentation” in verses 1-5.

1. The Art of Lamentation – Pleading with God (v1-5)

a. Is There Healing for Troubled Bones? “Be Gracious to Me, O LORD” (v1-3)

*6 O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.*

I know what I deserve.

God is angry.

And he is angry for a good reason –
because I have sinned.

I deserve his rebuke.

This is an important place to start our lament.

We don’t by saying, “I don’t deserve this!”

We don’t start by saying, “I’m a good person.”

We start by saying, “please, don’t deal with me according to what *I deserve*.”

Do not deal with me in anger.

Psalm 6 never makes clear *exactly* what the issue is.

And that’s what makes Psalm 6 so useful for the church.

Because whatever difficulty – whatever trial you face – Psalm 6 fits that situation!

It would be easy to locate times in David’s life when he could have written Psalm 6.

After his adultery with Bathsheba – as he watched his infant son die.

Or after Absalom had driven him out of Jerusalem (as we saw last time).

But the Psalms were not written so that we could analyze David’s psychology.

After all, we are only told that it is a Psalm *of David* (not necessary *by David*).

I tend to refer to the Psalmist *as David* –

but the text doesn’t say that he was the one who wrote it.

It might be better to say that the “I” of the Psalm is David.

When you think about the Psalms,
the singular often fits the person of the king –
and the plural often fits the person of Israel.
And of course, all of that is because the Psalms point us to Jesus and the church.

Indeed, even our Lord Jesus Christ could say,
“rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath.”
Our Lord Jesus never sinned –
but on the cross, the anger of God burned against him –
he bore the wrath of his Father.

And as he prepared to go to the cross, Jesus could truly say:

² *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.*

Be gracious to me.
If you treated me as I deserved, I would be destroyed!
I cannot endure your justice –
so please, be *gracious* to me, O LORD,
“for I am languishing.”

I am weak.
But “languishing” does not simply mean “weak.”
It means to become increasingly weak and feeble.

It’s getting worse.

Have you ever felt that?
It keeps getting worse.
Maybe because of your own sin –
or maybe because of things that are happening to you –
you just feel that malaise – that despair and depression –
nothing works.

It just keeps getting worse.

“Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.”
In other words,
this is not a superficial problem.
Your bones are the underlying structure that holds you together.
If your malady has reached your bones,
then it has reached the core of who you are.

That's why my *bones* are troubled,

But...

³ *My soul also is greatly troubled.*

My bones are troubled.

My inward parts are languishing.

But even more my soul is *greatly troubled*.

Those three little words, "You have cancer,"
are referring to a physical problem.

But my observation is that the emotional and spiritual struggles that follow
are every bit as powerful as the physical trial.

Indeed, the Psalmist abruptly turns to the LORD and asks:

But you, O LORD—how long?

The Psalmist avoids specifics, so that you can put the particulars of your life here.
What situation are you facing?

And what should you do about it?

b. "Turn, O LORD...for the Sake of Your Steadfast Love" (v4-5)

In verse 4, the Psalmist pleads with God:

⁴ *Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.*

As we saw last week,
the Psalmists pray in the imperative mood.

"Turn, O LORD, deliver my life – save me"

Now, first, I should point out that the word "life" in verse 4
is the same word translated "soul" in verse 3!

Verse 3 says "my soul" is greatly troubled

Verse 4 asks "deliver my soul."

This is important – because David is saying

please save the very part of me that is most greatly troubled!

And think about how David says this:

How can God save me?

Turn.

God must turn.

I'm languishing here.

I'm dying.

There's nothing I can do to change my circumstances and make everything okay!

In other words,

if God continues on his current course,

then I'm going to die.

And so we plead with God to *turn*.

Change direction!

Let me ask you something:

Why should God listen to you?

Why should the Creator of the universe pay attention to what you want?

You need to understand this.

If you think that God will listen to you because you are somebody special,
then you have a major ego problem!

There is one person who the Father listens to because he is somebody special –
and that's Jesus!

Jesus is the one-and-only Son (the unique, only-begotten Son of the Father).

God listens to *us* because of who Jesus is.

He listens to us because *he has promised to hear those who pray in Jesus' name*.

“Save me for the sake of your steadfast love!”

This is that great Hebrew word, *hesed* – steadfast love or covenant faithfulness.

God will save us – not because we are so good or special –
but because *he has promised*.

Quite frankly, if I had to be good or special in order for God to save me,
I wouldn't have a chance!

But over and over again throughout the scriptures,

God says that he will be faithful to his promises –

not because Israel is so good and faithful,

but for his own sake – for the sake of his own reputation, you might say.

That's what David appeals to in verse 5:

⁵ *For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who will give you praise?*

If I die, what will happen to your promises?
What will happen to your steadfast love?

Some people think that verse 5 reflects a time
when God's people didn't know about the resurrection yet.
But David isn't talking about the resurrection.
He's talking about what happens if the Lord's anointed dies.

"In death there is no remembrance of you.
In Sheol who will give you praise?"

We're so used to living on *this side* of the resurrection,
that we don't think about what it was like on the other side!

But just think about it –
what would have happened if Jesus had died *and stayed dead?!?*

There would be no resurrection!
That's what David is getting at in verse 5.
In death there is no remembrance of God.
No one praises God in Sheol – in the grave –
in the realm where death prevails!

If we all die – and there is no resurrection –
then what will happen to God's *hesed*?
What will happen to God's steadfast love – his faithfulness to his promises?

In this way, you can see how Psalm 6 is very much a song of the burial of Jesus.
When Jesus goes down into the grave,
he is forsaken by his Father.
Yes, he says at the last,
"Into your hands, I commit my spirit,"
but that is only the prayer of faith.
In death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who will give you praise?

And in the Christian life –
there are days like this.

No, that's not quite right.
There are *nights* like this.
Nights of darkness when we cannot see hope or joy or peace.

We long for *shalom* – for peace and well-being –
but all we see is darkness.

And that’s why we must practice our laments!

2. The Practice of Lamentation – Flooding My Bed with Tears (v6-7)

⁶ *I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.*

⁷ *My eye wastes away because of grief;
it grows weak because of all my foes.*

I don’t know whether you have ever spent a night moaning and weeping,
but the Psalmist uses extravagant language to make his point.

I once was reading a letter from the 1830s –
a letter to Virginia Shelby telling her that her husband was dead.

The letter was well-worn – making it a little hard to read,
so I looked more carefully at the paper.

It was tear-stained.

And not only that –

there were *layers* of tear stains.

One round of tears had dried – and then she opened the letter again –
and stained it with her tears *again* and *again*.

The grief of his death stained not only that page,
but her whole life.

My eye wastes away because of grief.

Moaning, tears, and weeping is the *right thing to do* when dealing with grief!

It’s true that God works all things together for good
for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

But that doesn’t change the fact that we suffer –
and we grieve – we weep and we wail and we moan!

Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus!

He *knew* that Lazarus would be raised in a few minutes!

But he wept!

Sorrow and grief and mourning
are the proper response when your bones are troubled –
when your soul is *greatly troubled*.

After my mother died, there were a lot of tears –
and even five years later, I could be reduced to tears by a poignant memory.

Turning your bed into a sea of tears is perfectly appropriate!
And we, as a church, should weep with those who weep.
We should enter into their sorrow and grief –
recognizing that when our fellow Christians suffer,
we, too, are suffering with them.

Psalm 88 will leave us here.

But Psalm 6 does not.
Psalm 6 teaches us the full pattern of lamentation.
Psalm 6 gives us a paradigm for lamentation –
but it's a paradigm that sees hope at the end:

3. The Fruit of Lamentation – My Enemies Shall Be Ashamed and Greatly Troubled (v8-10)

⁸ *Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.*

⁹ *The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*

¹⁰ *All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;
they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.*

This final section takes the language of the rest of the Psalm and ties it all together!
First, the LORD hears the sound of my weeping (from verses 6-7).

Then when God turns to me (v4) – then my enemies are turned back (v10).

My soul was greatly troubled (v3) –
but when God hears my plea (also v3),
then my enemies will be greatly troubled (v10).

Here in the final section of the Psalm,
David addresses the wicked in verse 8.
Get lost, you workers of evil! –
because the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.

God has accepted me – and my prayers.

And he has accepted me and my prayers
because he has accepted Jesus – and his prayers!

When you were justified in Christ,
God accepted you in him.
God forgave your sins and imputed to you the righteousness of Christ.

But think about the implications of that!
If God has accepted *you* in Christ,
then God has accepted your prayers, your good works –
everything that comes with you!
Our Confession of Faith says it this way:

“the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unprovable in God's sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.” (WCF 16.6)

When the Psalmist says that God has accepted his prayer,
he's not claiming that his prayers have been perfect.
Rather, he trusts God's *hesed* – his steadfast love.

Too often nowadays the church communicates the idea that what really matters is being “happy.”
We have forgotten how to weep.
Psalm 6 helps us remember the art of lamentation –
and hopefully will also help us *practice* our laments!

After all, as Psalm 6 makes clear,
lamentation is *not the final word*.

The reason why we lament and bewail our sin and misery
is first, because we recognize that things are not as they should be –
and second, because we long for the day when Jesus will make things as they should be!

Conclude by singing Psalm 6