



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 60-64

Monday 22nd June - Psalm 60

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Lily of the Covenant." A miktam of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

You have rejected us, God, and burst upon us;
you have been angry—now restore us!
2 You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking.
3 You have shown your people desperate times;
you have given us wine that makes us stagger.
4 But for those who fear you, you have raised a
banner
to be unfurled against the bow.
5 Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.

6 God has spoken from his sanctuary:
"In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth.
7 Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah is my scepter.
8 Moab is my washbasin,
on Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph."
9 Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
10 Is it not you, God, you who have now rejected
us
and no longer go out with our armies?
11 Give us aid against the enemy,
for human help is worthless.
12 With God we will gain the victory,
and he will trample down our enemies.

It seems that this Psalm is written against the backdrop of Israel's army being defeated in the final days of Saul's reign. Here, David remembers these losses and asks God to give his army victory over their enemies. There's an acknowledgment of (and complaint about) God's judgment (v. 1-3), a glad remembering of God's power and faithfulness (v. 4-8) and a petition for victory, recognising that victory only comes from God's hand (v. 9-12).

It's hard to know what to do with this Psalm. It might cause us to wonder whether the hard things in life are evidence of God being against us. We may wonder at God's disdain for the nations. But God hadn't rejected Israel; he disciplined them. And God's judgment of the nations demonstrated their need to repent and reminded Israel to be faithful to the covenant as God's chosen people.

This Psalm was meant to remind Israel that victory and security only come from the Lord. And this was meant to encourage them to be faithful to Yahweh, rather than putting their trust in other worthless gods. It was a reminder for Israel that God's promises were trustworthy, even when things were going really bad.

I wonder, what do you run to in order to find security? Is it God? Or your bank account? Or the success in your job? Or to sin? We don't seek military victory over foreign nations; victory is already ours in Christ. But we are just as prone as Israel to forget God and run to other things for security. We are just as prone to be like the world around us, rather than distinct as the people of God. And God, in his mercy, sometimes reminds us through lived experiences that those things offer no real security. Our tendency is to see those moments as betrayal rather than acts of grace.

David gives us a beautiful picture of how weak Israel was. For Israel, without God, there was no chance of victory. With God, victory was certain. As followers of Jesus, we too, walk the path of weakness. In our weakness, Christ is strong. So let's embrace our weakness. Let's exalt in Christ's victory. Let's find our security and victory in Christ, who will never leave us or forsake us.

Father, please forgive me for the times where I look for security in things other than Christ. Help me to remember your grace and my weakness. Help me to look to Christ for victory over sin and death.

James

Tuesday 23rd June - Psalm 61

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Of David.

Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
2 From the ends of the earth I call to you,
I call as my heart grows faint;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
3 For you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the foe.
4 I long to dwell in your tent forever
and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.
5 For you, God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who
fear your name.
6 Increase the days of the king's life,
his years for many generations.
7 May he be enthroned in God's presence forever;
appoint your love and faithfulness to protect
him.
8 Then I will ever sing in praise of your name
and fulfil my vows day after day.

Where do we go when we are in trouble? This Psalmist knew where to go when he was in trouble and he was completely open and vulnerable before his God. He genuinely "cries" out. As John Bunyan wrote – "When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words than thy words without a heart." We can feel the strain as he wrote, "from the end of the earth I will cry to You," meaning God seemed extremely far away, but he refused to trust his own feelings and continued to cry out to Him.

It is hard for us to fathom the greatness and majesty of God and at the same time realise that he can actually personally love us and care for us.

King David expressed his reliance on the God who is "the rock that is higher than I." Even though he had reached the top of the ladder as king, he still realised that wasn't enough, and needed something higher than himself. Ultimately Jesus Christ is the Rock that is higher than I. "Higher than I" because of his divine origin, his perfect obedience, his supreme sufferings, his ascension to the right hand of power.

Reflect on the greatness of God's care - "A shelter, a strong tower, your tabernacle, the shelter of Your wings": Image after image, David built upon the idea of "the rock that is higher than I." No one image could fully express the greatness of God's help to David. As Ravi Zacharias said, it doesn't so much matter who I am, but whose I am.

Father God, I praise you and thank you that I am perfectly loved in you. Thank you that you hear my prayers and are the rock who I can ultimately trust. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 24th June - Psalm 62

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.

2 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

3 How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?

4 Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.

With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.

5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.

6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

7 My salvation and my honour depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

8 Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

9 Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.

If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.

10 Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

11 One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:

“Power belongs to you, God,

12 and with you, Lord, is unfailing love”;
and, “You reward everyone
according to what they have done.”

In the Dr's surgery today the nurse commented that people now are getting more impatient, angry and restless than before restrictions lifted. “It feels as though people can't take the restrictions anymore, they have had enough.” It's fair to say we would agree with that sentiment. Our world seems to be impatient and struggling for rest. Rest from making decisions, rest from uncertainty, rest from the fear of death that has hung over us.

Yet what we see in our hearts and in our world in our lack of rest, shows that our world (and us) is out of order. Out of relationship with the God who made us and who calls us to follow Him. This problem of relationship that is broken with God is one which is full of turmoil and divides out the world between the fool and the wise, as we have seen throughout the psalms.

In Psalm 62 we see the way out, the way for the wise 1 – 2; 5 – 8; 11 – 12. Follow the progress for the wise. The wise person finds rest and security. Then they find rest and security expanded to honour and being heard and then saved. Lastly, the psalmist has God's power and love and reward. On the other hand, the psalmist's fool brings about threats of violence and hopeless fear and lies. He is the enemy of God's people. The one who threatens death and destruction.

There are then two ways for us to live. One which follows Jesus in life and the other as an enemy of God and in anger and futility. The Jesus who is our rest and salvation our joy and hope... our treasure.

One Lutheran old hymn (Awake my heart with Gladness) reflects the following:

The world against me rages,
Its fury I disdain;
Though bitter war it wages,
Its work is all in vain.
My heart from care is free,
No trouble troubles me.
Misfortune now is play,
And night is bright as day.

Now I will cling forever
To Christ, my Saviour true;
My Lord will leave me never,
Whate'er He passes through.
He rends death's iron chain;
He breaks through sin and pain;
He shatters hell's dark thrall;
I follow Him through all.

Thursday 25th June - Psalm 63

A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.
2 I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
3 Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
4 I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

5 I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of
foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
6 On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
7 Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
8 I cling to you;
your right hand upholds me.
9 Those who want to kill me will be destroyed;
they will go down to the depths of the earth.
10 They will be given over to the sword
and become food for jackals.
11 But the king will rejoice in God;
all who swear by God will glory in him,
while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

David wrote these words when he was in the wilderness running away from the enemy. He was seeking refuge in a quiet place. I am struck by his raw human cry:

"O God, you are my God, with deepest longing I will seek you. My soul [my life, my very self] thirsts for you, my flesh longs and sighs for you" AMP

David's desire for his thirst to be quenched is nothing compared to his spiritual desire for God. He remembers with real longing, as we do, the wonderful experience of fellow-shiping and worshipping with God's people. He recalls his experience of God's power and glory in the sanctuary in former times (v. 2). As he lies on his bed he rests in God's complete sufficiency for his life and ponders the greatness of God (v. 6). The knowledge of this strengthens his hope and confidence that God will again answer his prayer and enable him to return to Jerusalem. David prays for God to save him from those who are trying to kill him, and anticipates his vindication (v. 8-11).

David wrote these words when he was in the wilderness. Although we may not find ourselves in a physical desert, we may find ourselves in the wilderness of isolation, joylessness, loneliness, emptiness. It may be caused by the loss of a loved one, a painful diagnosis, a prolonged illness, the loss of a job or a broken relationship. The wilderness may be the place where we experience guilt and shame.

In the Gospel of John (7:37-38) Jesus stands up at a Jewish festival and in a loud voice addresses the barrenness of the human heart: "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him."

Father God, our hearts are like a desert. Thank you for the person of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his living, dying and rising addresses our human condition, and draws our spirits into life.

John

Friday 26th June - Psalm 64

Hear me, my God, as I voice my complaint;
protect my life from the threat of the enemy.

2 Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked,
from the plots of evildoers.

3 They sharpen their tongues like swords
and aim cruel words like deadly arrows.

4 They shoot from ambush at the innocent;
they shoot suddenly, without fear.

5 They encourage each other in evil plans,
they talk about hiding their snares;
they say, "Who will see it[b]?"

6 They plot injustice and say,
"We have devised a perfect plan!"
Surely the human mind and heart are cunning.

7 But God will shoot them with his arrows;
they will suddenly be struck down.

8 He will turn their own tongues against them
and bring them to ruin;
all who see them will shake their heads in scorn.

9 All people will fear;
they will proclaim the works of God
and ponder what he has done.

10 The righteous will rejoice in the Lord
and take refuge in him;
all the upright in heart will glory in him!

In this psalm, David contrasts the righteous and the wicked as he cries out to God because of the evil plots of the wicked against the innocent (v. 4). He appeals to God for protection from the threats and conspiracy of his enemy (v. 1-2). The wicked use their words to encourage evil plans and use their mouth to throw lies and accusation against the innocent (v. 3-6).

Down the track of David's lineage, Jesus is faced with a similar situation as he confronts the hypocrisy of the Pharisees after healing a demon-possessed man in Matthew 12:22-33. Jesus confirms to them the content of their hearts as they have been plotting how to kill him (Matthew 12:14). He calls them "brood of vipers"; a picture of sharpened tongues like swords and cruel words like deadly arrows (v. 3-4).

Jesus further reveals the content of their hearts in Matt. 12:34-35. He says to them; how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

How about us? Jesus says that what is coming out of our mouth is what our heart is full of. What sort of words are coming out of our mouth? Have we used words like sharp arrows to hurt others or words to glorify God?

Jesus used the evil plot against him to accomplish God's plan of salvation. Jesus finished work on the cross is proclaimed throughout the world and all those who trust and take refuge in Him will rejoice (v. 9-10).

Lord, our words reveal the content of our hearts. Fill our hearts with love, thankfulness and faith so that our mouth will be filled only with your praise.

Edwin