

God Is For You

Psalm 56

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Trip Beans

Good morning. If we haven't met, my name is Trip Beans. And I'm sitting over here this morning. I'm like, "Oh, I remember what congregation singing sounds like." It was really kind of cool to hear everybody singing. That was wonderful.

Our text this morning is Psalm 56. I'm excited to be the first in the series. And hopefully, it's encouraging to you because, obviously, when you're studying the Psalms, the first place to go is Psalm 56. I'm excited about this passage. Psalm 56.

To the choirmaster: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. A Miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!

You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life. [ESV]

This is the word of God. And it's trustworthy, and it's true.

If you go back to 1988, '89, there was a game that was invented in the Bean's household. It went something like this. The boundaries were the entire house, except my parents' bedroom and bathroom. You weren't allowed in there. The conditions were that it was played at night, and all the lights were out. And my parents weren't home. So this should tell you something about the game. Very important piece of information. And the game was played with me and my two brothers, Matt and Jeff, all the Beans boys. And my friend Todd was often there, and Matt's friend Devin was always there. And here was the objective of the game: to scare someone else silly. I mean, to make them, you know, like all over the place shake. Like you're trying to just scare them.

Let me give you an example. At one point, I went down to the basement. The basement was not finished. And people are just creeping around, right? And they're trying to find someone to scare but also not be scared. And so there's just this tension. And I had buried myself in a large pile of dirty laundry. And Devin walks by, and I just pop up. And he's like, "Aaahhh!" And I just rolled. I was laughing so loud.

But, you know, real fear isn't really funny. Like, real fear. The fear that David's talking about. The fear that you and I have to experience. It's not a funny thing. And this happens when the conditions of our broken world bring out threats that are all around us. The experiences of this last year have been

terrifying because they have revealed that we are frail, and that we are vulnerable, that people hate each other. This is scary. And I am confident that the next year of recovering from this past year is going to be equally scary. It's going to be equally terrifying.

And our passage this morning in Psalm 56, it's all about fear. This psalm is fascinating because David—it comes out of 1 Samuel 21. And it comes out of David's experiences there. David is running from Saul. Saul is the king of Israel. Saul is David's king. Now, of course, David has been anointed king of Israel. Just so we're clear, this doesn't mean David applied for the job of next king. David had been given the job of next king. And this terrified Saul. It made him anxious, and self-conscious, and nervous. And so Saul thought, "Well, I'm going to fix it. I'm going to kill David." And so David goes on the run. He's living in caves, and he's running away. And so at some point, he says, "Oh, I know." Like you and I hear this idea and are like, what was David thinking? "Because I know I'm going to go seek asylum from King Achish." Achish is the king of the Philistines, the mortal enemies of the Israelites. At the point that this happens, Achish and Israel—the Philistines and Israel are actually in a war. They're fighting. And David for some reason thinks he can find asylum with Achish.

And when David comes to town, the people recognize him. The Philistines, they recognize him. And they start saying something that Israel says about David. They start saying, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." "Ten thousands," Philistines. So Achish is in this really awkward situation, right? Because now if he gives asylum to the man that has killed tens of thousands of Philistines, well, who's Achish for? And so the court of public opinion rules, and David can't find asylum with Achish either.

David's life is literally threatened here. David is threatened. He's in genuine trouble. He's being chased by his own people, and he's in the middle of his enemies who hate and fear him. And he is afraid. This isn't just a pretty poem. This is real expression of fear.

And as we explore this Psalm this morning, I want you to hear the text telling you that God is for you. He's for you, especially in the midst of your fear. And David's going to give us some great tools for how we actually understand how to know that God is for us. Now, remember as we talk about this psalm, as you talk about Psalms this summer, these are poems. This is not Paul writing out some didactic, you know, lecture. This is David's heart on the page, and it should draw out your heart. If you find yourself a little anxious because the psalm evokes some of your fear and you're concerned, that's what it should do. If you find yourself comforted by the truth that God is for you, that's what a psalm should do. It should engage our hearts. It should engage our emotions. So with that introduction, let me pray.

Lord God, we are feeble, frail, broken people. We misplace where our trust should be, where our confidence is, and then when we realize that those things fall short, we get afraid. And so we ask that you would engage us with the truth this morning. That you would remind us what is real and what is true, that we would lean on the things that David leaned on, not the things that we tend to lean on. Lord, transform our hearts by the work of your word and your Spirit. Make us new people that we would look more like Jesus when this is done. We are grateful for your word and for this time together. And it's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Look at the way David talks about fear, about his fear. He lists these things. He says he's trampled and oppressed. He's attacked proudly. His opponents injure his cause. Their thoughts are against him for evil. They watch his steps. They wait for his life, they stir up strife, and they lurk. "Lurk," that's such a great sounding fear word, right? Lurk.

There are a couple things I want you to see here. And the first is as we try to engage this psalm, David talks about being trampled. And he actually says it twice. And I don't think he was ever run over

by the Philistines. I don't think anybody, like, threw him down, and a hundred Philistines ran over him. That's not it. Think about when you're afraid. You find your shoulders hurt. Your back gets tight. Your stomach's upset. Your body actually begins to ache because your body is responding. It's getting tense. And you feel trampled.

We can relate to David here. We get fear like that. This is the feeling of being beat up and afraid. Our insides are disheveled. We feel like we've been trampled.

And David seems to fear in this psalm not just for his life, but for his reputation as well. This is not a psalm about the fear of death. This is a psalm about fear, fear of lots of things. And David also can't seem to escape these people. Look at the words. They "lurk," they "wait," and they're always thinking about how to injure him. Fear is hard to escape. It hovers over us like a shadow, especially with the Internet. You used to be safe when you went in your house, and now those people can get to you via Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat. They find you everywhere, and they terrify you.

I don't think I have to illustrate or convince you that fear is out there. In fact, I expect if we went around and shared stories, you could tell me about what fear looks like. I would share something that was scary in my life, and you'd say, "Oh, that's awful. Let me share mine." And you all could actually instruct me on fear. So I don't think I have to convince you that there are things to be afraid of.

What we all know is that when people or things that are valuable or important to us, when those things are threatened, or when our finances and our health, our relationships, and all sorts of outcomes are beyond our control, when we are the object of social ridicule, rejection, or face failure, when the razor sharp brokenness of our culture and our world bump up against our tender lives, we can very easily become afraid. It is so easy for our fear to become greater than our God. It can be hard to believe that God is for us in the midst of our fear, and it can be hard to have faith when we are afraid.

But let's talk about God for a minute. For David, fear and faith, they exist simultaneously. And the challenge is to have them in the proper order, right? That faith would rule over fear. David's purpose in this psalm is to reorient the position of fear and faith. He wants to move God back into position of supremacy over his fear. It's okay that he's afraid, but he doesn't want that fear to dominate his faith.

So David references three things that he's doing to remind himself that God is for him. The first is this. He asks God to keep count of his tossings and put his tears in a bottle. This actually comes later in the psalm. But he says, "Count my tossings. Put my tears in a bottle." It's kind of a beautiful picture. But I found as I was studying the text, I was like, why? Your child gets their first haircut, and you keep a lock of that hair because it's this precious moment that you want to remember. I don't want to remember my fear. Actually, I just want it to go away. Why would you take all the tears and put them in a bottle? Like, that seems dumb. Asking God to put David's tears in a bottle, David's looking for assurance that his fear is meaningful to God. David's looking for some indication that God connects to his fear. The almighty, all power, omniscient, omnipresent God cares that he's afraid. He wants to connect. He wants this moment that he's going through to matter to the sovereign God. You can hear him asking, "God, if I have to suffer, can it at least be significant to you? Hold on to my tears. Count my tossings."

In Psalm 34:17-18, God answers this type of request. Psalm 34 isn't a response to Psalm 56. It's just an example of the way God responds. It says, "When the righteous call for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and he saves the crushed in spirit." David's fears matter to God.

Second, David reorients the relationship of fear and God in his life by praising God's word. The word "praise" here is where we get the word "alleluia." So there's this worshipful gratitude, which also seems a little unusual. There's a worshipful gratitude in this psalm, but it's directed towards what God

has said. I can imagine David remembering what God said to Joshua as He took over leadership of Israel. In Joshua 1:5-7, it says this.

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. [ESV]

You see, God honored these words to Joshua, and David's thinking, "Well, maybe he'll honor them to me."

Now, I got to be truthful with you. This is just my conjecture. I don't know if it's in this moment in the middle of the encampment in the Philistines David is thinking about Joshua 1. I don't know. But what I do know is that they were important words to David because he says almost the exact same thing to his son Solomon when he is preparing Solomon to take David's place on the throne. So maybe these were the words. Maybe they weren't. But he's thinking about God's word, and he's praising God's word because God's word is true. God's word is right. God's word is real. It matters. And David, in trying to reconcile his faith and his fear, says, "Okay. This is what God says is true, and I'm going to try to put God superior to my fear." David reminds himself that God keeps His word, and He promises to be with His people because God is for His people.

All right. Third thing. David addresses his fear by trusting in God. This trusting is the subjective remembering of God's work in his life. One of the assumptions that we have in RUF is that God is at work. God is at work if I go to campus and work really, really hard, and I meet with a hundred students in a day. And God is at work when I'm sick and at home, and I can't get out of bed. God's at work all the time. We assume that. And so David is looking at how God has been at work in his life, His faithfulness to him personally.

You can envision David remembering his fight against Goliath, right? Just a few chapters earlier in 1 Samuel 17, David's this young boy pitted against a seasoned warrior. And you can see him remembering that moment, right? He walks out onto the field in front of this massive, giant experienced warrior, and he's afraid. 1 Samuel 17 says, "Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down.'" That's what David said. Those were God's words through David to Goliath. And he can remember that moment, right? He goes, "Here's this moment where God did something amazing, and I remember."

David recognizes that fear is not greater than God. People are not greater than God. Circumstances are not out of the control of God, even when they are out of David's control. He remembers that God does work in his life because God is for him. God is for David.

And now for us, because we live in kind of a different reality than Jesus. I told the punchline before I got the joke out. Man, I hate that. We live in a little bit of a different reality than David because we live in light of the resurrection of Jesus. So this promise that David was trusting in, we've seen fulfilled. We know that Jesus lived, that He was the Son of God, that He lived a perfect life, that He died on the cross, that He rose again conquering death. And this changes our perspective on the work of God when we are afraid.

I recently listened to a novel called *Byzantium* by an author named Stephen Lawhead. It's a

fantasy novel. It's been a long time. It's probably been since college that I read it, and I just listened to it again. And in it, a young monk named Aidan is appointed to go on a journey with other monks to deliver a book to Rome. And Aidan's mentor looks at him and says, "Aidan, never doubt in the darkness that which you believe in the light." And as we go into application here, what I want you to hear is never doubt in the darkness what you believed in the light. Never forget in those moments of terror what God has said is true and real, what He's done for you.

And so let's look at this. In the midst of our fear, we must remember God's word. The Bible tells us what is true. So we lean on it heavily. We need it. In 2 Timothy 1:9-10, Paul reminds us of how great Jesus's death and resurrection truly is. He says this.

"Jesus has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

In this passage, we hear that Jesus has destroyed death. It's gone. It's done. It's defeated. It's conquered. And He's given life by His own death and resurrection. Because He died, because He rose, death is destroyed, and those who trust in Him are given life.

In this passage, we hear that Jesus destroyed death and gave life to His own. David was reminded to be strong and courageous because God would be with him. And we have that, too. That's true for us, too. We can go to Joshua 1, if that's helpful. But the New Testament shows us this bigger picture, this even stronger than Joshua 1 Jesus. Jesus destroys death. Jesus brings life. And isn't that what we're afraid of, death? Isn't that what we're afraid of, losing our life, our reputation, our status? Isn't that what we fear? Jesus brings the life. Jesus destroys death. Even if I must suffer, Jesus has won the biggest battle because He's for me. He's for you. In the midst of our fear, we remember God's faithfulness to us. So remember, David praised God's word, and he remembered God's work.

So this is a little bit of a hard thing to do. Like, we can point to David and Goliath because it's written on a page. But I haven't read any of your stories in the Bible recently. And so it's hard for me to tell you how God's been at work in your life. But what I have to encourage you to do is to reflect, to go and think about the moments where you have found God to be most faithful, for Him to be most recognizable in the activity of your life, in those moments where He shone more than usual, because those are the things we want to grab onto.

I think I said this to you the last time I was here. If you get the chance to move and start a ministry in a pandemic, you should not do it. Don't. It's been hard here. It's been a painful year. But if we had more time, I could take these moments out of the past year, and I could say to you, "Look, God's at work. Look, God's at work. Look, God's at work." And then when I'm terrified, I need to remember the things that I've said to you. "Look, God's at work." Or actually I might need you to come tell me, "Yeah, Trip. But remember when God was at work?" Because this brings Jesus superior to our fear when we remember where He's at work. It is okay that you are afraid, and you are trying to have faith. But let's put God where He belongs because He's for you. He's for you.

Finally, in the midst of our fear, we need to know that our fear matters to God. You know that moment when you're startled awake when that bill that you forgot to pay—like, it's two o'clock in the morning, and somehow you remember then that you didn't pay that bill. I see a lot of smiles. That's an illustration that connects apparently. Remember waking up in the middle of the night after this terrible

dream, and you realize that that relationship that's struggling and broken is just deeply on your soul and in your mind? The number of times you've tossed and turned, the number of sheep you've counted to fall back asleep, God's counting all of those with you. He's putting your tears in a bottle. He's saving them. He puts them on His dresser. He saves them because they're precious to Him. He's actually got millions of bottles. It's a very big dresser.

He has counted your tossings. He's counted the sheep because your fear, your experience, your moment where you're going, "I don't know what I'm going to do. This is awful." It matters to Him because He's for you. He's for you.

And this is the gospel. This is true. Jesus died. He defeated death. He gives life. He's been at work in your life the whole time, even if you haven't recognized all the moments. And He cares that you're afraid. He cares that you're suffering and struggling. This is truer than your fear.

I would not be preaching this passage well if I didn't point out one more thing. We need to talk about faith. If you look at the last stanza of the passage of the psalm, it's kind of a weird thing. This is David's response to this expression. He's trying to reconcile his faith and his fear. He's trying to reconcile these things. And he's doing all the stuff we've talked about. And then he gets to the end, and he has this expression of faith. David responds to God's presence and comfort by living a faithful life before God. Look at the things he says. He says, "I'm going to perform my vows to God." David's going to do what he's supposed to do. David's going to be obedient to God. He's going to keep his commitments. David's going to worship by rendering offerings of thanksgiving. Don't you think that's weird?

I mean, maybe you're better people than I am. But if this last stanza were mine, if the psalm were written by Trip instead of by David, it would say something like this. We go through the whole thing, and then it would say, "Thank you, God. I'm out of here." Wouldn't you? Like, the first priority for me would be to exit the situation. And David actually does. He's actually pretty creative about it. He puts spittle in his beard, and he acts all crazy. And the Philistines look at him and go, "This guy's nuts." And they just let it go. Like, he was creative about it, and it was a priority.

But the first priority is obedience. The first priority is worship. That's not where I tend to go when I'm afraid. And yet I think we should. I think David's response here is the prototype for the way we should respond. "Jesus, you died. You destroyed death. You give life. I remember how you've been at work, and you care that I'm afraid. Let me take a moment right now and worship you. Can I take a moment right now and just think about what are the things I'm supposed to be doing? How can I be obedient to you here? Okay. Now I'm going to exit the situation." It was obedience and worship that were at the top of David's list and should be at the top of our lists in the midst of our fear.

Friends, remember faith and fear coexist. When you are afraid, it does not say, "I don't have faith." When you are afraid, it doesn't say, "My faith isn't big enough." When you are afraid, it doesn't say, "Well, Jesus isn't going to love me anymore." That's not true. That's a lie. Your faith and your fear can coexist. The reason is because God is for you, and nothing can change the love of God for His people. Let's pray.

Lord God, we are fearful, confused people sometimes. We struggle to reconcile our fear and our faith. We struggle to trust that you're at work, to trust that your word is true, to trust that you care. Help us. Remind us of the work of Jesus on our behalf. And Lord, then help us to be obedient and worshipful in the midst of that. O Lord, thank you for loving us, for sending Jesus. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.