

Psalm 58

This is one of those psalms we are tempted to draw a veil over. The language offends us and the images seem at odds with our view of God and his love. Its clear from the first two verses that the subject is oppressive rulers. We might read this psalm differently if we lived in a setting where blasphemy laws are used to oppress Christians or where the state reserved the right to remove your children if you were found to teach them from the Bible. Is an impassioned curse inferior to shrugging our shoulders or a diplomatic silence towards such things?

V1,2

Those who wield power are questioned over their justice. They fail the test. Note the order - *in your hearts.... And your hands*. "Here is a calculated ruthlessness, thought out and meted out with business like efficiency" (Derek Kidner) Real people suffer grievously at their hands. David has been on the receiving end of Saul's style of authority. The Son of David too would experience this first hand.

V3-5

The psalm emphasises the extent of the problem. These unjust rulers are not themselves a product of oppressive circumstances. The issue lies much further back. *Even from birth the wicked go astray*.

And all attempts to moderate their behaviour is doomed. Diplomacy, sanction, threat fall on deaf ears. They are compared to a snake that refuses to be charmed.

Yet the difference between David and these people is only one of degree. *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5)*. And Romans 3 summarises our plight in similar words to this psalm: *There is no one righteous, not even one... If we are able to consider ourselves one of Gods people it is all down to his mercy and grace*.

v6-8

He commits the matter to God. The psalmist doesn't advocate violent protest but urgent prayer. The NT urges us: *Do not take revenge my dear friends but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge, I will repay"*. (Rom 12:19)

v9-11

As you come to the end of the psalm it becomes clear what David is concerned about. It doesn't stop at justice for the oppressed. His priority is that people will see that righteousness is worth committing to (see Psalm 73) and above all that it will become evident that there is a God who judges the earth. That surely is a great concern to have.

- Does the plight of oppressed people bother us? Focus on a particular group and bring their situation to God.
- Where do we go with our experience of injustice? Do we leave room for Gods action or are we tempted to mete out our own idea of justice?
- If we have been brought out of darkness into Gods light can we see ourselves as 'debtors to grace' and act accordingly?

Psalm 59

This psalm has a specific historical context described in 1 Sam 19:11ff. When men came to murder David he escaped through a widow, assisted by his wife Michal. There are though aspects of the psalm that go beyond David's person safety. The nations come into focus (v5,8) and the population is referred to as David's people (11). This suggests the

completed psalm comes from David the King not David the outlaw. But he writes remembering the experience and the lessons learned earlier in life.

The first five verses convey something of the danger. *'Fierce men conspire against me'*. David looks for something more substantial than his house to keep him safe.

Yet for all the threat posed by his enemies the mood of the psalm is not despondent. These opponents may *'snarl and prow'* their words maybe like *'sharp swords'* but David has learned to measure his enemies against his God. He is the *Lord God Almighty and the God of Israel* (5) who laughs and scoffs at the nations (8)

David seeks to place himself under Gods protection. The key word is fortress. (v1,9,16,17). He has had to abandon the apparent security of his house. He looks to God to be his fortress. The word conveys the idea of something high and out of reach. *Be my tower of strength (NEB)*

In practice though what does this mean?

You are my strength, I watch for you; you God are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely. (9,10)

Note the phrase: I watch for you. Those who take refuge in God learn to wait for and recognise the help he sends. For David that came in the form of Jonathan's encouraging words (1 Sam 22:16). Abigail's intervention (1 Sam 25:23ff) was similarly recognised as God's gracious involvement (32). Sadly when the information arrived: *she is Bathsheba... the wife of Uriah* David was not watching for word from his God.

David wants his people to learn this lesson. (11-13) Remembering is an important part of the life of faith and God teaches important lessons through the nations. The concern is not selfish. *Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. (13)*

The psalm ends by repeating the refrain of 9,10 in verse 17 where *watch* gives way to *praise*. It's the intended end point of all that is brought to bear on our lives.

- We don't face the kind of opposition that confronted David. Can we see life's setbacks and difficulties as pointing us in the direction of David's security?
- Times of stress can sometimes by times of distraction. David would encourage us to watch for God. Can we recall times in the past when God's help was very clear and practical. Are we watching for his help now?
- We may recoil from some of the sentiments of this psalm. But David lived in a very violent world and his concern goes beyond personal success. Does the second half of v13 feature in our prayers?

Psalm 60

The Psalms are here to teach us about the life of faith. What should we expect, how should we respond, what are we meant to learn through the various circumstances we find ourselves in. The Bible works on a large canvass (national enemies, wars, victories and defeats) to teach us important lessons for our more mundane but no less important lives.

Its would easy to think David's reign was wall to wall military success. David's campaigns took him far into the north. At a time when he was engaged in battle around the Euphrates Edom took the opportunity to attack Judah from the south. The setting of the psalm is the deflating news of havoc at home. (1-3)

Scripture does not hesitate to ascribe setback and defeat to God. The language of v1-3 is strong. *Rejected, burst upon us, torn open, desperate times.....* There is no suggestion that this connects to specific sin. God's discipline is not reserved for failing believers.

V4 serves as the hinge of the psalm. *But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow.* There is a rallying point for the Lords people in the middle of the crisis. This is a place where we refuse to argue or resent the Lords ways but instead humbly submit to his wise ordering of our lives. It is a place of instruction where we determine to learn the lesson our wise God aims to teach. It is also a place of faith. Circumstances may suggest God has rejected his people (1) but here David is enabled to see himself and his people as *those you love.* (5)

Reassurance comes from recalling Gods settled will.

Derek Kidner writes: “Verses 6 and 7 proclaim the inheritance of Israel; verse 8 puts her neighbours in their place. Like a colossus God dominates the scene: it is no longer a matter of rivals fighting for possession, but of the lord of the manor parcelling out his lands and employments exactly as it suits him.”

Understanding comes to those who learn the fear of the Lord.

The main lesson of the psalm is contained in its final verses. (9-12) David frankly faces the lesson of Gods withdrawal. His successes are not the product of his bravery, military strategy or superior training. They are entirely the result of God’s gracious involvement and activity. And so he draws the crucial conclusion: *Give us aid against the enemy for human help is worthless.* (11)

- How do we respond to setback and difficulty? Will we make our way to v4 where we refuse to resent but rather look to learn?
- In times of difficulty knowing where we stand with God is crucial. We have more reason than David to be sure we are among *those your love* (5) See Romans 8:32
- Are there signs in our lives that we are becoming more convinced of our complete dependence on God? (11)

Psalm 61

This is a prayer from someone who is in a difficult place. David prays ‘from the end of the earth’ and out of a heart that ‘grows faint’. It could have arisen from the situation behind Psalm 60 (David engaged in a distant campaign when word comes of a crisis at home) Alternatively it could have come from his flight from Absalom when his son seized his throne. ‘Faint’ suggests a depressed state of mind or an exhausted body.

David teaches us that what we need in those places is the security and stability of *‘the rock that is higher than I’*. As the congregation sings these words they are encouraged to realise that no matter their geographical or spiritual circumstances this help is available to them through the guidance and provision of their God.

David’s destination is not merely to be returned safely to his palace but to find an enduring home in God’s presence. The tent of v4 is probably the tabernacle and the wings of refuge those of the cherubim in the Most Holy Place. Ultimate security is found under Gods throne.

The request of v6,7 seems excessive. We can understand the request for *increased days* (6) but *enthroned forever* seems unrealistic. It is though no more than the promise made to David in 2 Sam 7:16 *Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.* And this is a promise that is wonderfully fulfilled in the life of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 8 ought to be our response. In view of Gods answer to our prayers we too resolve to sing his praise and keep our promises, day after day.

- Do we find ourselves in a place where we need pray that God would lead us to *the rock that is higher than I?*
- Does any part of us share David's longing to ' *dwell in your tent for ever*'?
- Let our awareness of how wonderfully God has keep his promises to David prompt us to sing his praise and keep our vows 'day by day'.

Psalm 62

Our culture views suffering as something to be avoided at all costs. Difficulty is to be resolved and removed as swiftly as possible. Trouble has nothing to commend it. How different the perspective of the Bible. This psalm reveals some of the real benefits that come through adversity.

1-4

Vulnerable and fragile would be words that described David's life viewed from one perspective. His enemies attempt to topple him regarding him as a leaning wall or a tottering fence. (3,4) But David's life is not merely comprised of human resources. He knows God to be his rock and he has taken residence in an unshakable fortress. (1,2)

5-8

This is a place of 'rest'. Despite the plotting and scheming expressed in mouths that bless but hearts that curse, David is quietly content. His hope is not based on public approval it comes from God. His honour depends on God not his performance. And his security is in good hands. In v8 he sets out what is involved in finding rest in God. *Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. (8)*

9-11

The psalm ends by drawing out two pairs of lessons that have emerged about life. One concerns people the other God. The word translated 'honour' (7) relates to what is weighty or substantial. By contrast people be they from the bottom or the top of society are insubstantial and lightweight. In the context of a psalm full of threat and aggression the message is we have nothing ultimately to fear from people. This is supplemented by a reference to money. The connection is with v8 *Trust in him at all times....v10 Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods.*

The psalm ends by turning our attention from shadows to substance. *Power belongs to God*, that is where its located. No one is able to do anything without his permission. But coupled with this is the reassuring truth, *with you Lord is unfailing love*. God wields his almighty power not randomly or unpredictably but according to his covenant love. It is a statement of great reassurance.

- How do we see our lives: troubled by people or secure in God?
- Do we share the psalmist's perspective on people and money?
- Can we follow his direction so that we enjoy rest in God. See v8 and let it guide your prayers.