

Psalms 61

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[0 : 00] Do sit and turn to Psalm 61. And you might think, well, why isn't he carrying on preaching about deacons?

! I can't remember what I preached on two weeks ago, let alone three months ago. And so I thought I'd be better off leaving that to when nearer the vote for elected deacons. The other thing I thought is, I'm aware that the studies in Romans, where Romans 1 and 2, it's not easy, is it?

I'm grateful for your patience in that. There's parts of your words which we rejoice over and we love hearing about Romans 1 and 2. We love the first part, don't we?

But the second part, it's not easy. And so I think we need to balance the preaching of what we're hearing in the morning and in the evening. And as much as it's good to preach on the qualifications of deacons, I thought maybe you needed some sugar or something like that.

[1 : 15] So Psalm 61. David is travelling through life in spiritual terms and look at verse 2.

He feels like he's at the end of the earth. He feels like he's at the end of the earth and he's searching for rock. Verse 2. From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. And so you can read the commentators and they dispute the exact time of when he wrote this psalm. His flight from Absalom when he's running away from his son seems to be the most likely.

But it's not actually critical to our understanding of this psalm. It's certainly not necessary for identifying with the psalmist here. And David describes, I think, what we often feel and we rarely talk about.

And that's the unsettling experience. That's really common in the Christian life. The unsettling experience of our heart being faint and our heart overwhelmed.

[2 : 25] And so the psalm divides into 2 verses 1 to 4 which describe our mighty rock. And then in verses 5 to 8 it describes the messianic king.

1 to 4 the mighty rock. 5 to 8 the messianic king. And the first point, our mighty rock. There's three things for you and I to see. First of all, see David's crisis.

Look at verse 2. The word in the Old Testament is used for extreme physical exhaustion.

It's to be at one's physical limits. But David is speaking of a heart condition. Not a physical condition. A spiritual condition.

So Psalm 61 is exploring and describing a man who is spiritually exhausted. His innermost being is overcome.

[3 : 26] We would say something like he's at the end of his rope. Some translations translate the phrase, my heart is overwhelmed. It's the picture of being covered over. You go to the sea when it's rough.

And you stand in the sea and the big waves hit you. And suddenly you're knocked off your feet. And just about as you go to get up, there's another wave. And another wave. And you're overwhelmed. Wave after wave crashing over you. And you're submerged. And that's the way David feels. And that's why he tells us he feels overwhelmed.

Because of his location. From the ends of the earth, I cry to you. It's not just that he's homesick.

Longing for home. But these words tell us about David's spiritual location.

Not his physical location. One commentator says this. He seems to be at the ends of the earth. For he measures distance not as a map maker. But as a worshipper.

[4 : 30] In other words, David is not charting his distance from home on a map like a pioneer. Here, he's measuring his distance from the Lord as a worshipper. Here is a man who does not feel close to his God.

Now, he wants to. But he doesn't feel close to God. And that makes the separation all the more greater.

This feeling of desertion overwhelms him. Verse 4 does suggest, doesn't it, that he is geographically distant from the tabernacle in Jerusalem.

That place where God had promised to meet with his people of God's gracious presence. It's maybe that he's fleeing from Absalom. But while his feet are absent from the tabernacle, that's where his heart is.

His heart is still there. He longs to be close with God. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt at the ends of the earth, spiritually speaking, remote from God?

[5 : 38] And your soul, that maybe once felt fresh with the joy of salvation, now feels arid and distant. And you can identify with David when he says in Psalm 42, As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants after you, O God.

Deep calls to deep. In the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me. If you've ever felt that way, well, you're not alone. It's a very common experience for the believer, as it was for David.

Do you notice, he says, when my heart is faint. Notice those words. It seems to be a recurring heart condition, isn't it? It's not a one-off.

I think I've said it a few times over the last while. I think we often imagine that Christian experience is just a straight line, steady line on the graph. When actually we know it's not, don't we?

We know that there are times when we are conscious of God being with us. And then there are other times when we feel God is far away. When my heart is faint, it seems to be a recurring heart condition.

[6 : 55] And there can be several reasons for that in the Christian life. Maybe that we've grieved the Holy Spirit by some unconfessed sin.

You don't feel his influence upon you as you did before. It may be that there are trials and afflictions. And they suddenly break on you like successive waves.

And you feel submerged. There are times when the Lord providentially withdraws that sense of his smile upon you. And none of those things, none of those things threaten your salvation wonderfully. But they certainly threaten your enjoyment of that salvation, don't they? Samuel Bolton writes this. He says, Though a believer cannot sin away grace, yet he may sin away the evidence, the sense, the comfort of it.

Though he cannot sin away his pardon, yet he may sin away the sense of it and the comfort of it. Though he has it, he has no comfort from it.

[8 : 09] And I think that summarizes neatly the situation that David is describing. You could identify, can't you, with David's crisis in Psalm 61. And so David's crisis produces, secondly, David's cry.

David's instinctive response to this crisis is what mine and yours should be. He turns to his Lord in prayer. Look at verse 1 and 2. Hear my cry, O God.

Listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you. When my heart is faint, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. And we learn here that prayer transforms spiritual isolation into spiritual intimacy.

prayer summons the Almighty to listen. Literally, verse 1 is, pay close attention, Lord, to my crisis, whatever it is.

And so when you pray, are you informing God about your situation? You know that kind of prayer, Lord, we just want you to know about such and such.

[9 : 20] Of course, God knows, doesn't he? I told you before, Richard Beews, when he lived in Ealing, and I would pop in for coffee and he would pray with me and he would say, Lord, you know, here we are, Paul and I at Curzon Road in West Ealing, I would look at him and say, well, the Lord doesn't want your address, Richard.

He's a far godlier man than I am. But God knows, doesn't he? God knows your situation. You don't have to tell God as I'm sure you were reading in the paper this morning, Lord, and saw.

There's none of that. David knows, doesn't he, God is omnipresent. David knows you can call on God anywhere, even in the ends of the earth. He may be really distant from the tabernacle, but that doesn't mean that God is out of range.

And David also knows that God is omniscient, that he already knows what David needs. The Lord Jesus says, doesn't he, your heavenly Father, he knows what you need before you ask him. And so the request of verse one, listen to my prayer, isn't asking God to be informed about your spiritual crisis.

It is asking God to intervene, isn't it? We need to ask specifically, what does he ask for? So you've seen David's crisis and David's cry, and then thirdly, David's rock.

[10 : 39] And this is the substance of David's prayer. Verse two, from the ends of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint, lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge. A strong tower against the enemy.

Let me dwell in your tent forever. Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. So what is the rock that David's got in view here?

Is it perhaps some desert stronghold that he can hide from Absalom in? Is it a high mountain vista from which he can observe all his enemies approaching?

Well, that no doubt would help him, wouldn't it, in a political crisis? But it wouldn't help him much with this spiritual crisis. You see, the rock that is in question here is a person and not a place.

And so we find, don't we, as we read through the Old Testament, it's a common Old Testament metaphor. Let me give you some verses. Deuteronomy 32, verse 15. But Deuteron grew fat and kicked.

[11 : 45] You grew fat, stout and sleek. Then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation. You've got a historical book, 1 Samuel 2, 2.

There is none holy like you, Lord. There is none besides you. There is no rock like our God. Psalm 18. He, Lord, is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

You've got to the prophets. Isaiah 17, 10. For you've forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge. So what David is saying here is that God is his rock.

David is asking God to reveal himself under the characteristics of a rock. The metaphor is what you and I need.

And David unpacks the metaphor in verses 3 and 4. What does it mean that God is a rock? So look at verse 3. For you have been my refuge, number one, a strong tower against the enemy, number two.

[12 : 58] Let me dwell in your tent forever, number three. And let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings, number four. And I want you to notice here, David is moving from describing his presence in the present tense to reviewing what God has been to him already in the past tense.

He's explaining to himself and to you and to me how God has revealed himself to David as a rock in the past. How does God as a rock help his fainting heart?

Well, for one thing, the rock supplies a refuge. We said to the children, didn't we, that a rock is something solid and firm and immovable.

It suggests a firm footing and a foundation. Feet that were sinking in sand can stand on a rock. As such, God provides refuge for the troubled believer.

He or she may stand firm. The rock supplies its strong power against the enemy, verse three. A strong tower against the enemy. So you think of the monasteries.

[14 : 15] You drive around the country and you see some of these ancient monasteries where they've got a high tower. And when the Vikings attacked, the monks would grab their treasure or the valuable things and they would run into the high tower.

Proverbs 18, verse 10, the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and they are safe. And that is what we need, isn't it? When we feel overwhelmed in life, we need a safe place to hide until the trouble is passed by.

And he continues to describe how God was a rock to him. He moves from God's faithfulness to his future faithfulness. Verse four, let me dwell under the shelter of your wings.

And those words, depending on what Bible translation you're using, they may be seen as a prayer to God, let me dwell. Or they may be an expression of confidence, I will dwell in your tent.

Either way, there's two metaphors of how God is a rock for us. We've seen how God supplies a shelter, we've seen that God supplies a high tower.

[15 : 29] Third thing, this rock is a tabernacle or a tent. the place before the temple where God symbolically dwelt enthroned amongst his people, right in the center of his people.

The tabernacle was God's sanctuary on earth. The tabernacle said to David and to Israel, Emmanuel, God is with us.

and the tabernacle made approach to God possible, didn't it, through a sacrifice of atonement. It was there that the priest offered a lamb without blemish to God so that David could experience God as his rock.

And knowing God as rock means knowing that you are reconciled to him by shed blood in his day at the temple and abiding with him in peace and him dwelling with you.

And finally, David says, the rock supplies rest and security. Take me, let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings. So it's not only a strong shelter, a shelter of stone, but it's also a tender shelter, isn't it, of a loving mother bird with her vulnerable chicks.

[16:50] There's strength, there's rest, there's security, but there's tenderness and intimacy and warmth. It's one of David's favourite images in the Psalms.

Psalm 57, be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge till the storms of destruction pass by. Psalm 91, verse 4, he will cover you with his feathers and under his wings you will find refuge.

His truth shall be your shield and your buckler. And David's God supplies more than an impregnable fortress to protect, he supplies a warm embrace to the afflicted.

So to summarise, what have we seen? We've seen, lead me to the rock that is higher than I, and that means be my shelter, be my strong tower against the enemy, be my dwelling place through the atoning blood of the Lamb, be my warm place of rest and security.

In short, the believer says in a crisis, God, lead me to yourself. And specifically, that God would reveal himself in these characteristics of a rock.

[18:09] He knows what he needs. But the question in the rest of the psalm is how is this going to happen? How will this be achieved? How is he going to come to God and find God to be a rock to him?

David says of this rock, it is higher than I, it's higher than I. It's beyond my reach. How am I going to reach this rock?

Air's Rock is probably the most famous rock in the world, it's in Australia. It's a magnificent red sandstone, it's 100 feet tall, six miles around, according to Wikipedia.

You can see it from miles around. But if you want to have Air's Rock revealed to you, and if you want to experience Air's Rock in all its glory and splendor, what you need is a guide.

You need someone to take you to that rock, to lead you to that rock, someone who knows it intimately. And David is here expressing a similar need, isn't he? He says, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

[19:16] It's beyond my reach. God is beyond my reach. And if God is going to reveal himself to David as a rock of salvation, God needs to supply the guide. He must be led there.

And the only one who is able to reveal God in the character of rock of salvation is God himself. And you see, this is precisely what God does in the second half of this psalm.

At first look, isn't it, you look at the second half of Psalm 61 and you think he's changing the subject. It looks like he's talking about this coming king, this coming Messiah, but there's no change of subject.

In the first part of the psalm, he explains his deliverance and then he explains the source of this deliverance. David can only find God to be a mighty king because David had a messianic king. And that's our second point. God is a mighty rock and then see his messianic king in verses 5 to 8 and there's three things again. Look at verse 5, you see there David's Christian heritage, David's Christian heritage.

[20:27] For you, O God, have heard my vows and you've given me the heritage of those who fear your name. It's verse, at the end of Selah, can you see that at the end of verse 4?

Selah, it means pause, stop what you're doing, think about this. it's the turning point of the psalm and David expresses his confidence in God.

He says, God, you've indeed heard my prayer and you will prove to be a rock to me in my distress and he expresses his confidence in terms of the heritage that he has received from God.

You see, David had made vows. It was an Old Testament way, this expression making vows of committing himself fully to the Lord, to fear his name and in consequence of his vows he's received this heritage of all those who fear your name.

It's a reference pointing you back. It's a reference pointing you back to all the promises of the Old Testament. all the promises of the covenant.

[21 : 41] Do you remember those promises of the Old Testament? They all point to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true Israel where God dwells.

Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham. Jesus is the bestower of God's covenant blessings on God's covenant people. And that's exactly where David spends the rest of this psalm.

David's Christian heritage. The second thing is David's Christian hope. David's Christian hope. David had something more to base his hope upon than the covenant with Abraham because God had himself entered into covenant into a bond, into an oath with David himself.

So you remember the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel's son. God said, when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who will come from your body and I will establish his kingdom and he shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever and I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son and when he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men.

But my steadfast love will not depart from him as I took it from Saul whom I put away from before you and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me and your throne shall be established forever.

[23 : 11] And so remember the terms of the covenant that God had promised to raise up a king from David's own family line and he will bear a special intimate relationship with God and God will be his father and he will be God's son and God will establish his throne and he shall abide before God forever because God will preserve him as king and his reign.

His reign will have no end. And of course the king that was spoken of to David in that covenant is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's this glorious heritage that David and all the Old Testament saints awaited with confidence and with hope.

And that's David's Christian hope. He expresses it clearly in verses 6 and 7. Prolong the life of the king. May his years endure to all generations.

May he be enthroned forever before God. Appoint steadfast love unfaithfulness to watch over him. What does that remind you of? God save our gracious queen.

God save our gracious queen. Long live our noble queen. God save the queen. Send her victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us. God save the queen.

[24 : 42] It's very similar to Psalm 61 verses 6 and 7. They're like that, they're like an anthem for the church for the church of both testaments that God would keep his promise to prolong the Messiah king's life.

That the Messiah king would endure to all generations. That the Messianic king would be enthroned forever before God. That God would watch over his Messianic king in his love and faithfulness.

And so that being the case, let's try and summarize the message of this psalm. We've seen, I think, that as a Christian, you occasionally find yourself spiritually dislocated at the ends of the earth.

Trials come in upon you, wave after wave, and your heart fails within you. And we saw that you need God to come to you as a rock to be your refuge and your strong tower against the enemy, to be your dwelling place, to be your rest and security.

But you have a problem. And the problem is this, this rock is too high for you. And so you come to him and you pray, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

[26 : 01] And God answers that prayer in a marvelous way because he sent you a guide. One whom he has appointed to reign over you as king forever and ever. And one who tonight abides before God forever to make intercession for you as your priest, so that when your heart is faint and overwhelmed, only Jesus, your eternal priest and king, can lead you to the rock that is higher than I.

For he is God himself. And he is the self-disclosure to you of the God of all grace. Who is a rock? Well, that is what God is to you through the gospel work of Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus who reveals God to us as our rock. And so without Jesus, you remain spiritually at the ends of the earth. outside of Christ, the overwhelmed become the overcome.

The overwhelmed will be overcome. And they may cry to God, but God will not answer their prayer because they have no one to lead them to the rock that is higher than I.

And so contrast to Christian. The Christian can pray with confidence. Verse four, let me dwell in your tent forever. That confidence that you will dwell in his tent forever is found in verse seven.

[27 : 34] Because he, the Lord Jesus, is enthroned forever before God. And so if your heart is overwhelmed this evening and you feel like you're at the ends of the earth and you're begging him to listen to your prayer, that he might lead you to himself as a rock, then come to Christ.

Trust in his high priestly work for you this evening. Turning God from his wrath against your sin to the rock of safety.

And so come to Christ that he might reveal to you afresh that love and faithfulness that preserved him in his earthly work and preserved you too.

And so here you have David's Christian heritage and David's Christian hope, which is ours as well. And then to finish, look at David's Christian walk. Look at verse eight.

So I will ever sing praises to your name as I perform my vows day after day. It's a little postscript, isn't it, at the end of the psalm.

[28 : 48] David began the psalm crying and he ends the psalm singing. It's interesting, the psalmist's gradual experience verses one to two, I call to you.

Verse eight, I sing to you. And he commits to praising God as much as he had petitioned God.

Spurgeon says of this psalm, there should be a parallel between our supplication, our asking, and our thanksgiving.

We ought not to leap in prayer and limp in praise. David had come to a time of crisis. He doesn't only seek God when the going gets tough.

Having been assured that God is a rock to him, he commits his life to God to perform my vows day after day.

It's an Old Testament way of saying, my daily Christian walk, I'm going to live for you, Lord. I'm going to walk with God every day. And the Christian life is plodding.

[30 : 03] It is plodding, and it is day by day performing our vows. And there are occasional days where there are great feelings of danger when your heart is all wound.

So whichever is the case for you this week, like David, may we all sing praise to his name as we march to our destination. And may we look to the rock, to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let's pray. Amen.