



Psalms 54-57

Psalms 54-57
Tape #7183
By Chuck Smith

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to Psalm fifty-four? It is interesting that the psalms that we will be covering tonight were psalms that were written under pressured situations. In each of these psalms David was facing serious problems and these psalms grew out of those problems.

In Psalm fifty-four it is when Saul was pursuing David. David had come down to the Wilderness of Ziff. The men of that area reported to Saul that David is hiding down in our territory. So they exposed David to the wrath of Saul. David's psalm fifty-four grew out of that. Psalm fifty-five was when Absalom had rebelled against David and he was driven from Jerusalem fleeing for his life. Psalm fifty-six is when the Philistines took David in Gath and again he was facing some real problems as he was being falsely accused before Achish the king of Gath. Then psalm fifty-seven is when David was fleeing from Saul and hidden in the cave. So all of these grow out of stressful moments in David's life, times when he was facing real peril and real danger.

It is great that he could speak to us out of this peril, out of this danger. Our lives are not always a bed of roses. We do have problems, we face dangers, we face adversities and we have people who turned against us. Thus as David deals with these types of issues, it is able to minister very much to us because we too have experiences where it would seem that we have those that have turned against and we are calling upon God for help, strength and guidance.

Psalm fifty-four, David had fled from Saul to the Wilderness of Ziff and the Ziffites had told Saul that David is hiding down here.

SAVE me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength (54:1).

When David said, "Save me, O God, by thy name," (54:1) he is referring to all that the name of God implies. The name of the Lord is YAWEH, which is the becoming one. Lord, become to me a savior, become to me strength, become to me a deliverer, save me by thy name and judge me by thy strength.

Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers [the Ziffites] are risen up against me, and oppressors [Saul] seek after my soul: they have not set God before them (54:2-3).

David is being pursued by Saul, the Ziffites have turned against David and thus he offers his prayer unto the Lord. But then he goes on, he has prayed and asked God for help and then he speaks of words of assurance concerning God. It is always a good place to be when I've turned my problem to God. When I've called upon God for his help and turned it over to him then I'm in good position because now I can have confidence that God is going to take care of it. David, having turned his difficulty over to God, now he declares his confidence that God is going to take care of things.

Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth (54:4-5).

David is confident now. I've placed it in the hands of the Lord, the Lord is my hope for the Lord is going to deliver me, he is on my side. He's resting now his case in the Lord and thus it ultimately ends in praise. Prayer so often moves through the petitions to the confidence, to the declarations of our confidence in God's work and then they end in praise. I haven't seen the victory yet, Saul is still pursuing me and those rat fink Ziffites are still a problem but I'm going to come out of this because I've put it in God's hands. I know that having placed it in God's hands he is going to help me. He moves into the finale part of the psalm.

I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good (54:6).

I know you're going to bring me out. I'm going to end up Lord by offering to you the sacrifices of praise. I will praise your name, "Save me by your name" (54:1). "I will sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name O YAWEH for it is good" (54:6).

For he hath delivered me [the voice of faith] out of all trouble: (54:7).

I know that God is going to take care of it and it's good as done. He has delivered me.

and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies (54:7).

I'll see God work out this situation with those that have set themselves against me. I'm going to praise the Lord. It ends in that voice of confidence and praise trusting now that God is going to take care of it.

Psalms fifty-five, Absalom, the son of David, has rebelled against his father. For months Absalom had stolen the hearts of the people. He has been planning and plotting to overthrow his father. He has rebelled against his father's authority; he is holding bitterness in his heart for his father. So he has gone to Hebron on the guise of paying a vow to God but in reality he has gone there to raise up an army. That he might march against Jerusalem and kill his father and take Jerusalem and reign over Israel.

David hears that Absalom is on his way. He hears that some of his chief counselors, Ahithophel who was sort of the prime minister, the counsel of Ahithophel was highly valued because it was as the voice of God speaking for the people, tremendous wisdom and counsel. David had confided so often in Ahithophel and Ahithophel had guided David and been a close associate to David but Ahithophel has joined with Absalom. It seems like the force and the strength of Israel has turned with Absalom against David. So David again, what do you do when you're in trouble? What do you do when you're overwhelmed by your enemies? You pray.

GIVE ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; (55:1-2).

He's asking God to listen, to hear and to respond. Lord, pay attention, I'm in trouble, listen to me, I need help and I mourn in my complaint. The reason for the prayer.

Because of the voice of the enemy, (55:3).

Who happens to be of my own household, my son Absalom.

because of the oppression of the wicked: (55:3).

Those that have joined in their rebellion against me.

for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me (55:3).

Being in the position of the public eye is a very tenuous kind of a thing because the public is so fickle. I think of those baseball heroes, the homerun hitters and how when their name is announced and they come up to bat everybody cheers; they are expecting something to happen. You know, hit one out of the park; put the game on ice. But let one of those fellows go into a batting slump and then when their name is announced they come up to bat and everybody boo's. They want them to perform; they want them to come through. When they fail to do so the adulation turns to hatred.

David, a popular king, a good king, the people were singing the praises of David, he had killed his tens of thousands but now the turning. Those who were once praising him are now speaking evil against him and hate him.

My heart is sore pained (55:4).

These kinds of things do bring real heartache. Family problems, children who are in rebellion and a turn of events causes real heartache.

My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me (55:4).

Absalom was determined to kill his father. He knew that as long as David was alive he could not really establish himself in the kingdom because there were those who remained loyal to David. David remained a threat as long as he was alive. It was determined by Absalom and Ahithophel and others that David should die. David figured that he was as good as dead.

Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me (55:5).

At one time this would not have been such a problem to David. He was extremely brave, he had tremendous confidence in God, and he was a fearless kind of a warrior. David is now in his older years, he's not so strong, the strength of his youth has failed and he's out of condition. Thus he knows he's not capable of defending himself as he once was. The man of strength, the power, the confidence, the courage is filled with fear, terror and trembling.

And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest (55:6).

A desire to escape. This is so typical of all of us when we are facing problems that we really don't know how to cope with. There's always that inner desire to escape. If I could just escape from here, if I somehow had wings of a dove and just escape. People seek to escape in many different ways. Some turn to alcohol as an escape, some turn to drugs as an escape, some turn to nomads as an escape, some turn to eating as an escape and that's a dangerous thing. You can't cope with the issues of life so you escape compulsive gambling and compulsive eating, these things are escapes. David said, "Oh if I had the wings of a dove and could just escape, I'd fly away".

Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness (55:7).

Get away from my problems, get away from my troubles, and wouldn't find me.

I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest (55:8).

Now David is praying.

Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues: (55:9).

David was not kind in his prayers towards his enemies. I guess that's putting it mildly. He did not have the advantage of the teaching of Jesus where he said, "If your enemy smites thee on your cheek, turn the other cheek". My flesh likes David's way better than the way of Jesus. My old nature desires God's judgement and wrath to fall upon my enemies. O yes, I want God to be very merciful to me but I want him to be wrathful in his judgement against my enemies.

Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city (55:9).

What's new?

Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it (55:10).

The city of Jerusalem is in turmoil. The city of Jerusalem is divided. Law and order has more or less ceased as the troops of Absalom are moving towards Jerusalem. It has created a divided city. There are those within the city that have sided with Absalom, there are those who have sided with David. Those who have sided with Absalom are creating civil unrest. At night they are running around creating problems, rioting.

Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets (55:10-11).

Now David turns his thoughts toward Ahithophel, that man who had been so close, his confidant, his companion.

For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company (55:12-14).

Ahithophel how could you? I thought you were a friend. It's always a troublesome thing, a sad thing, a tragic thing when someone that you had really taken into your confidence, one that you really counted as a close brother, a real friend, one that you had trusted that would stand beside you through thick or thin, when one like that turns from you to become your enemy not just to leave you but to become an enemy to you is extremely hurtful. David was pained by this. His son is in rebellion against him and his close acquaintance, notice David doesn't call him a friend here because he thought he was a friend but it proves he wasn't a friend he was only an acquaintance, has also turned.

These are the things that cause heavy burdens upon our hearts. These are the things that are so disturbing to us in life. They become a continual pressure, sorrow.

Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them (55:15).

No prayers for mercy, Lord just wipe them out.

As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me (55:16).

Here again David is filled with despair, it looks hopeless. It's like when the Zifites had reported to Saul that David was there, he called to the Lord, "Hear me Lord, attend to me, listen now" then he ends up with confidence. The Lord will help me, the Lord will be with me and I will praise the Lord. The same kind of a pattern. He pours out his soul, pours out his complaint to the Lord, and lays out this problem, the hurt and all that he feels. Then he speaks with confidence, "I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me" (55:16).

Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, (55:17).

Really spent all day in prayer.

and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice (55:17).

The great confidence that David had in God.

He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me (55:18).

I've seen God's deliverance in the past. He has delivered me. David was not at all unfamiliar with problems and trouble. Heavy scrapes but God had shown himself faithful and had delivered him.

God shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God (55:19).

They haven't really had any real problems thus they don't fear God. Their lives have never really been disrupted they've never really been disturbed. It seems like things have always gone well for them and smooth; thus they don't fear God because they have had no changes.

He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: (55:20).

David wasn't at war but Ahithophel put his hand against David when David was at peace with him. David loved him.

he hath broken his covenant (55:20).

The covenant with David.

The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: (55:21).

He speaks one thing with his mouth, smooth-flattering words with his mouth but in his heart there is something different. David realizes that now. Those that say oh, I think you are so wonderful you need to watch out for.

his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords (55:21).

They were intended to cut. Using the tongue as an instrument for cutting, his words were like a drawn sword to cut. Now David, I think, is talking to himself. As David was “want to do” (an Old English phrase) it’s accustomed to do as he often did.

Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: (55:22).

Family problems, a rebellious son, a burden to David. A friendship gone awry, a close confident turning himself against David caused David a real burden. His life is being threatened. The people, so many have turned against him, it was a real burden to the heart of David but he says, “Cast your burden upon the LORD, and he will sustain you” (55:22). Peter said, “Casting all our cares upon him for he careth for you”.

The Bible tells us that we are not to be filled with cares. Jesus warns us about the cares of this life, how they could choke out fruitfulness. The cares of this life could so absorb us that we will not be ready when the Lord returns. Cast your cares upon him. Those things that are a problem, cast them on the Lord. Take your cares, according to Paul, and make them your prayers. Don’t be filled with care but “in everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”. Turn your cares into your prayers. Bring them to the Lord in prayer, cast them upon him.

Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (55:22).

The Lord will establish you.

But thou, O God, shall bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days: (55:23).

It was true. Ahithophel was soon dead. Absalom was soon dead. Absalom was only in his forties; he didn’t live out half of his days.

bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days: but I will trust in thee (55:23).

The fifty-sixth psalm, the prayer of David when the Philistines took him in Gath. This Jonathelemrechokim means the cry of the dove in the distant terebinth trees. You hear that dove way off, just that morning sound of the dove way off in the terebinth trees. This is David’s cry like the dove.

BE merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me (56:1).

Lord this turmoil that is all around me. David had escaped from Saul to Gath. Gath was one of the capital cities of the Philistines; in fact it was the hometown of Goliath. When David fled to Gath, David’s reputation was that of the giant killer. They said hey this is the guy that killed Goliath. We’ve got him here. They began to come to the king and say you can’t let this guy stay here. The king called David in and that’s when David feared and he began to spit all over his beard. He slobbered and started making crazy noises and scrabbling on the wall. The king thought that this guy’s insane, get him out of here. David escaped from Achish. But this is when he had been reported.

Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High (56:2).

It's interesting that out of all of these sad and sorrowful experiences in David's life, such strength and help have come to us. God used that as a time of working in David's life and David, as he related that help and work of God, brings us comfort and strength.

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee (56:3).

David was fearful. What's the king going to do?

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me (56:3-4).

David so often, in facing these heavy situations, these heavy problems, would put them in perspective. That was the key to David's life and victory. He would be facing these horrendous situations but then he would always put in perspective; I'm going to put my trust in God, I'll put my trust in his word. As he would cast his burdens upon the Lord, sort of speak. He would find the sustaining strength of the Lord and that confidence would come. "I will put my trust in God; I will not fear what flesh can do to me" (56:4). Jesus said,

"Don't be afraid of those who can destroy your body and after that have no power. Fear him rather who after your body is destroyed can cast your soul into hell. Yea, I say unto you, Fear thou him".

Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts against me for evil (56:5).

They were going around saying well David said this and David said that, David said just wait and I'll get him when I get a chance. They are twisting David's words. I don't know if you've ever had someone twist your words but it's just an uncomfortable thing. That's one reason why I really don't dislike counseling, I hate counseling. People will go out and wrest your words, they'll twist what you've said or they'll only save part of what you've said. Look out. Don't believe it.

They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when thy wait for my soul (56:6).

David gets a little paranoid at this point and probably for good cause. He was in this Philistine city of Gath probably the relatives of Goliath were still around and they were marking his path. They were watching him; they are just waiting for their opportunity.

Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? (56:7-8).

Now in those days tears were a valuable thing. In fact at home and I wanted to bring it tonight and it slipped my mind but I have a little tear bottle. Every lady had her tear bottle. A beautiful little bottle with a big wide rim on it. Whenever they would cry they would run and grab their tear bottle and hold it up and they would bottle their tears. These tear bottles became very valuable collectors items for the person because they would see that little bottle of tears that would represent to them the emotions that they had experienced in life. They were a valuable possession and they were prized possession. these tear bottles, because it represented so much emotion. Tears of joy and then also sorrow and grief. Prized possessions of the lady's. They all had their little tear bottle on the shelf to catch their tears.

You remember when the lady washed Jesus' feet with her tears? She took that precious valuable little bottle of memories and poured it on his feet and washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. That was a very meaningful thing because they prized these bottles of tears so highly. David is saying, "Lord catch my tears in your bottle: all of my tears are they not written in thy book?" (56:8).

I don't know how complete God's records are of man but we are told in the book of Revelation that when unregenerate man stands before God that the books will be opened and they will be judged out of the things that are written in the books. I suppose that God is capable of keeping complete absolute complete records. In fact we are told that that judgement will not just be of the things that you have done but for the motives for why you did them. God just doesn't keep the books on the actions but the thought that was behind the action, the motive that was there. Many of things that we have done that we think we are going to get a good score for that because our motive was wrong, I hope everybody sees how generous I am when they observed what I did for that poor little old lady. They would say, "My isn't he wonderful, isn't he generous, isn't he kind. He's marvelous". That will be my reward.

As far as the books that God was keeping on me, they've been wiped out and I'm glad for that. Through Jesus Christ, the record is clean. "There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus" God has erased the books. "But for the wicked, they stand before God, the books are open and they are judged out of the things that are written in the books" whatever they be.

"Lord are they not written in the book" (56:8) my tears, my sorrows, these tragic experiences, you kept record of them.

When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me
(56:9).

Again, as he puts it in perspective and as he sees God's part, then there arises that confidence. When we are faced with a problem the mistake that we so often make is we begin to concentrate on the problem. As we dwell upon the problem it magnifies, it grows it becomes overwhelming. We need to concentrate upon God, "cast the burden onto him" and then begin to look at the greatness and the power of God. As we do then we have that confidence that God's going to take care of it. Putting our focus upon God confidence comes, assurance comes, peace comes and we are able to ride out the storm because I know that God is going to help me.

When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me"
(56:9).

Do you know that God is for you? That's such a glorious thing. Paul said, "If God is for us who can be against us?" The wonderful thing is that God is for you, "Cast your burden upon it, he will sustain you. Learn to turn things over to God, learn to see things in that perspective, in God's strength, power and ability not in my weakness. O I am too weak for this, O I can't handle this, O I've had so much I just can't take another thing. I see it with my diminished capacities and I'm prone to despair but if I see it in God's perspective and turn it over to God and begin to think of the power of God, the universe that he created. I begin to see it in its proper perspective and then there is no problem because God's going to handle it. God is for me.

In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me (56:10-11).

He gets things in perspective and the words are no longer filled with anxiety and despair but now he speaks confidently because I've put my trust in God and in the word of God, the word of the Lord and I'm not going to be afraid of what man can do.

Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee (56:12).

So often when David was in trouble he would make vows to the Lord. Lord if you get me out of this and I'll do this for you. So David speaks a lot about the vows, paying the vows. "I will pay the vows that I made in that in which I was in trouble," David said.

For thou hast delivered my soul from death: (56:13).

He escaped from king Achish. He got out of there, God set him free.

For thou hast delivered my soul from death: will not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living? (56:13).

God, you've been my help, my strength.

David's still in trouble. He's fleeing from Saul and he goes down into the area of En Gedi. There he hides in this cave. Saul is pursuing him and David and his rugged ragged band of guys, rough and tough characters who are running from the law and are in trouble, in debt. They are gathered with David. They are hiding in the cave. Saul and his trained army are pursuing them. As they are hiding there in the back part of the cave, as Saul is looking for a place to spend the night, they spot this cave and they come and Saul and his men all settle down there in the cave. They take off their gear and lay it beside them. David and all his guys are back there hoping that no one sneezes and just watching these guys settle down for the night right there in the mouth of the cave. David and his buddies are all up there in the dark shadows hiding in the back part of the cave and Saul and his men are right there.

BE merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow if thy wings will I make my refuge, (57:1).

Remember that beautiful psalm that has brought so much comfort? "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide beneath the shadow of the almighty". My dwelling place, where is it? In the shadow of God. David said, "In the shadow of your wings I will make my refuge".

until these calamities be overpast (57:1).

What calamities David was facing. So Lord I'm just going to hide in the shadow of your wings, I will make that my place of refuge.

I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up (57:3).

David really despaired of his life. He came to the place where he said I know that one-day Saul is going to do me in. I know that one day it's going to be over, Saul is going to get me. He really despaired. Saul was seeking to swallow him up.

God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. My soul is among lions: (57:3-4).

These characters that are with me with heavy beards look like a bunch of shaggy lions.

and I lie even among them that are set on fire, (57:4).

These guys are a rough rugged group of guys. They were the thugs that had gathered to David, those who were in trouble and in debt. They were a tough bunch.

even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword (57:4).

I imagine that David had to separate a lot of these guys with their squabbles with each other, they were just that kind of guys.

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; (57:5).

What a contrast with a bunch of guys that I'm surrounded with.

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth (57:5).

Again turning from the situation and turning to God, getting your mind upon him; "O God be exalted above the heavens; let your glory be above the earth". Turning my heart and my mind to God is such a cure for the boo's, for discouragement, for despair.

They have prepared a net for my steps; (57:6).

The way that they trapped animals in those days was with a net. They would set up this net and you would hit this rope and the whole net would come and wind around the animal and catch it. They were doing this for David. They were setting nets or they were digging pits and then they would cover over the pit. So as you are running along, down into the pit with no way out. They had dug pits to trap David. They have set nets for David.

Thy have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves (57:6).

All right. They have fallen in their own traps that they have laid for David.

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise (57:7).

In another psalm David prayed an interesting prayer, he said, “Unite my heart, O Lord, to worship thee”. One of the problems that we have is a divided heart. So many times my heart is divided towards my desires than towards God’s will. I find myself with a divided heart. I want to do what God wants done and yet I also want to do what I want done. David said, “Lord, unite my heart. Give me a singleness of heart”. The problem is an unstable heart constantly changing. Gung ho one day for the Lord, gung ho the next day for the flesh. I know so many people who have this problem of the divided heart or the unstable mind. James tells us that a man who has an unstable mind is unstable in all of his ways. That we need to have a fixed course.

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, (57:7-8).

Literally it is I will wake up the morning.

Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early (57:8).

These are the things that you put down in the times of discouragement, you let them rest.

I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O god, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth (57:9-11).

A beautiful theme for David’s song, “I will sing of the glory of God, I will sing of the mercy of God, of the truth of God”. And so David ends his psalm.

He’s still not out of trouble. As we go into fifty-eight and fifty-nine we find him praying over other problems that he is facing. Psalm fifty-nine is when Saul had sent the men down to watch David’s house and to take him and kill him when David left the house. So he still has lots of problems and he writes to us about them. We will go on next week and look at Psalms fifty-eight through sixty-one.

Shall we stand? Now what have we learned to do tonight when we have burdens? Cast them on the Lord. When we are faced with overwhelming problems? Get our eyes upon the Lord, look away from the situation and fix your heart upon God. Pray about these things. As we pray God will give you that confidence as he did David. His prayers always ended in confidence and in praise. As your prayers should lead you to that confidence in God. He’s going to take care of it. In fact, I’m just going to go around singing tomorrow of God’s love, grace and goodness because I know that God is going to handle it, he’s going to wipe them out. Sure they are strong and tough but they are not tougher than God. He’s able to handle it. So I will be praising.

Let our lives be filled with praises as we learn to just turn everything over to the Lord, those things that have troubled us, those things that are a burden, those things that have weighed us down. Let’s learn to turn them over to the Lord and go our way rejoicing in the goodness and grace of our God as He is exalted above the heavens, His glory above the earth.