

“The Highest Rock”
Psalm 61
(Preached at Trinity, March 6, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Psalm 61** finds David once again crying out to God for help. We aren’t sure of the occasion of David’s writing.
 - A. **Verse 6** tells us the psalm finds its setting after David became king. The psalm tells us it was a time of distress for David, but David experienced many such times.
 - B. Perhaps he is speaking of fleeing from Absalom. This was a time of great trial for David. What is consistent with David is his great trust in God, even during times of great life-threatening adversity.
2. The superscription tells us that David is the author and that it was delivered to the chief musician who led in Israel’s worship. It was also designated “upon Neginah” which is a word that designates a stringed instrument. God is not unconcerned about any aspect of our worship. David is designating the particular instrument to accompany this psalm.
3. This a brief psalm that I’ll divide into three simple sections.
David’s Prayer – **Verses 1-2**
David’s Peace – **Verses 3-7**
David’s Praise – **Verse 8**
- I. David’s Prayer – **Verses 1-2**
 - A. The intensity of David’s prayer
Psalm 61:1 – “Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.”
 1. We can learn much from the prayers of Scripture
 2. David’s prayer was with great earnest – “Hear my cry”
 3. **Verse 2** – He declares that his heart is overwhelmed so he prays from the heart. Relationship with God is a heart affair.
 4. God turns His ear towards earnest prayers
James 5:16 – “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”
Literally: “Much will the powerful prayer of the righteous accomplish”
 5. The only way to approach God is with earnestness
Jacob would not let Christ go
“I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”
 6. This is the nature of coming to Christ – we seek Him with our whole heart
 - a. God spoke to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah
Jeremiah 29:12-13 – “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. ¹³
And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

- b. Jesus spoke of the diligence in entering the Kingdom
Matthew 11:12 – “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”
Literally: “the forceful take it forcefully”
 - c. Again, Jesus spoke of it as an intense striving
Luke 13:24 – “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”
ἀγωνίζομαι – we get our word agonize.
 - d. David in the 119th Psalm
Psalm 119:2 – “Blessed *are* they that keep his testimonies, *and that seek him with the whole heart.*”
6. This is the way we come before God
David is crying out to God – “Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.”
- B. David recognized that he needed power beyond himself
Psalm 61:2 – “when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock *that is higher than I*”
1. During this trial David was probably hiding among the rocks in the Judean wilderness. The rocks provided him protection but David looked beyond the physical rocks to his ultimate protection--
“lead me to the rock *that is higher than I.*”
 2. The theme of the God as a Rock is a favorite theme of David. He uses this theme 20 times—three times in Psalm 62.
 3. Of course, the Rock is ultimately Christ. He is the Rock that is higher than all. This is one reason I think the proper interpretation of Matthew 16:18 is Christ.
Matthew 16:18 – “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
 4. Nothing earthly could provide the rest that David was seeking. Our rest and comfort can only be found in Christ. He is the foundation of our relationship with God. He is the solid bedrock upon which we stand
 5. We can rest in Him. As God’s people we are united with Christ. God is not deaf to the cries of His people—those who rest upon Christ, the Solid Rock.
 6. There is another important consideration in this passage. David refers to the Rock as too high for him to reach on his own.
 - a. David’s situation was insurmountable. It was beyond human ability to escape. He cries out for God to lead him to the Rock that was beyond his reach.
 - b. Thus we find the complete impotence of a sinner finding relief by his own power. Coming to Christ is a work of God’s grace and power.

- c. Spurgeon: “A Saviour would have been of no use to us if the Holy Spirit had not gently led us to him, and enabled us to rest upon him. A seeking soul should at once believe in Jesus, but it is legitimate for a man to ask to be led to Jesus; the Holy Spirit is able to effect such a leading, and he can do it even though the heart be on the borders of despair.”

II. David’s Peace – **Verses 3-7** - David turns from pleadings to sweet declarations of peace

- A. God had been his abiding refuge for David
(The word for “shelter” in the KJV also means refuge – ESV, NAS)
Psalm 46:1 – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”
 - 1. Luther referred to this “refuge” as a “Mighty Fortress”
 - 2. David adds: “*and a strong tower from the enemy.*”
A tower provided security out of reach from the enemy’s arrows.
 - 3. This verse speaks of security, comfort, protection. David found great peace in God’s mighty hand of provision
- B. David found unspeakable peace in the presence of God
 - 1. David is making a plea: “Let me dwell”
 - 2. What is David asking? He is asking to abide in the dwelling place of God
 - a. The KJV translates it “tabernacle”
The ESV & NAS translate it tent
 - b. It isn’t the word usually translated “tabernacle”
This word refers to a home. David is pleading to come under God’s roof.
 - 3. Listen to **Verse 4** in the NAS
^{NAS} **Psalm 61:4** – ‘Let me dwell in Thy tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Thy wings.’
The picture is of a chick coming under the wings of a mother hen.
 - 4. Where God is is home for us
- C. David had the peace that God hears his vows
“For thou, O God, hast heard my vows”
 - 1. The concept of making vows has been lost today
A vow is a commitment, a pledge, an irrevocable promise.
 - 2. This is why the divorce rate is so high today
 - 3. Christianity is a vow – a vow of surrender, commitment, obedience.
Our church covenant is a vow. That which makes us a church is that we have covenanted together to be a church in commitment to Christ and to each other.
 - 4. What were David’s vows? They were expressions of praise and expressions of commitment to God.
 - a. Our vows are not tools of bargaining with God but expressions of commitment, pledges of faithfulness, promises of everlasting praise
 - b. We pray with vows attached to trust God in His provision and rest in His perfect government.

- c. William Gurnall – “Indeed, that prayer is a blank which hath not a vow in it. Is it a mercy thou prayest him to give? If sincere, thou wilt vow to praise him for it, and serve him with it.”
5. It is the saint’s comfort that God hears our vows. He hears us and honors our vows.
Matthew Henry - "The vows themselves which I made, and with which I bound my soul: thou hast taken notice of them; thou hast accepted them, because made in sincerity, and been well pleased with them; thou hast been mindful of them, and put me in mind of them."
6. David had confidence that he was one of God’s people. There are a particular people who have vowed commitment to the living God; who stand before Him in covenant faithfulness. “Thou hast given *me* the heritage of those that fear thy name.”
- D. David had the peace that God would preserve his throne, even in the face of the relentless attacks of his enemies.
1. On one hand David was declaring with confidence that God would preserve his throne. He knew he was God’s anointed. Though his enemies were great God would protect him and restore him to power.
2. David was ultimately looking beyond himself. Through Christ his kingdom would indeed be an everlasting kingdom. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic promises. Jesus will sit upon His throne forever.
 The angel of the Lord speaking to Mary:
Luke 1:32 – “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.”
3. David prays with confidence in God’s covenant love, “Appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him.”
- E. All of these things brought peace to David.
1. Peace in God as our strong refuge – our Mighty Fortress
2. Peace that God hears and honors our vows
3. Peace that our Lord’s Kingdom shall never end. Jesus is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.
Isaiah 9:7 – “Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.”

III. David’s Praise – Verse 8

Psalms 61:8 – “So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever”

- A. David expressed his heart of commitment before God
1. God is interested in our heart. Christianity is a relationship with Christ - its a heart affair. All of our actions are motivated by the heart.
2. There are many Hebrew words for praise.
- a. **יָדָה** yadah - to throw, shoot, cast (it can refer to shooting an arrow) We can see from this that praise is something we lift up towards God with great energy.
- b. **יָדָה** also carries with it the idea of thanksgiving.

- c. Another word for praise is הלל - to shine – This is where we get the word, hallelujah. We can catch a glimpse of the glory in praise. In praise we are magnifying the glory and splendor of God.
3. The word used here refers to the singing of praise
David declared he would sing praises.
His heart moved him to worship God in song
Psalm 9:2 – “I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.”
Psalm 71:23 – “My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed.”
Psalm 104:33 – “I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.”
4. David declared that his praise would be perpetual.
Psalm 61:8 – “So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever”
- B. But it had present realities. David adds, “that I may daily perform my vows.”
1. Remember, David’s vows were expressions of praise and commitment
 2. David expressed that he would daily carry out these vows
 3. This should also be our heart – a heart of love, commitment, praise, and gratitude.

Conclusion:

1. God is our ever present stronghold. He has always defended us. He always will.
2. God is worthy to be praised. No one has ever loved us like He does. No one will ever defend us like He does. Think of the many times He has proved Himself mighty in your life. Praise Him!
George Horne – “We are bound to sing praise unto God’s holy name for ever, and daily to perform the vows made in baptism, that we would believe in him and serve him all the days of our life; until that blessed day shall dawn which no night is to follow, when faith shall end in vision, and duty be resolved into praise.”