

God is Our Refuge

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[0 : 00] You never answer directly, but instead you ask us yet another question. Rabbi, why all the questions? Can't you just give us a simple answer? The wise old man was silent for a moment or two, and then with a twinkle in his eye, he responded, So what's wrong with the question?

Well, tonight I want to start with a question, and it's this. Why do many, many churches pause their regular preaching throughout the year and in the summer months, delight and benefit immensely from looking at a number of the Psalms, as you at St. Silas are doing?

Why this part of the Old Testament? Well, let me prime the pump for you. We have in our five books of Psalms, there are 150 Psalms, and while they differ, because they've been written by apparently different authors in different settings, nonetheless, they share something in common.

What they share is theology, but theology earthed in human experiences. The experiences of the king, for example, David being the chief example, I suppose, is the one true God.

But also the experiences of other individuals, as well as the ordinary experiences of ordinary people, living by faith in the one true God.

[1 : 28] There is theology, to be sure, but it's theology that's earthed in human words, human expressions, and very much human emotions.

And so I have a hunch that the question, why is it that many churches in the summer months pause their regular program and enjoy the Psalms, it's for this reason.

We feel we can relate to the Psalms. There's something very human and emotional, which strikes a chord with us. We feel in some ways that we can relate to the Psalms.

And particularly Psalm 62 this evening. A Psalm, as you look down in your Bibles, is attributed, you can see it in what's called the superscription. That's the, well, I find all fonts now get smaller and smaller, but it's sort of the italics.

That's called the superscription. It's attributed to King David, and we think it was probably set to music by one of David's chief musicians, a guy named Jeduthin, and therefore it was probably at some point in time intended for public worship.

[2 : 38] In other words, in a corporate setting like we've done this evening. Namely, all of Israel, all of God's people, somehow or other, are meant to connect with the overall theme of this Psalm.

But what is the overall theme? Well, like the old rabbi to whom I referred at the start, let's see what asking some questions brings us. Here's the first question.

Question number one. To whom is David speaking in this Psalm? At first glance, that's not as easy to pull out as it is in some of his other Psalms.

I mean, for example, if you look at verses 5 to 7, David seems to be speaking to himself. Clearly, in verses 11 to 12, he is speaking to God.

And it looks like in verse 3, if you look back, he's speaking now directly to his enemies who are out to get him. But I suppose if we ask the question, yeah, but why would Israel, as a group of people, why would they particularly sense some kind of resonance or ownership of this Psalm?

[3 : 56] I think, I want to suggest to you this, it's there in verse 8, if you look down with me. Trust in him at all times, you people, all you people.

Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. I think this is the key to this Psalm.

The chief audience, not the only people, but the chief audience to whom David is speaking, is actually all of God's people. And that's very fitting for David's role as a king.

You may know that David was Israel's anointed king, roughly around 1000 BC. And God had intended David to lead Israel.

God wanted his anointed king to help his people experience faithful living, individually and collectively. So when Israel's kings, and then later Judah, the other kingdom, when her kings failed

to do that, failed to shepherd the people faithfully, well, all sorts of chaos ensued.

[5 : 05] Because you see, true kingship, as God intended it, was to exercise not just leadership, but leadership that served to shepherd, to care, to pastor the people of God.

And so in part, David's call in verse 8, to all the people, is actually expressing his kingly shepherding care. What God wants for all his people.

But let's look more closely, in our second question is, what is it that David urges the people to do? In other words, what does he want people to do?

Well, here's where, again, if you look back at verse 8, things look at first glance very obvious, but as is often the case with things obvious, there's more here than what meets the eye.

Or as I hope you'll see, there's more here to affect the heart. Look more closely with me at verse 8 again.

[6 : 08] David urges trust, first of all, trust in him, namely God, at all times, O people. That word trust means to depend, to rely on.

It's a beautiful Hebrew word that actually implies leaning on him for support and strength. It's a very active word. It suggests constant trusting activity, not simply a one-off.

To trust is more than an intellectual agreement, although that's involved in it. It's a reliance on God because there's something about God that is reliable, trustworthy, which explains why trust is important.

He's described, he's spotted in verse 8, as similar to a refuge, a shelter. And we'll come back to that because it's a very key theme in this psalm. Notice as well in verse 8, it's not just trust, but trust in him at all times.

All times, you people. All times includes times that are both joyful and probably fearful. The expression actually suggests trust in him in every circumstance.

[7 : 31] Now you can look back at verses 3 to 4 and it begins to see and make sense. So that's why David is telling us about his experience with these enemies of him.

We're not sure who they are and we don't know specifically what circumstance David is referring to, but clearly there are enemies who want to topple David. The language is vivid.

They use lies. They use hypocrisy. And in verse 4, out of their hearts, they curse. They curse David. And it's in this kind of circumstance, trust God.

Lean on to him, urges David. Why? Because God is like a high tower or a rock of strength.

But also God actively loves, loves his people. I mean, David describes his own experience as king to help his people.

[8 : 33] Look at my experience or listen to my experience, urges David, and take my word for it. Out of my own experience, David is testifying to the people, God is a rock, a shelter, a refuge in the hardest times.

In other words, when everything around you is unstable and possibly even about to fall apart, trust in him, all you people, urges David.

And notice that this trust has a face to it or a heart to it. Notice the phrase, not just trust in him at all times, but do you spot it?

Pour out. Pour out your hearts to him, David counsels. I mean, he certainly did this. In other psalms attributed to David, they express his emotions, his heart, heartbreaking tears and cries.

What's David's point? Why pour out your heart? I think this is breathtaking. God is not embarrassed or turned off by human emotions.

[9 : 51] Poured out emotions, indeed, underline the intensity a person feels. And bringing this emotional intensity to prayer to God is actually a good thing.

It's an honest thing to do. God welcomes our hearts' cries, including our painful confusions, our sorrowful struggles.

He accepts our hearts because he cares for our hearts. He does not aim to break our hearts, but strengthen our hearts.

The problem is we may easily doubt that and so in panic turn to wrong alternatives, which is why our next question matters.

Thirdly, what does he want the people not to do? What is he saying? Don't do this. Appreciate that in times of difficulty or crisis, it's very easy to become disoriented, isn't it?

[11 : 02] When we're disoriented, when things don't make sense and we're frightened, we can very easily make very poor decisions, panicky choices, or look for wrong solutions.

And that's all the more so, all the more likely when it feels to you that God is silent or slow to respond to your prayer.

Waiting in silence before God, verse 1, which is another way of translating verse 1, truly my soul finds rest or silence in God.

Sometimes that can actually feel rather pointless. But David instructs and warns his people, stick to what is true rather than to what will disappoint and fail.

And he contrasts two solid certainties of God's faithful character with two, well, I guess you could call it two illusions in life. First, people of social standing and prominence and secondly, financial security.

[12:16] Look at me at verse 9. David instructs his people, don't overly, overly rely on human security as is often defined by our society.

David's point in verse 9 is whether low-born people or high-born people, we might call these both ordinary people and then sort of high flyers, remember that they are but breath.

Now, human relationships matter. Of course they do. And David's not denying that. But human relationships ultimately, ultimately cannot carry the weight of your greatest needs.

They will crush other people if you place on them everything that you think you need to make it through life. They can't carry that.

But David may specifically have in mind the error of looking to people with so-called social connections or influence. So David urges the people, don't ultimately place your weight in low-born or high-born people.

[13:27] It also includes in verse 10 the presumed financial security that life can bring. Let me be the first to acknowledge that in times of difficulty, in times of crisis, financial assistance really helps.

It really matters. Of course it does. But building security on investments or portfolios alone, alone, well that could end up leaving a person rather short-changed, if you will.

Do you spot it? Because setting our hearts on what may not last may leave us heartbroken.

Well, I suppose David, if it's neither the people in my life that I can ultimately count on or even the financial security that I may or may not have in my life, tell me again David, how is it that this God is our refuge?

Which is our fourth question. How is God alone the refuge? How is God alone the refuge?

[14:37] My sense is that we can never ask that question too much. Or better yet, we regularly need to hear the answer to this question. Tell me again, how is it that God alone or supremely is the refuge for his people?

Now, David begins the psalm in verses 1 to 2 by recounting his own experience. And the answer, he repeats it again in verses 5 to 7, doesn't he?

Now, it's possible because poetry is always hard to translate from one language to the next. This poetry, originally written in Hebrew, has now been translated into different English translations. And so, in our translation, the word truly is actually a beautiful word which could also be translated yes, absolutely, irrefutably, alone, singularly.

You can understand why it truly just works a lot better than that mouthful. But the word alone or exclusive is another way of translating it. And David uses that six times in this psalm.

[15:47] He's trying to stress something. He's trying to emphasize something. Namely, the exclusive ability and willingness of God to help his people. He is stressing this point, urging us to hear it.

David stresses the exclusivity of God's care because of God's character. God is relational. In other words, he likes people. Which is why David not only uses the word my refuge, but again, as I pointed out in verse 8, includes all of Israel and says, our refuge.

And this idea of refuge, well, picture a solid fortress high on a prominent position. I mean, for me, every day, I see Edinburgh Castle.

Or picture a mountain shelter you finally reach because a storm has come up and you've been hiking through the Cangoirns and at last you find protection from the rain and the wind. That's what a refuge is like.

But David is saying, God is a refuge not just for his anointed king, me, but says David, for all his people. This is who he is.

[16:59] And because of God's character, David concludes the psalm with a particular point of assurance in verse 11 that quite understandably we could easily miss. Because remember, the

context that David is referring to is finding God a shelter, a refuge, when there are enemies around. And David says, not only is God strong in verse 11, but God is loving verse 12. And both go together for a very crucial reason and it's this.

David says at the end of this psalm that God will not forever remain silent in the face of injustice that his people may experience.

he will reward each person according to what he has done, verse 12. More literally, it means God will render or give to each person according to his or her work or doing.

In other words, David is saying God will ultimately deal with the people that are attacking you, hurting you, threatening you. this will not last forever, says David.

[18 : 12] Even if you have to wait a long time, and many people do, he will deal with this problem of his people's experience. That's why he is both now and in the future a refuge.

And that is why David can call upon the people in verse 8. Trust in him at all times, you people. Pour out your hearts to him.

He is our refuge. He is our safe place. Right here, right now. Now we could probably end this sermon right here.

And that would probably be good and well. Maybe you might welcome that. But I think there's one last question that I really think we must ask. And it's this.

how is this even possible for people like us? How is Psalm 62 even remotely possible for people like us?

[19 : 20] In other words, what right what right do you and I have to take Psalm 62 for ourselves?

Now I acknowledge although you're very gracious and you're not speaking out loud, many of you will say, of course we have every right to do this. It's in our Bibles.

And you're right, that's irrefutable. But I mean, on what basis can you and I say we should trust in him at all times and we should pour out our hearts to him because he's our refuge.

On what basis may we say that? Let me push this. You see, Psalm 62 might leave you thinking tonight, I must trust God more.

I really must. I must be more faithful. faithful. But that puts the ultimate responsibility upon you.

[20 : 31] And may I just say that you can start doing that, but after a while it's exhausting if you just constantly beat yourself up saying I need to trust more.

And in the end that will be rather futile. Or Psalm 62 could ironically lead some of you to actually to despair.

You might think, but my problems right now are just so awesome, so great, I don't think I can wait for God's help.

Or perhaps, and I say this carefully because I don't know you, perhaps some of you have poured out your heart to God, but never felt God either heard your cries or did anything in response.

But this is where we need to read and listen to Psalm 62 with the flow of all the Psalms and the overall, what would be the word trajectory of both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

[21 : 52] Only this way will we tonight see how Psalm 62 can include each of us because the answer, the answer is a person.

He is King David's heir or descendant, the one in the line of David who is the good shepherd. He's the true anointed king about whom David is a forerunner or foreshadow.

He is Jesus of Nazareth who is our refuge. The ultimate point to the Old Testament Psalms, in fact the entire Old Testament, is the one whom the apostles claimed to be the suffering man, the fully obedient man, the faithful man, the crucified man, and now the risen man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, Psalm 62 is about him and his own experience. Now get this, it's ultimately about him and his experience so that in union with him by faith, in union with him, we can now with Jesus trust God at all times as we pour out our hearts to him.

Now as I conclude, what does that mean for you? It means that Jesus is the one who can wonderfully help us. Help us trust in God at all times, O people.

[23 : 20] He says to the wounded, to the weak, the fearful, the failing, and even the doubting, come to me.

Let me carry you. Let me trust for you. Lean on me and I will trust for you. Jesus is the one who gets it.

Who gets it completely. What frightening times can do to us when trust feels almost impossible. Jesus knows what it's like to be attacked, to be disowned, to be disappointed, and dare we say it,

Jesus knows what it feels like to be forsaken, or even feeling like God has abandoned us. Let him help you trust at all times. Asking questions, like the old rabbi. I urge you to ask questions. what if, what if God the Holy Spirit through Psalm 62 carries us now tonight to Jesus himself, the true rock, the refuge, and the shelter.

[24 : 46] What if Psalm 62 doesn't so much tell us what we must do as much as it tells us of the splendor of Christ who will never let us go.

out of his sure and certain steadfast love. What if Psalm 62 graciously assures us that God the Father enjoys it, enjoys it, when people receive the kingly shepherding care of his anointed son, Jesus.

What if Jesus' faith and trust in his Father is the strong faith and trust he loves to share with his people, and the Father delights to welcome those who trust.

through his son. Let me pray for you and myself with a very, very familiar words.

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast. When the tempter would prevail, he will hold me fast.

[25 : 58] I could never keep hold through life's fearful path, for my love is often cold. He must hold me fast.

Those he saves are his delight. Christ will hold me fast. Precious in his holy sight, he will hold me fast. He'll not let my soul be lost.

His promises will last. He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast. Amen.