

April 3, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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THROUGH GOD WE DO VALIANTLY
Psalm 60

I have little doubt that people of the world might sometimes look at me and think, “What a loser.” There is no doubt at all that the world as a whole says that kind of thing all the time about true Christians as a whole. There are a lot of people who really do wonder why we who love Christ, believe the Bible, and seek to obey God should even be allowed to exist. We make those people very uncomfortable.

History is replete with examples of how these enemies of God have gained power to the point that they have been able to make life very difficult for God’s people. Many true believers in our modern world experience negative push back and persecution every day. It is hard to believe (but true) that America could be only one election cycle away from that same kind of bold, overt attack against Christians.

Some of you already experience difficulty. You don’t need to look to some future event or time for it to happen. Christians can suffer difficult circumstances due to unbelieving family members, anti-Christian work places or co-workers, God-denying neighbors, or even issues like poor health, hard economic times, or even their own doubts and fears. In fact, no Christian is immune from suffering all the time. Sooner or later we will face an enemy of sin demonstrated either in a pagan government, unkind acquaintances, or physical problems.

How do we respond when it looks like the enemy is winning? What keeps us going when the enemy shouts, “Come out with your hands up—we have you surrounded.”? David found himself in that kind of situation. Like we might do, he stumbled just a bit. Then he

remembered that we can trust God to give us strength and deliverance.

David’s Concern (vv.1-3).

This psalm begins by describing David in difficult circumstances (v. 1a). Notice that he intended for this to be a song for instruction. *To the choirmaster: according to shushan eduth. A miktam of David; for instruction (v. 1a).* Obvious from the title is the fact that David wrote this song and gave it to the choir director for the choirs to sing. A musical notation tells the singers that it is to be sung according to shushan eduth, whatever that was. We can be quite sure that it was not a reference to the place in the Median kingdom where Esther lived in the palace also known as Susa. Nor was Edith the soprano soloist for this piece.

We do know that the Hebrew word shushan described a tender, lily-like flower, a thing of beauty. The word eduth is a testimony or witness. Most of the time the Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament to refer to the law of God. A prime example is that the word speaks of the “testimony” that was kept in the Ark of the Covenant. That testimony was the law which was the covenant that binds God to His people and His people to Him.

Therefore, this psalm reminds us that the law of God is a beautiful thing especially when we learn from it that God promises to be faithful to help, strengthen, and deliver those who fear Him. At the same time, however, if God’s people reject Him, the same law spells out God’s certain justice against them. That is why God told Moses: *“Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel” (Deuteronomy 31:19).*

We conclude then that this song is intended as an instrument for teaching about God’s faithfulness because of His covenant. It teaches us that God is behind the good times and the bad times. It teaches us that God is always faithful to His promises. It teaches us to move forward in obedience to Him because we can trust Him.

David learned some of those very important lessons in a real battle. He confessed that he learned, *when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return*

struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the valley of salt (v.1b). A brief reference to that battle shows up in 2 Samuel 10:1-19. There we learn that David, intending to show kindness to Hanun, son of Nahash, king of Ammon who died, sent ambassadors with greetings. Some lowlife-kind-of-guys convinced the new king that David's ambassadors were spies. So the Ammonites humiliated the emissaries and sent them away which made the Ammonites a stench in Israel's nostrils. Not waiting for Israel to wipe them out, the Ammonite ruler hired soldiers from the Arameans of Beth-rehob and Arameans from Zobah. These armies attacked Israel. In the battle, they trapped Joab and the Israelite army in a pincer-kind of movement, which looked quite serious for Israel. God gave the victory and ultimately the Ammonites, Edomites became vassals of Israel. David was reminded that God is faithful.

However, as we have experienced in life, lessons can also be learned through bad conclusions. In the heat of the battle, when it looked like things were not going well, David attributed the difficulty to God (vv.1c-3). He concluded that in His anger, God made things difficult for him. David stated quite clearly that he believed God was angry. *O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry (v.1c).*

It is true that sometimes God gets angry with His people. That anger is not always expressed as intensely as wrath, but more like displeasure. The Hebrew word is a picturesque word that is related to the word for nostril. Picture your authority being displeased with you as his or her nostrils flare. You know you are in trouble. God promised in His law that if His people took Him for granted or rejected Him, He would respond in anger (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Precisely, one of the judgments was, *The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth (Deuteronomy 28:25).* David felt like that was happening as the enemy's large army seemed to have the advantage.

Is it possible for God to be angry with His people still? The nation of Israel still constitutes God's special people, and it would seem that their continual rejection of Him would certainly cause Him displeasure. But at the same time, God's people are Christians. We too can feel the sting of God's chastening when we displease Him. It

happens so easily. It is not as though God must be obvious in our presence for us to know that we have displeased Him. To grieve the Holy Spirit is to displease God. When that happens and we do not confess and repent, our loving God shows His displeasure. *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Hebrews 12:6-7).*

Not only did David conclude that God was angry because the battle went hard against them, but he also confessed that in a more general way God intervened in life. He intervenes by impacting nature. *You have made the land to quake; you have torn it open; repair its breaches, for it totters (v2).* Maybe this is figurative in that particular battle, or maybe David had an actual event in mind. Certainly there were times when God enforced His justice through natural cataclysm. In fact, God also promised in the law that natural disaster would be the result if the people left Him. Moses warned, *And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed."* (Deuteronomy 28:23-24).

God also could reveal anger by impacting people. *You have made your people see hard things; you have given us wine to drink that made us stagger (v.3).* That is not to accuse God of causing the people to sin by being drunk. However, because God set laws into motion, when those laws reach their natural end or consequences, it is God who ultimately allows it. God is not responsible for a person drinking alcohol, getting behind the wheel of the car, and causing an accident which kills an innocent person. Yes, God created the person. Yes, God created the grape vine. Yes, God gives humans wisdom by which came the process of distillation. Distillation can be used to good ends. It can also create highly addictive alcohol. But God didn't kill the innocent person. The person who used God's gifts for the wrong purposes did.

Therefore, it is not unusual for people who are bent on rejecting God to experience real physical, emotional, and mental problems. I read an article last week from some reputable psychologists who have concluded that many common mental illnesses people deal with in

modern life are not the result of genetics, as has often been proposed in the past. These researches have concluded that many of these ailments are the result of experiences in life. I have often wondered and sometimes asked authorities, if it is not possible that repeated sin can actually alter a person's mental, emotional, and physical state.

David feared that he and God's army were experiencing God's hand of justice against them. How do you respond when it looks like God is against you? You have never felt that way? I hate to admit that I have. There have been times when I have audibly articulated this frustration: "God, what are you doing? Why are You against me?" Pretty immature? Yes. Common response? Probably.

Instead of getting angry with God, ask for restoration to His favor. That begins by admitting reality. The reality in David's situation was, *O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry (v.1)*. All of that appeared to be the real situation. However, the truth is generally not that God has rejected us, but that maybe we have walked away from Him. It is entirely possible that there will be times when it seems like God is a long way off and maybe not even listening. When it seems like God has turned a deaf ear, we can always go back to the Bible and read the love letters He has written to us.

Does it seem like God is angry with you? Maybe He is displeased with you. Maybe He is trying to get your attention so that you will understand why He is displeased. Rather than blame God and conclude that He is not fair, it is best to first take a long look in the mirror of His Word.

So often, looking into the Bible in an effort to diagnose a problem is both sensible and enlightening. The modern age of the internet, and especially *You Tube*, has proven to be a great blessing to Mr. Fixit guys like me. Regularly I run into a problem ranging from how to fix a leaking washing machine to how to cut dovetail drawers. I have learned that a bunch of people have already posted videos showing me how to fix the problem. God's Word is the original problem- solver especially for spiritual problems.

Therefore, when it appears that we are at odds with God or that God is trying get our attention, through difficult circumstances, our best response is to simply ask Him for help. David cried out to God,

Oh, restore us (v.1). He knew this was the right response because he knew that God has promised to hear us when we call. God has promised to forgive our sins when we confess them. God has promised to restore us to fellowship with Him. So why don't we ask for restoration? Maybe we are too proud to admit we have failed. Maybe we still think there is hope that we can correct the problem ourselves. Maybe we are afraid that restoration to fellowship with God will cost us some of our prized possessions (sins). Our God is wonderfully gracious to let us get so low, so miserable, so out of sorts they we really just want for Him to restore us no matter what.

David's confidence (vv.4-12).

From blaming God for difficult circumstances, David changed to understand that God offers protection in times of trouble (vv.4-5). In a way, he concluded that God sets up "home base" for those who fear Him. *You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow (v.4)*. The banner is the flag that identifies base. In wars of past centuries the army's flag was very important. Flags marked the commanding general's headquarters. Flags marked the center of multiple corps, divisions, brigades, battalions, and companies. An observer could estimate how large the enemy army was by counting the number of corps or division flags. Headquarters for God is where He sets up the banner.

A popular game for teens in past years is called "Capture the Flag." The idea is that two teams each have a flag which is generally kept at the back of their side of the field. The object is for someone from the opposing team to run over and capture the opponent's flag. However, if the person attempting to capture the flag is tagged by an opponent, he or she goes to jail or is out of the game and thus neutralized. The difference between that game and real life is that in capture the flag you are not even safe while standing by the banner. In real life, God's banner is home base where you are always safe and the enemy cannot tag you.

God set up "home base." If we can get to home base, we will be safe. We are like the batter who slams a line drive into the right field corner. As the ball careens off the wall, we are running with all our might to get to home plate. The last thing we want is to get caught

between third and home. We run and prepare to slide and long to hear the umpire shout, "Safe." But where is home plate, the place where God says we are safe? Our rallying point is the truth of the Bible. In God's truth, we find His presence. In God's truth, we are strengthened for further battle. People who do not have an awesome respect for God don't find refuge in His Word. They don't see the point of the "banner." They can sit down and read the Bible and never sense God's wisdom, instruction, or presence.

We should be so thankful that God has provided the place where we can flee for safety when the enemy attacks. They can press the attack against us. They can slander, mock, lie, about us. They can beat us, imprison us, or even kill us. But sin and sinners can never capture the flag. Because, as David concluded with such assurance, *Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens (Psalm 119:89). Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever (Psalm 119:152). The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever (Psalm 119:160).* Because these conclusions are true, we flee to God's banner and do not fear the enemy bow . . . even if Satan's arrow pierces our heart we are confident we will be with God forever.

We, like David, are confident that God grants salvation by His hand. We may flee to God's banner *that your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us! (v.5).* Often God delivers His people from their enemies and trials. We know many who God has delivered from the trial of bad health. We know those who by God's grace have escaped human enemies who desired to harm them. God has delivered us all from the enemy of sin, if we would but enjoy God's deliverance.

Eventually God will deliver each of His people **through** the great enemy. Paul taught, *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).*

And so these things must be because God has spoken (vv.6-10). We should have the greatest confidence even in the time of trouble

because God has already determined the outcome (vv.6-8). *God has spoken in his holiness: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth (v.6). Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter (v.7). Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph" (v.8).*

Notice that when God speaks, He speaks in holiness. *God has spoken in his holiness (v.6a).* God cannot speak any other way. Because He is holy, that trait has to shape and influence everything God says. This means that every word that God speaks is distinct from, outside the influence of, separated from sin. Sin is the failure to meet God's righteous standard. Every single word God speaks conforms to perfect righteousness. No wonder Jesus requested the Father concerning us: *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).*

God is able to speak in holiness and whatever He speaks comes to pass because He owns the whole world. He can divide it up according to His will. *With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth (v.6).* The God of the universe created these geographic areas regardless of the names they have had over the centuries. In particular, God the Creator chose to give these specific regions to Israel as an inheritance. David was not fighting a losing battle because God already determined they get Shechem and Succoth. Nor is the nation ultimately fighting a losing battle today. In the end, God will divide up the land according to His eternal plan.

In the process of bringing His will to pass, God can use nations according to His will. He told David, *Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter (v.7). Moab is my washbasin (v.8).* Those are interesting pictures and descriptions of God's use of nations. It means that God determined that the tribe of Ephraim will be strong in battle. God determined that Judah will be the seat of authority, the place where the King of kings reigns. God determined that the Moabites would be slaves to His people, slaves whose duty is to carry and use the washbasin for the benefit of Israel.

Because God has already determined the station and work of whole nations, defeating a nation is easy work for God. God promised that *upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph" (v.8b).* Throwing the shoe at a person was a way to show total

disrespect. It declared that the victim was a slave who should clean the shoe. Most people never understood the deep symbolism in December 2008 when a Muslim journalist threw his shoe at President Bush. God promised to show that kind of disdain for Israel's enemy, Edom. God also determined that Philistia was already defeated.

Can you believe it? Do we trust what God has spoken? Or do we conclude that these are simply figures of speech. It appears that David doubted (vv.9-10). As the enemy waged their battle, David began to wonder who was in charge. *Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom (v.9)?* He found himself in this quandary in spite of all God's promises. In spite of all the deliverance, victories, and care God had already given, he doubted. Still David wondered who would get him to home base? For a few minutes or hours at the most it looked like the Edomites might win and David almost lost his faith. We love David because He is so much like us.

To David's question about who is in charge, we might answer, "It doesn't look like God is." That seems to be David's conclusion. *Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go forth, O God, with our armies (v.10).* When times are difficult, does it look like God has cast you off? If God really rejected us and really does not guide us with His hand of love, we would be the most hopeless people.

Sometimes we need to come to our senses! Because we know God's promises and because we have experienced His help in the past, we just need to obey God with confidence (vv.11-12). God is the only dependable source of help. How encouraging to see that David finally came to this conclusion. *Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man! (v.11).* We do well to follow his example. Plead to God for help. Acknowledge that human help is ultimately useless. Acknowledge that God is our most dependable help.

The result of faithful obedience is that through God's grace we do valiantly. *With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes (v.12).* We have to be convinced this is true. Through God we will be strong and move toward success like a victorious warrior. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory.

It is so difficult for us, the people of God, to keep an eternal perspective. We are so prone to judge all things by the passing

standards of a modern culture. We can enjoy great peace in our hearts when we know that even if it looks like we are losing according to the world's measure, we are winning forever through God.