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GOD ONLY

Psalm 62

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God Only
Psalm 62

In 1777, Dr. William Dodd, a London clergyman, was condemned to be hanged for forgery. When his last sermon, delivered in prison, was published, a friend commented to Samuel Johnson that the effort was far better than he had thought the man capable of. Dr. Johnson replied, "Depend upon it, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

The difficulty with applying Psalm 62 is that very few of us have ever been in the desperate straits that David was in and so we cannot truly relate to what he says here. Evil men were threatening David's life and scheming how, not only to topple him as king, but also how to kill him.

A few times in the past 32 years, people have tried to get me fired. But I've always joked to Marla, "At least they're only after my job. So far no one has threatened my life!" But they were trying to murder David. They were saying, "He's like a leaning wall or tottering fence. Just push and he'll go down!" Under that real threat of death, David's mind was wonderfully concentrated to write this psalm. The message is:

In life's most threatening times, you will be at peace if God alone is your salvation and refuge.

The main theme of the psalm is the right and wrong objects of faith. If we trust in God, we're secure. If we trust in men or in things, we're depending on that which is lighter than breath (62:9). Interestingly, even though David was in a life-threatening situation, the psalm contains no prayer. H. C. Leupold writes (*Exposition of Psalms* [Baker], p. 459), "There is scarcely another psalm that reveals such an absolute and undisturbed peace, in which confidence in God is so completely unshaken, and in which assurance is so strong that not even one single petition is voiced throughout the psalm." Of course, David experienced this peace through prayer, and he exhorts God's people to pour out their hearts before Him

(62:8). All of us want to have this same peace that David had in this crisis. At the heart of his peace is his confident trust in God alone.

The word *only*, which translates a little Hebrew particle, is also a recurring theme in this psalm. It occurs six times, four in reference to God (62:1, 2, 5, 6; also in 4, 9). Each time it begins the sentence for emphasis. The word itself conveys emphasis and may be translated in different ways, depending on the context (*Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke [Moody Press], 1:39). Sometimes it is translated “but.” Calvin here prefers “nevertheless” (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], on Ps. 62, pp. 417-418). It sometimes means “surely” or “certainly.”

But the most authoritative Hebrew lexicon and most modern translations translate it in Psalm 62 as “only” or “alone” (*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs [Oxford, 1977], p. 36). Thus by repetition, David hammers home the concept that we will enjoy God’s peace in the midst of life’s most threatening moments when God *only*—God *alone*—is our salvation and refuge. Since we all struggle to get to that place—and as we’ll see in the psalm, David himself struggled to remain there—I’ll try to focus on *how* to come to that place of complete trust in God.

The psalm falls into three stanzas, the first two ending with “Selah.” The first section (62:1-4) we may label “Composure in threatening times.” The second section (62:5-8) is “Composure reaffirmed.” The final section (62:9-12) is “Contrast,” where David shows us what *not* to trust in and *whom* to trust in.

1. Composure: In threatening times, you can be at peace if God is your salvation and refuge (62:1-4).

While David begins with his calm waiting on God (62:1-2), it’s helpful to work our way back by looking first at the fierce enemies that were threatening him:

- A. You will face times when you’re under attack (62:3-4).

Some think that David wrote this psalm in the context of Absalom’s rebellion, but we can’t know for sure. The attacks seem to have been prolonged, as seen by David’s cry, “How long?” The New King James Version translates verse 3b, “You shall be slain,

all of you, like a leaning wall and a tottering fence,” making it David’s words against his enemies. But the ancient versions and most modern versions take it as David’s enemies’ words against him (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* [IVP], p. 221). They were counseling together how to thrust him down from his role as king by assassinating him. They were spreading falsehoods and using flattery, telling him that he was a great king, while inwardly cursing him.

Hopefully you’ll never have anyone plotting to kill you! But if you’re in any kind of leadership position, whether in the church or in business, you will have times when you’re under attack. You’ll be criticized and slandered. I’ve known pastors that left the ministry because they couldn’t handle the criticism that inevitably goes with the job. But the Bible never promises exemption from such attacks. Rather, it shows us what to do when you’re under attack.

- B. When you’re under attack, make God alone your salvation and refuge (62:1-2).

David begins (61:1a), “My soul waits in silence for God only.” Calvin (p. 418) helpfully explains what David means by “silence”: “The silence intended is, in short, that composed submission of the believer, in the exercise of which he acquiesces in the promises of God, gives place to his word, bows to his sovereignty, and suppresses every inward murmur of dissatisfaction.”

The key word there is *submission*. When difficult things happen to us, we can either angrily complain to God, “I don’t deserve such treatment!” Or, we can submit to Him, agreeing with His promises, giving supremacy to His Word, bowing before His sovereignty, and suppressing our tendency to grumble. I can’t think of a more remarkable demonstration of this than that of Job. When God inexplicably took his possessions, his ten children, and his health, Job humbly proclaimed (Job 1:21b), “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” While the rest of the book of Job shows how he wrestled through his pain and his complaints against God, by the end of the book we find Job again in a posture of worship, bowing before God’s sovereign hand (Job 40:4-5; 42:1-6). So, humbling yourself “under the mighty hand of God” (1 Pet. 5:6) is a key element in experiencing God’s peace when you’re under attack.

David adds (62:1b-2), "from Him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken." In this context, *salvation* refers to God's deliverance from David's enemies. And yet we're not amiss if, with C. H. Spurgeon, we apply this to God being the only source of our salvation from sin and judgment. He preached two sermons on this psalm. In one ("God Alone the Salvation of His People," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pilgrim Publications], 2:210) he writes, "If anyone should ask us what we would choose for our motto, as preachers of the gospel, we think we should reply, 'God only is our salvation.'" He goes on to say that this sentence is the sum and substance of Calvinism (which he held to, as do I), to say that *salvation is of the Lord*. Then he adds,

I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. It is the essence of the Bible.... Tell me anything that departs from this and it will be a heresy; tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence here, that it has departed from this great, this fundamental, this rocky truth, "God is my rock and my salvation."

I said at the outset that most of us cannot relate to this psalm because we've never been in the desperate situation David was in, where fierce enemies threatened our lives. While that's true physically, it's not true spiritually. The Bible teaches that we all were born spiritually dead into Satan's domain of darkness (Eph. 2:1). We were in danger of *eternal* separation from God if we should die in that condition. Well then, how did this change? Paul explains (Eph. 2:8-9), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

My point is this: If God alone is your salvation from eternal death, if He raised you from death to life and gave you the faith to believe in Jesus Christ, then you also can take refuge in Him from less threatening trials. As Paul puts it in Romans 8:31-32, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" So if you know God as your *only* source of salvation from sin, then when problems hit, submit yourself to His sovereign hand and trust *God alone* as your salvation and refuge from the problems.

2. Composure reaffirmed: When God is your only source of salvation, you can rest secure in Him (62:5-8).

In verses 5-7, David repeats what he already said in verses 1-2, with a few variations. Why does he do this? In verses 3 & 4, he has been thinking about his enemies and the extreme threat that they represented. So, he may have been *a little bit shaken* (not, *greatly shaken*, v. 2). Calvin (p. 422) explains, "Here it is to be remembered, that our minds can never be expected to reach such perfect composure as shall preclude every inward feeling of disquietude, but are, at the best, as the sea before a light breeze, fluctuating sensibly, though not swollen into billows." In other words, we never reach a place of perfect composure, where severe trials don't affect us. And so we have to fight to regain our peace in God. But how?

- A. Repeat these truths as often as you waver due to the attacks of the enemy (62:5-7).

First, David talks to himself ("My soul"). They say that talking to yourself is a sign of senility, but the Bible often tells us to do this very thing. In Psalms 42 & 43, the psalmist repeats (42:5, 11; 43:5) the refrain (43:5), "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God." The opening chapter of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' wonderful book, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* [Eerdmans], is on Psalm 42. He asks (p. 20), "Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?" He goes on to explain that rather than just going along with the thoughts that come to you in the morning, which bring back all of the problems of yesterday, you've got to take yourself in hand, preach to yourself, and question yourself. You ask yourself, "Why are you cast down?" Then you exhort yourself to hope in God. Lloyd-Jones continues (p. 21),

And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: "I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God."

That's exactly what David does in Psalm 62. He piles up description after description of who God is. After telling himself to wait in silence for God only (62:5), he adds (62:5b-6), "for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be moved." This time he does not say, "I shall not be *greatly* shaken" (62:2), but he advances to, "I shall not be moved" at all! Then he goes over it again (62:7), "On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God."

Don't miss the pronoun *my* (9 times in vv. 5-7!). Also, *God* is either directly named or referred to with the pronouns *Him* or *He* five times in these verses. David knew God *personally* as *his* hope, *his* rock, *his* salvation, *his* stronghold, *his* strength, and *his* refuge. If we want His peace in severe trials, we must know God personally and experientially as *our* God and remind ourselves of who He is.

So the point is, David is fighting here, while under these life-threatening attacks, to put these comforting truths front and center in his mind. Calvin astutely notes (p. 424),

One expression is here heaped upon another, and this apparently because he wished to rein that infirmity of disposition which makes us so prone to slide into wrong exercise. We may throw out a passing and occasional acknowledgment, that our only help is to be found in God, and yet shortly display our distrust in him by busying ourselves in all directions to supplement what we consider defective in his aid.

Isn't that so true! We *say* we're trusting in God alone, but then we quickly scheme how to deliver ourselves, rather than waiting on Him! It's not that it's wrong to think about how to get out of a difficult trial, or to use methods to do so. In fact, more often than not we *should* use plans and methods in dependence on Him. But it's wrong to give God a token nod of trust and then set Him aside while really we trust in our schemes and methods. Rather, with David we must fight to make God our *only* source of deliverance: "He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold." *Then*, "I shall not be shaken" (62:6). If we trust in plans and methods we'll fail. But if God *only* is our rock, we will stand firm.

B. Use your peace through trials to encourage others to trust in God alone as their refuge (62:8).

David can't contain the joy of knowing God as his salvation, so he writes (62:8), "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." What a wonderful verse! Sadly, I've heard supposedly Christian psychologists say that it is useless, pat advice to tell hurting people to trust in God. I don't know what Bible they were reading! David isn't giving out pat, useless advice! He's telling us how he endured this terrible attack on his life by these fierce, cunning enemies. He trusted in God; he poured out his heart to God; he took refuge in God. He's telling us to do the same. What God was to David in his extreme trial, He can be to you in your crisis.

How does *pouring out your heart to God* (62:8) fit with *waiting silently for Him* (62:1, 5)? Obviously, they're not contradictory. Waiting silently for God only, as we've seen, is to put our hearts in submission to His sovereign love in the face of trials that seem to contradict either His sovereignty or His love. It's an attitude of trustful submission. Pouring out our hearts is to unburden ourselves in prayer, where we empty all of our anxieties and confusion and pain onto the Lord, while still remaining in submission to His sovereign love. As 1 Peter 5:7 puts it, "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

Calvin (p. 425) points out how prone we all are to keep our troubles pent up in our hearts until we're driven to despair. We show much anxiety and ingenuity in seeking to escape our troubles without God. But in so doing, he says, we only get ourselves into "a labyrinth of difficulties." The answer is to pour out our hearts before Him, taking refuge in Him, because He cares for us.

David has shown us that we can be composed or at peace if God alone is our salvation and refuge. He has reaffirmed it, showing that it is usually a battle to get to this place and remain there in the face of difficult trials. He concludes with a contrast, showing us what *not* to trust and repeating again *who* to trust:

3. Contrast: Do not trust in men, in crime, or in riches, but rather trust in the God of power and love (62:9-12).

In the first stanza, David looked at his enemies primarily in relation to himself, so that he was acutely aware of the danger that he was in. He was like a leaning wall. Here, he looks at them in re-

lation to the powerful, loving God, who is his stronghold. By comparison, these supposedly dangerous men are “lighter than breath” (insights from James Boice, *Psalms 42-106* [Baker], p. 513).

A. Do not trust in men, in crime, or in riches (62:9-10).

“Men of low degree are only vanity, and men of rank are a lie; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than breath” (62:9). Derek Kidner (p. 223) says that the point here “is not so much that we have nothing to *fear* from man (as in 27:1ff.), as that we have nothing to hope from him.” So, by implication, don’t trust in men, whether in men of low degree (thugs who can knock off your enemies) or high degree (men of influence or power), because you’re putting your hope in thin air!

Also, David goes on to say that we should not put our trust in oppression or vainly hope in robbery. Even if you gain riches through legitimate means, he adds (62:10b), “do not set your heart upon them.” Kidner (*ibid.*) astutely observes that “absorption with *riches* counts as no less perilous than a life of crime.” Most of us probably aren’t tempted to use oppression or robbery to get out of our trials, but we may be tempted to trust in money. But (Prov. 11:4), “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.”

B. Rather, trust in the God of power and love, knowing that He will render justice to all (62:11-12).

“Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God; and lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to his work.” The “once, twice” language is a common Hebrew poetic device. Here it probably means that God repeated the answer or impressed it upon David more than once to drive the point home. Matthew Henry (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary* [Revell], 3:467) says, “To some God speaks twice and they will not hear once; but to others he speaks but once, and they hear twice.” Make sure that you hear twice God’s answer for how to deal with threatening problems: First, God is powerful; second, He is loving. Therefore, He will justly judge all of our enemies. If anyone opposes God’s power and resists His love, he will know His justice.

Satan always attacks either or both of these truths when we face trials. He tempts you with the thought that if God is all-powerful, He could have prevented these trials. So, He must not love you. This is where by faith we have to join Joseph, who told his brothers who had sold him into slavery (Gen. 50:20), "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...." By faith, affirm *both* God's power and His love.

Conclusion

Years ago, we knew a young family in Dallas with two children and a third on the way. At seven months along, the wife became deathly ill. The doctors finally decided that they would deliver the premature baby by C-section and then attempt to save the mother's life. Thankfully, everything came out well. The baby and the mother both survived. But during the height of the crisis, the wife's parents, who were not believers, thought that their son-in-law must not really love their daughter, because he was so calm. He explained to them that he loved her dearly, but he was trusting in the Lord, who gives His peace to those who trust Him.

The main reason that we should "fight" for God's peace in threatening times is not so that we will be at peace, but so that God will be glorified and others will be drawn to Him through us. God's peace comes to us in life's threatening times when *He alone* is our salvation and refuge.

Application Questions

1. Are some more bio-chemically disposed to anxiety than others are? How does this psalm apply to them? Is it wrong to take medication to control the anxiety?
2. Why is it important to keep in mind that the goal is not our peace, but God's glory?
3. How do we explain those that trusted in God and yet were martyred? How does their experience fit with this psalm?
4. Where is the proper balance between trusting in God *alone* versus using plans and methods for deliverance?

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