

In God Alone

Psalm 62

A fisherman was out in the ocean when a storm arose and his boat sank. He was lucky enough to make it to a small island. When the Coastguard found him, the leader noticed a fire pit with California Condor feathers lying nearby. He informed the fisherman, “Sir, it’s illegal to kill a California Condor. I’m afraid I’m going to have to arrest you.”

The fisherman protested, “I was desperate. Had I not eaten the bird, I would have starved.

The officer was considering letting the man off the hook until he asked the man, “Out of curiosity, what did it taste like?”

The fisherman said, “Well, it was kind of a mix between a snowy owl and a bald eagle.”

Today, David teaches us that the wisest course to take in moments of desperation is the course of silence. The nature of the conflict behind Psalm 62 seems clear. David is being savagely pursued by those who want to knock the king off of the hill. His enemies are pragmatic. They will say or do anything. We cannot be certain as to the specific event behind the psalm, but it seems that David was already the king. A number of commentators suggest that the psalm was written when Absalom, David’s wicked son, led a revolt in an attempt to wrestle the kingdom from his father.

Whether or not Absalom’s revolt inspired the psalm, clearly some usurper wanted to take the king out by any means possible. Still, David does not appear to have written Psalm 62 from the depths of his angst as is the case with similar psalms. Rather, this psalm reads as though David had already wrestled with his angst and had resolved that he would “rest in God alone” or, as another translation renders the verse: “My soul waits in silence for God only” (NASV).

In Psalm 62, silence before God is contrasted with our knee-jerk tendency to trust ourselves and “TO DO SOMETHING.” David is the king. To whom can a king turn? His closest men are in as much danger as he is. It took many years for David to become the king of Israel after God’s promise was first given to him. For years, jealous Saul, the reigning king, had chased David all over the countryside, trying to kill him. But much of the delay between the promise of the kingdom and the realization of the prize also had to do with David’s arrogant choices that reflected a greater trust in his own wits than in God. Now, many years had passed. After countless disasters in this area of self-reliance, the king now understood what he must do. He must rest in God alone.

I. In God Alone, Can We Endure the Malicious (1–4)

A. David Sings of an Unshakable Shelter verses 1, 2

¹My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.

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

David does not invoke the covenant name of *JEHOVAH* as he so often does elsewhere. Here, God is *Elohim*, the most common Hebrew word for God and one that emphasizes His strength and the fact that He is out in front, leading His people. Note David’s description of the strength of God.

Elohim was the source of David's "salvation". He did not have our grasp of a salvation from sin secured by the atoning blood of Jesus. He spoke of salvation in the sense of deliverance, a rescue that requires God's might and sovereignty. God had rescued David from Saul and from many other adversaries so as to bring David into the enjoyment of a promise fulfilled. In other words, after God had rescued David time and time again, He finally raised him to the throne of Israel. These many deliverances factored into the "salvation" that David now attributes to *Elohim*.

Elohim was David's "rock". He may have had in mind the times that he found refuge in mountains and caves. Ultimately, God had provided those places of shelter. More than a mere place to hide, however, *Elohim* was David's "fortress," a high tower of defense. Hiding behind a rock can be safe in the short-term, but there is nothing precarious about a mighty fortress in the mountains. God is sufficient in the little skirmishes of our lives, but He is also sufficient when powerful and sinister forces work to undermine us as God's children in our pursuit of holiness.

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing
Our Helper, He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe ... - Martin Luther*

We need a Rock and a Fortress when Satan works to destroy our faith. We have all that we need.

B. David Sings of Unscrupulous Enemies verses 3, 4

³How long will you assault a man?
Would all of you throw him down –
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?
⁴They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse. *Selah*

David's adversaries were driven by a naked lust for power. There was no noble and patriotic ideal at stake. They wanted simply to topple the king "from his lofty place". According to verse 4, they didn't mind resorting to lies and flattery. Of course, they didn't mind killing him either. But they did not know what they were up against. They saw the king as a "leaning wall" or a "tottering fence." One more huff and puff should knock him down, but they did not understand who was on David's side. They did not anticipate his "rock" and his "fortress".

Gregory Elder shares this story:

"Growing up on the Atlantic Coast, I spent long hours working on intricate sand castles; whole cities would appear beneath my hands. One year, for several days in a row, I was accosted by bullies who smashed my creations. Finally I tried an experiment: I placed cinder blocks, rocks, and chunks of concrete in the base of my castles. Then I built the sand kingdoms on top of the rocks. When the local toughs appeared (and I disappeared), their bare feet suddenly met their match."

A believer is always accosted by many dangers. No one is necessarily plotting to kill us or to take our stuff, but powerful unseen forces are determined to cause us to fail as Christians. Satan knows where we are uniquely prone to temptation and he watches for us to be careless in guarding our hearts. We are not at war with the culture around us, but we must awaken to the fact that the Prince of Darkness has blinded the eyes of this age. Our most precious beliefs and values are ridiculed. Our message is trivialized and our motives are impugned. Many today believe that they are too sophisticated to believe in a literal devil. Don't you fall for that.

God is still the source of our rescue, our Rock and our Mighty Fortress. He is there for His people, but we must be engaged enough in what is going on around us to recognize that we are only safe when we cling to Him for safety. For many who profess to be Christians, there is often no awareness of a conflict, so there is little sense of need to run to the One Who is our Fortress.

This Fortress that God provides has a number of strong walls. One is prayer. The very act of praying about our needs is a recognition that we are dependent on God. One of these walls is worship, a time where your strength can be renewed. Another is the Word. Our prayers are directed as we understand God's mind. Our path is illumined. One of these walls is meaningful fellowship. You are not the first to encounter obstacles to your faith. There is a place of safety for you in the battle that rages in spiritual realms. Are you even aware that there is such a battle?

Notice the designation *Selah* after verse 4. This signals the congregation to a moment of meditative pause. Let's observe that reflective pause ourselves. Consider the value of stillness in the presence of God. The malice of unseen enemies is all around us. We have an Anchor. We have a firm Foundation. Are you inclined to rest in Him or to react to the rancor in your wisdom?

II. In God Alone, Can We Encourage the Maligned (5-8)

A. God's Past Faithfulness Inspires David's Present Certainty verses 5, 6

⁵Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.

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

In verse 1, *Elohim* was the source of David's "salvation" based on His might and strength. In verse 5, *Elohim* is the source of David's "hope" or expectation based on His track record of faithfulness. As David reflected on God's past faithfulness, surely his anxiety about the immediate crisis began to diminish. Was God equal to the danger at hand? He always had been in the past? How could He not be equal to the dangers now? God was more than equal when David, as little more than a child, guarded his father's flocks from predators. God was sufficient when David, a young man unschooled in the formal art of war, faced and defeated Goliath, the giant champion of the Philistine army. And, of course, there were all those evidences of salvation between God's initial promise to David of the crown and his ultimate claiming of that prize.

In May 1995, a construction worker welding near the top of a water tower outside Chicago unhooked his safety gear to reach for some pipes when the scaffolding tipped and he lost his balance. He fell 110 feet, landing face down on a pile of dirt, just missing rocks and construction debris. When paramedics arrived, he was conscious, moving and complaining of a sore back. Apparently the fall didn't cost him his sense of humor. As paramedics carried him on a backboard to the ambulance, he said, "Don't drop me."

Are we ever inadvertently like that construction worker? God has protected us from harm in real crises. He has rescued us from Hell and death. Still, we fret the three-foot heights.

B. Our Present Certainty Equips Us to Prop Up Others Who Are Weary verses 7, 8

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

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

David continues to praise God as he turns to the men around him, exhorting them to also see that there is no salvation and no honor to be enjoyed apart from God. In verse 7, *Elohim* is now “my mighty rock”. David has found God a firm place to stand and a solid foundation for all of life.

Once we still ourselves in God’s presence, once we get a grip in the face of those things that tend to cause us to fall to pieces, once we are willing to rest in God – only then, can we be particularly compelling heralds of His sufficiency for the needs of others. Someone once said that Jesus called us to be witnesses, not reporters. The difference is a reporter has no personal relationship to the facts he is working with; a witness must tell what he has seen and heard. David was not reporting that God had worked salvation for others. He was testifying that God had worked salvation for him many times. The difference would not be lost on those around him.

The “people” David addresses in verses 7, 8 are not the entire nation, but only those who remained loyal to the king. Elsewhere in the Bible, this particular phrase refers to an “entourage of attendants” as opposed to a vast number of people. These “people” should be commended for their loyalty to David through a variety of trials, for David was their God-appointed king. But more than that, David was the one among them with the most experience in this area of God’s faithfulness. They could be no more courageous in this trial than their king. As they join David in pouring out their hearts to God, His “refuge” of verse 7 becomes “our refuge” of verse 8.

Perhaps, you have been asked before if you have a testimony, and, based on amazing stories others have told, you’re not sure that you do. A testimony may be the story of a reprobate finding religion. It may be the account of how a dire situation was turned around in a believer’s life. Maybe you’ve heard testimonies so dramatic and captivating that you question whether you have a story of your own worth telling. The fact is we each have many testimonies, because we have a faithful God. Testimony is not a single, neatly-polished anecdote. Rather, when in the daily round of your life, you find someone who needs help to stand, to overcome, to hope or to turn to God – you will be able to share what needs to be shared because you are learning to rest in God.

David breaks again for a meditative pause, so let us do the same. In God, we are strong and equal to the giants that we face. Because He loves us? Of course - but also because other people in our lives fight giants, and they might need you to remind them of the sufficiency of God.

III. In God Alone, Can We Exhort the Many (9-12)

A. This King Had Learned the Folly of Human Might and Scheming verses 9, 10

David now turns His attention to the nation at large. God’s past faithfulness and David’s future hope have helped him to find his voice. He now speaks in absolute terms – to the wicked, to the righteous and to the undiscerning that need to be pointed in the right direction.

⁹Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie;
if weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.

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

"Lowborn men are but a breath." As Ecclesiastes reminds us time and again, everything under this sun is transient and, therefore, meaningless. There is a tendency of the "have nots" to envy the "haves," of the common to envy the elite, to covet their wealth or to cower at their might. David "calls the bluff" of privilege, adding that "the highborn are but a lie". Any appearance of self-sufficiency among men, great or small, is an illusion. An old Italian proverb puts it well:

"Once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back into the same box."

In God's scheme of things, a man is only rich who rests in Him. To a carnal mind, wealth may be so synonymous with security that wealth is worth seizing even by theft and extortion. But riches are not to be trusted as a secure foundation no matter how they are attained. Even if the generous hand of God Himself has blessed your most ethical pursuits, only God is worthy of your trust.

B. God's Character Is the Heart of Our Confidence verse 11, 12

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

that you, O God, are strong,

¹²and that you, O Lord, are loving.

Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

The song closes with a different look at why David was confident in God. First, God is strong. Nothing will ever happen in this world that will not ultimately bend to His perfect will. This is why the center of God's will is always the safest place to be. God is also loving, and that too is crucial to our confidence. If God was only powerful, what would direct and harness that power? The powerful gods of ancient cultures were capricious and brutal. Was David's God capricious? Was He brutal? Was He indifferent whenever His covenant people needed rescue? But, if God was only loving at the exclusion of all else, would He necessarily be able to help us? We need God to be both powerful and loving, and that is what He constantly shows Himself to be.

"Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done." Someone reported seeing a T-shirt that reads: "Please God, don't let me be behind Mother Teresa at Judgment Day."

It would be easy to dismiss that final thought of a judgment based on deeds as an Old Testament Law thing, but, the New Testament also speaks of such a judgment. That's hard to reconcile with a salvation that comes not by works but by faith. Of course, that is hard to reconcile with the idea that any faith devoid of works is dead. For now, let us simply concede that our deeds do tend to reliably reflect our salvation because they are a reflection of the real us in fellowship with God.

If I was going to wrap this sermon up into one final, tidy lesson, it might go something like this. Whenever you are in deep, deep trouble is a good time to resolve to rest in the Lord. But whenever you are not in trouble, but are, rather, comfortably situated in some "lofty place", that might be an even better time to resolve to trust in the Lord. That way, when trouble does come, you will already know and understand the loving provision of God when you need it the most.