

In God Put Your Trust

“My God in whom my trust shall be.” Let us continue our worship of God by going to His word. The text for this morning is Psalm 56, which should be read with the title, which is part of the inspired word of God:

For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim [*one possible rendering of that is 'the dove of the distant terebinth trees,' possibly the title of a melody*]. A Mikhtam [*a particular kind of psalm*] of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

¹Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me;

Fighting all day long he oppresses me.

²My foes have trampled upon me all day long,

For they are many who fight proudly against me.

³When I am afraid,

I will put my trust in You.

⁴In God, whose word I praise,

In God I have put my trust;

I shall not be afraid.

What can *mere* man do to me?

⁵All day long they distort my words;

All their thoughts are against me for evil.

⁶They attack, they lurk,

They watch my steps,

As they have waited *to take* my life.

⁷Because of wickedness, cast them forth,

In anger put down the peoples, O God!

⁸You have taken account of my wanderings;

Put my tears in Your bottle.

Are *they* not in Your book?

⁹Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call;

This I know, that God is for me.

¹⁰In God, *whose* word I praise,

In the LORD, *whose* word I praise,

¹¹In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid.

What can man do to me?

¹²Your vows are *binding* upon me, O God;

I will render thank offerings to You.

¹³For You have delivered my soul from death,

Indeed my feet from stumbling,

So that I may walk before God

In the light of the living.

(Ps. 56, NASB)

These are the words of David, who confessed in 2 Sam.23 that he, David, son of Jesse, was “the man raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel” – and that the Spirit of the LORD spoke by him, and that His words were on his tongue (2 Sam.

23:1-4). Our Lord Christ Jesus said that David spoke by the Spirit, and does His disciple Peter after Him. “Therefore, being a prophet. . .”, as Peter says in his first sermon, the one on Pentecost, we would do well to hear him. These words are not only the words of David, but the words of the Holy Spirit.

Ps. 56 is one of the many Psalms of David. Thirteen psalms ascribed to David also have clear historical connections designated in the title, eight or nine of which pretty clearly come from the time of first open and severe conflict with King Saul to the death of Saul – Ps. 59 falling at the beginning of this history, and Ps. 18 at the close. I suspect many more without titles come from this period as well, but three of these titled psalms are from the narrow period of time from David’s first fleeing to Gath at the end of 1 Sam. 21, to his learning of the death of the priests at Nob at the end of 1 Sam. 22 – a mere chapter of 1 Samuel gives us Psalms 56, 34, and 52. This morning’s sermon is on the first of these, and 1 Sam. 21:10-12 summarizes the immediate context for the Psalm:

¹⁰Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. ¹¹But the servants of Achish said to him, “Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying,

‘Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands’?”

¹²David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath.

(1 Sam. 21:10-12)

What does the Holy Spirit teach us through David, in this psalm?

Point 1: Pray in Adversity

The first thing we learn from this psalm is that we should *pray in adversity*. We are here exhorted, by example, to *pray in adversity*. The whole of this psalm is prayer, and given the dire circumstances and David’s isolation at the time, a prayer we would assume was first uttered in private, - yet, in due time, handed over to the choir director, with what we think might be a suggested melody, for worship of the gathered people of God, the congregation. Thus what was most private here becomes public for the benefit of the people of God, so let us as the people of God heed it.

That it is a prayer is clear enough from the reading of it: both from the manner of addressing God and from the three petitions that it bears. From the first verse to the last, God is addressed:

¹Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me;

(Ps. 56:1a)

And at the end:

¹³For You have delivered my soul from death,
Indeed my feet from stumbling,

(Ps. 56:13a)

And in numerous times in between: “O God”, “You”, “Your”. David is speaking to God in this Psalm, and he makes petitions before his Lord. The three explicit petitions are: first, in the first verse, for God to be gracious to him – or in the older translations, to be merciful to him. The second, found in verse 7, a plea for justice, that those who are opposing him, the peoples, bear God’s wrath and be cast down. The third, in verse 8, a plea for God’s remembering of and accounting for his griefs. These three petitions are worthy of a sermon in themselves, but it is enough for this morning to see that here David is praying God’s will: God has been and will be gracious to David, as we will see, and Scripture abundantly promises God coming in judgment, and if God considers the death of His saints precious in His eyes, He too accounts for their tears.

That it is likewise a prayer in adversity is obvious from the psalm. David describes his circumstance not to inform God, for he knows that God has taken into account his wanderings (v 8a) – David knows full well that his heavenly Father knows what he needs before he asks Him (Matt. 6:8) – so not to inform, but to open up this stricken heart of his before his heavenly Father. And so he relates not so much a history as a picture of his condition: man has trampled on him, – he has been stepped upon, ground underfoot, and that all the day long. Or, if you have an older translation, he has been swallowed up, consumed. He has been fought against and oppressed. His words have been distorted, twisted, ‘wrested’, so that he may be slandered – by those whose consistent thoughts against him have been evil. They act in pride, and they are many. These have attacked, lurked, stalked him, all with the intent to kill him. He has had to flee, go on the run and become a wanderer, and a man filled with grief and weeping.

Not that all of that could have been guessed from the immediate context, from the few verses we’ve already read. He went to an enemy territory, and got captured. Where are the stalkers and slanders in that? To see that, one has to recall how it was that David ended up coming to Gath, and recall the history recorded in 1 Sam. 18 through 21. “I want you to know, brethren, . . . what has happened to” David, to understand how fitting the words of this psalm are. That song that those of Gath remembered about David – those words had caused problems before for David, for when first sung they had caused King Saul to be suspicious of David – he suspected that David was aiming for the throne, his throne. Now Saul had been told by Samuel that the Lord had torn the kingdom from him, and given it to a neighbor, one better than he, and that that was how it had to be could have been confirmed to him by the blessing of Joseph upon Judah – Judah, the neighboring tribe to the south of Benjamin, the tribe of Saul, from whom the scepter would not depart. All that could have been known to Saul, but it was not united with faith – so all Saul can see in David’s success is a man angling for his throne. In humility he could have acknowledged that David must increase, and that he must decrease – but, no, because of his pride. I say all this to show you how just are David’s words that those who are against him are prideful. Such is Saul. God’s purposes, though told to Saul, remain invisible to him, for his heart is hard.

So, rather than give way to David, Saul fears and dreads him – and begins to act for David’s destruction. Twice he hopes to kill David by proxy – to have send him into battle enough so that the Philistines (like those in Gath, who have reason to hate David) may have opportunity to slay him in battle. Twice he does this, and both times with stated and hypocritical intent to make David his son-in-law; and twice he fails: David is successful in battle, and this

leads Saul to even greater fear, seeing that God is with this one. And now David is his son-in-law, since the second time he did grant a daughter to him. Well, since proxy has not worked, Saul now gives direct order to his men to kill David. Jonathan, the son of Saul, a true friend of David's, intercedes, and Saul gives a shallow repentance, but almost immediately again gives authorization to have David killed, this time without Jonathan's knowledge. Now men are watching David's house and the atmosphere of this occasion is captured in Ps. 59. This attempt fails too because David's wife Michal, who knows of the order, urges him to flee. Saul will start not trusting any of his children! You might see some measure of love on Michal's part in this, but when Saul learns of his escape, her words to her father show just how shallow her love is, which will later blossom into a full despising of David, for she lies that she had had to allow David to escape because he had threatened to kill her. Thus, you have one more biblical occasion of someone throwing his or her spouse under the bus. David has fled to Samuel at Naioth in Ramah, and when Saul sends his men there to kill David, every time the threat is countered with the turning of all those men to prophecy – even Saul himself, when he comes - if you want a job done right, you've got to do it yourself – but no, he can't even do it himself, rendered both incapable by the Spirit of prophecy and rendered embarrassingly unclothed. Then comes the complicated event of David's absence at the expected New Moon feast, and the confirmation by Jonathan, that faithful friend, that Saul's intentions are evil, as always, against David, and that his hatred has spread to his own children and even his own wife - and so David must flee like an arrow shot into a field. So he does: alone he flees to Nob, and the priests there, from whom he gets provisions of bread and the sword of Goliath – although, here we must admit, that he gains these by lying, and even on that occasion has a cause for worry, for he sees there a man named Doeg, an Edomite who is a servant of Saul. What will come of that? Then, David flees to Gath.

This, in short measure, summarizes all that has brought David to Gath, to be captured by those there. David's stricken heart laid open in this psalm is fitting for the circumstances of all the adversity he has experienced. The particulars of David's adversity will not be ours – would not even be those of the congregation to whom the psalm would be sung – and like us, might not be received in times of particular adversity. After all, things are peaceful enough that they can worship with a choir! But they are perfectly given to prepare a people for adversity that may come. Habakkuk also gives to choir director a psalm recorded in the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk – times may be peaceful then, but they were a God-given preparation for the people who would humble themselves, for that time shortly to come when Babylon would invade, take captive, and destroy Jerusalem and the temple. So too, our state may be peaceful now, but we should take these words to prepare us for adversity to come. We know of Christians in far-off places whose lives are forfeit, and even in this land some, because of their stand, who lose livelihoods or experience state-sponsored theft of their wealth, and have experienced slander and vandalism.

Here we are 'taught to pray' – we might say that we are taught most perfectly to pray by Christ, true, but we are not told to ignore all other prayers in Scripture also inspired by the Holy Spirit. This prayer in particular prepares a people for suffering. *Pray in adversity.*

Point 2: Praise God's Word

The second thing that we are taught in this psalm is to *praise God's word*. Dear brethren, *praise the word of God*. In three different ways, I think, we are exhorted to do this by this psalm. Most obvious is in the two refrains of this psalm, which in the first refrain reads "In God, whose word I praise," but in the second refrain, this phrase is repeated with the divine name revealed to Moses: "In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise." Let us do as David did.

That bare example would or should be enough for us, coming from the Holy Spirit, but David had encouraged his own soul in his adversity, and so encourages the congregation, with a reason why the word of God should be praised, one reason among many that Scripture gives us. The Holy Spirit gives us a particular cause for praise of God's word in verse 9:

⁹Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call;
This I know, that God is for me.

(Ps. 56:9; *emphasis mine*)

In this verse, David's certainty regarding his enemies turning back in the day of prayer is the knowledge that God is for him. And how does he know this apart from God's word to him? At this point in his history, the only word that we know had been given to David was the acted word by the prophet Samuel in his anointing at Bethlehem, although there may have been other words spoken on that occasion, or in David's time with Samuel at Naioth in Ramah, when first fleeing from Saul – or, since David is prophet, God's word directly to him. But the anointing is sufficient: David is to be king, and if he is to be king, he has to survive. If God has pledged that David would reign, he must be alive to do so. God is for him. That is the ground for his confidence, his reason for certainty. When it comes to pass, no doubt his faith will be strengthened, but his sure and certain confidence at the present time is God's word to him, that tells him that God is for him.

David, at this point, did not know the half of it: God's covenant with David, that he would always have a descendant upon the throne, still lay in the future, recorded in 2 Sam. 7. David might have known that by the time this psalm was handed to the choir director, but not at the time of his first uttering of this prayer in Gath. And even when David receives the covenant, he does not know the half of it. For David must live and become king, because Christ must come and receive an everlasting throne, perfectly fulfilling God's covenant with David despite the years that had come without a Davidic king.

So, brothers and sisters, we have good reason for praise of God's word: God has spoken with great promises to His people, that He is for them. This is one particular preciousness among many, but is a particular reason which in adversity is of great help for us to remember. Regardless of the circumstances in the here and now, God is for us. I believe we also see this in verse 12, which reads in the NASB:

¹²Your vows are *binding* upon me, O God;
I will render thank offerings to You.

(Ps. 56:12)

I recognize that older translations render this as referring to the vows that the psalmist has made before God (say, to give thank offerings), rather than God's vows made regarding David. But

His faithful God *has* made vows, and is to make even greater ones, large enough to stagger David, and those vows are binding, binding (joyfully so) upon David. As in the promises made to Abraham, God, not having anyone greater to swear by, has sworn upon His own unchanging being, and this true and living God is a faithful God. Having promised it, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish it.

And not only in verse 12, but in verse 13 as well:

¹³For You have delivered my soul from death,
Indeed my feet from stumbling,
So that I may walk before God
In the light of the living.

(Ps. 56:13)

Older translations render the second part of this verse as a question – if God has done the first (delivered my soul from death), will He not keep my feet from stumbling so that I may walk before God in this life? And here we see a good, gospel reason for praise of God’s word: *You have delivered my soul from death.* Drink in the worth of that, brothers.

We know how it was that our souls have been delivered from death, and just what sort of a death we have been delivered from. God has not promised to you that you will be king of an earthly kingdom. We have, rather, a better covenant, founded upon better promises. Think of just some of these promises:

²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

(John 10:27-29)

¹“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

(John 14:1-3)

Here are a mere two, to serve as tokens for the many. You can think of others; encourage one another with these. There are promises that stagger us, as was David overwhelmed – things are promised us that really pertain to Christ, but which are ours as well because of our being in Christ. Read some of the promises made to those who overcome in the letters to the churches of the Apocalypse in the first chapters of Revelation, but sufficient is this from the last chapter of Romans:

²⁰The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

(Rom. 16:20a)

Our feet? The promised seed does this – and yet, in Him, it is granted to us. This, by the grace of the Lord Jesus who is with us.

All this can be summarized in the word which David gives the congregation:

⁹Then my enemies *will* turn back in the day when I call;
This I know, that God is for me.

(Ps. 56:9; *emphases mine*)

Point 3: Trust in God and Fear Not

In verse 9 we see not only the particular aspect of God's word that should give occasion for praise, but we see a soul who is trusting in that word. True praise of God's word is not just acknowledging its beauty, or seeing its relevance to our situation, but true praise lies in our trusting of it. So it is not surprising that we see in the refrain an exhortation by example to *trust in God*:

⁴In God, whose word I praise,
In God I have put my trust;
I shall not be afraid.
What can *mere* man do to me?

(Ps. 56:4)

And again in verse 11:

¹¹In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me?

(Ps. 56:11)

This is the third point: *Trust in God. Trust in God, and do not fear.*

This is gospel, brethren; this is gospel. Anything we find in the Old Testament that urges us forward to trust, ultimately urges us to trust in the God, Jehovah Jireh, who will provide, and has provided, the sacrifice for our sins. It is not about David's works, nor about his devotion, not about his skill with words or the skill of his fingers, whether on an instrument of music or upon instruments of warfare: it is a reliance upon God and what He will do. As Psalm 147 says:

¹⁰He does not delight in the strength of the horse;
He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.
¹¹The Lord favors those who fear Him,
Those who wait for His lovingkindness.

(Ps. 147:10-11)

What is this waiting for His lovingkindness but faith – faith not in the sense of a body of belief (which is a biblical sense), but faith in the sense of trusting? The just shall live by faith.

Trust in God is wondrously harmonious with praise of His word. It is not fitting, not at all appropriate, that we praise God's word while we do not trust in it. The excellence of His word being that it comes from Him, a faithful God, whose faithfulness is great, who lacks no wisdom in having made the promises nor lacks wisdom in how He carries them out, who lacks no power – nor lacks knowledge – to execute His promises, who is perfectly *there* and everywhere to carry out His holy will, - with all this excellence, how should we not trust it? Our unbelief greatly mars these truths, and proclaims to the world that perhaps He is not so faithful, perhaps not so powerful, just maybe not so all-wise. Foolishness! Lord, we believe; help our unbelief! And if David was not perfect in how his trusting of God was lived out during this time

(as it seems he was not in how he behaved with those at Nob), yet these words perfectly exhort us, and any defect in his actions merely point us away from David and onto Christ.

To paraphrase Paul from the book of Philippians, “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to David has really served to advance the gospel . . .” (Phil 1:12, ESV) As for Paul, so for David. All of that adversity – and here we are really only at the beginning of it, for there is much more to happen before Saul at last dies – all of that adversity yields psalms for the church – the 8 or 9 so titled, and I would guess many more that don’t bear titles. In his fleeing from Saul, David went to and fro, weeping, carrying his bag of seed, but did indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him (Ps. 126:6) – sheaves of gospel psalms that like the loaves miraculously multiplied, have fed the church of God both before and after the coming of Christ, and still there are baskets left over – sheaves that pointed forward to the coming of Christ, and now back to the Christ who came. Sheaves that point us to pray to God in adversity, to praise His word which promises so much to us, and to trust in God and not fear man. What can mere man do to me?

Here is a wonderful comparison to put before our minds: the infinite, uncreated God on the one hand, the great I AM; and man on the other, mere dust, or like grass that withers. What *can* mere man do to me? One looks at this psalm, and thinks of the history leading up to it, and could say: well, man can do quite a bit! They can trample upon you, or swallow you up, slander you, watch you, lie in wait to take your life. There can be many of them, and only one of you. They can be acting in pride, without restraint, and you, being humble, are restrained from wickedness – which from the perspective of this world, puts you at a disadvantage. And so this mob may succeed, since you, not having a promise to be an earthly king, may have that life taken from you as Christ has said – “some they will kill, some they will persecute” And yet, what is all that? It is like snow on a summer day, in the light of eternity.

⁴“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

(Luke 12:4-5)

I quote this as one whose faint heart needs this exhortation again and again. All logic points us to this conclusion – why are we so reluctant to embrace this truth? Because we are not seeing with faith, but merely with our eyes. We see the army gathered around us, but do not see by the trustworthy testimony of Scripture the heavenly host that surround *them*.

Twice David says this in the refrain of the psalm: “I shall not be afraid.” When he feels that fear arising, he preaches to himself:

³When I am afraid,
I will put my trust in You.

(Ps. 56:3)

Lack of fear shows forth the trust in God – and thus, as faithful trust in God adorns our praise of His word, so too a godly fearlessness adorns that faithful trust. David knows that such fear

betrays a lack of trust in God, and thus knows that what is needed is a greater trust in God. “Help my unbelief.” Such trust is not at odds with taking lawful precautions. When the hurricane is coming, one evacuates, or boards up the windows, or moves to higher ground – when the waters of the peoples threaten to overflow us, we may flee and there are occasions when we lawfully fight. Whether this is done in faith or in reliance upon the flesh will reveal itself sooner or later – often, in the here and now, by wandering off into that which is forbidden us. We reason that we must win, and so we start gathering false witnesses to aid our cause – here is revealed flesh, not Spirit; unbelief, not trusting faith.

³When I am afraid,
I will put my trust in You.

(Ps. 56:3)

We must preach this to ourselves again and again.

We must, *in adversity, pray* – pray, rather than fear. If there be any excellence, anything worthy of praise in God’s word (and there is aplenty), bring that to mind so as to *praise God’s word*. And that praise should be adorned by *trust in God* who spoke those words, gave us those promises.

And so I end with words that are familiar, but I hope not to the point that they lose their force; from Romans, chapter 8:

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶Just as it is written,

“FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.”

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Preached by the grace of God, 9/24/17