

The “Only” Psalm

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When you come face-to-face with problems that arise to block your progress, have you thought of turning to read about a man who had similar problems? David walked through the storms of life, and God gave to the world, through him, the hymnbook of the Bible. We know it as the Book of Psalms.

I'd like to focus now on Psalm 62, a great hymn and a majestic psalm. It bears a superscription that is part of Scripture. It is "To the Chief Musician," and that lends importance to it. It was not just an ordinary psalm of David, for when he composed it he sent it to the head musician. The chief musician at that time was Jeduthun, one of the three leaders of the singers. He was the choirmaster of that day. The three sons of Aaron and their families contributed these three song leaders who served in turn at the tabernacle.

David, a gifted musician, was responsible for the music of the tabernacle worship. He organized the choir and the orchestra that played the great hymns he composed. But I hasten to state, the music of David was not a product of genius. He was neither a Stephen Foster nor a George Gershwin. Stephen Foster wrote of a Kentucky Home, which he never knew, and of a Suwannee River, which he had never seen. The songs were the product of genius giving voice to dreams. David, on the other hand, wrote out of profound experience. Actually, the psalms he composed encompass his own life and set it to music. They are genuine and abiding. You would not find them making the Top 40. They would not receive a Tony Award, for they are not just ditties with catchy tunes. Their musical score was written in the blood of David. Psalm 62, which we are considering, is a striking example of this.

The Great Crisis

This song is the expression of the heart of David at the time of the greatest crisis that ever came in his life. In it you see the soul of David laid bare, and you can look into its depths as at no other time.

It is true that David had a life that was a succession of mountaintop experiences. As a boy he wrestled with a bear and a lion, and that was exciting; but this psalm does not deal with that experience. Then there was a day when he was called in from the sheepfold and anointed king. We might attempt to imagine some of the emotions of the lad as the anointing oil, poured by Samuel, ran down upon his hair. What an experience – all the way from the pasture to the palace! But this psalm is not about that. Then there was the time of great challenge when David went out as a boy against Goliath with his slingshot. But he does not refer to that in this writing. We recall the scene as he sat in the torch-lit palace, and Saul, holding a javelin, hurled it at David, missing the mark only because of David's alertness to action. Exciting? Yes, but he is not writing about that here. He spent years out in the hills and dens of the earth, encountering many a crisis peculiar to rugged living, but none of these lie in the body of this psalm. Then came a day when Saul and Jonathan were killed. Both fell in the same battle. When word was brought to David, a song acknowledging God's dealing rose from his heart, but it was not this psalm; it was another, a funeral dirge. David committed the tragic sin of his life, the sin that stood out in such a glaring fashion but, again, he does not tell of it here.

My friend, Psalm 62 does not depict any of these grave seasons in his life, but it does tell of the *greatest* crisis that came to him: he was an old man when his own son, his favorite son, the son who was more like him than any of his other sons, led a rebellion against him. And David was forced to leave the comforts of the palace and flee from Jerusalem, returning once more to the dens of the earth.

The Dramatic Moment

As you watch the old king in his flight from Jerusalem you are witnessing the highest peak or crisis in which his soul is involved in the drama of faith's supreme test. Turn back to the historical record for a moment:

So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up. (2 Samuel 15:30)

That was a tragic time in the life of David. It was his dramatic moment, his time of crisis. Thomas Paine, a great political philosopher, wrote of "the times that tried men's souls." This time had come to the old king.

The Line of Betrayal

Absalom, David's son, was marching into Jerusalem. His entry was forcing a time of decision. There were some who were choosing David; others were choosing Absalom. It was a time when David found who were the loyal and the disloyal in the ranks. The betrayers and followers were well-marked.

Of note was Ahithophel (related to David by marriage through Bathsheba), an astute statesman, a man of sagacity, of wonderful ability, one upon whom David had leaned. He had deserted and gone over to Absalom. This was the first Benedict Arnold on record, and it broke David's heart when he found out that this trusted man had deserted him.

Then Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, came and said that his master, the son of Jonathan, had betrayed him. But David could not believe Ziba, for Ziba was two-faced and he never knew which face to believe. Therefore David was not quite sure about Mephibosheth at the time.

Then, as David fled from Jerusalem, barefoot and weeping, there stood Shimei, just outside the town of Bahurim. He was of the house of Saul, and from his store of bitter hatred for the old king he heaped cursings upon David and threw stones.

A Song Out of Testing

We see Absalom entering Jerusalem in triumph, and the same crowd that shouted to the rafters for David was now shouting deliriously for Absalom. The children of these people later were the ones who shouted, "Hosanna," to the Lord Jesus Christ and in the days following shouted, "Crucify Him!" David knew the sting of the voice of the mob, and Psalm 62 is the song of David in that moment of anxiety.

Here we find a man who had committed his way to God, one who was traveling in the spiritual stratosphere; a man who was living above the storms, shocks, and stresses of this life. And as we read this psalm, which burst forth from his heart in that hour of darkness and defeat and time of testing, we are amazed at not finding one note of discouragement, no suggestion of fear, no word of distress. There is neither rancor nor bitterness welling up in the heart of the psalmist. He sings forth a song of salvation, a paean of praise, an opus of optimism. It is a song of sanguinity, a thesis of trust, and a work of wonder. How could David write such a "Hallelujah Chorus" out of an experience so dark?

Structure of This Psalm

I do not want to be tedious, but I would like to have you note the mechanics of this psalm very briefly, for it is important that you have this understanding. The little word *selah* occurs twice here. You should not verbalize *selah* in reading the Psalms, for it is actually a kind of punctuation. It is as if you have read along in a writing and come to the end of a sentence—you have gotten to the end of the thought.

While the word *selah* occurs but twice, at the end of verses 4 and 8, it breaks the psalm into three stanzas, the first line of each stanza containing the little adverb *only*. Have you noticed that? You will find this fact if you read the New American Standard version:

My soul waits in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation ... My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him ... Men of low degree are only vanity, and men of rank are a lie. (Psalm 62:1, 5, 9 NASB)

The little word *only* occurs but three other times in the psalm. I think it was Spurgeon who was the first to call this “the *only* Psalm.” This does not mean that there are not 149 other psalms – there are. It is “the *only* Psalm” because of the emphasis it places upon the word *only*.

The three stanzas are divided as follows:

1. The test of faith, verses 1–4
2. The time of faith, verses 5–8
3. The triumph of faith, verses 9–12

The Test of Faith

Here we see the deep conviction that motivated the life of David – the currents that swept over his spirit, guiding and directing him through life. Here, for the first time, we see David’s soul laid bare. While you do not see the heart of the man in the historical account, you do see him in clear view in this song of his soul. His favorite son is in rebellion, actually seeking his life, and now his enemies have come to the front. They have moved to lay hold of him that they might destroy him. Some of his friends have turned traitor. David was forced to flee, for he would not offend Jerusalem, his beloved city, by doing battle within her walls. Therefore, he left and returned to the caves of the earth. He had been dealt a cruel blow.

Weaker men have crumpled under circumstances less trying than this, but from David we hear no complaint, no condemnation, no criticism. He was committed to God and cast himself upon Him. There was nothing to say; he had no defense to offer. He said that God had permitted this thing to come to him and that the outcome of it all held no concern for him. His one concern was that he remain in the hands of God. He was undisturbed, unmoved by the things taking place around him.

No doubt there were those around David who urged that he stand his ground and thereby exhibit his faith, for he was God’s anointed and God should overrule this whole matter! Not David! He said that his life was in God’s hands and it seemed best that he leave Jerusalem. Beloved, while small men cried for a miracle David avowed to walk in the dark, trusting God. Oh, for a faith like that – a God-given faith! To David, what others called defeat was but a test of faith. David could retreat from Jerusalem, and it is still going to sound like a victory.

Listen to David and watch his actions as the disastrous floodwaters broke upon him:

He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. (v. 6 NASB)

We note that Zadok, the high priest, decided to go with David. He was faithful and had brought the ark, a symbol to the Israelites of God's presence in their midst, and began following David. Then the old king turned and, seeing the ark, commanded Zadok to carry it back to the city:

Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." (2 Samuel 15:25, 26)

I would love to make this great truth clear so that it will live for you! Here was a man so wholly committed to God that he turned aside from any thought of merit in the ark, clinging only to God and saying to Zadok that if it was God's will for him to come back to this city, he would be allowed to come back; if not, then he was in God's hands. He refused to attempt to force God to do anything, but determined to go the way God led, regardless of the path. Oh, to live like that today!

In Psalm 62:3 David said to his enemies,

How long will you assail a man, that you may murder him, all of you, like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence? (NASB)

Many of David's former friends had turned against him or betrayed him. Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, did a dastardly thing by thinking he would gain favor with David if he lied and said that Mephibosheth had deserted David. And Ahithophel, David's best friend and wisest of his counselors, went over to the other side in David's darkest hour. Here in this psalm David spoke of Ahithophel prophetically as Judas Iscariot. Ahithophel was in David's inner circle and was the man whom he leaned on, and just like Judas he turned on his master.

David said that they were running over him as a mob runs over a fence, but he also said, "It is all right as long as it is God's will. If these things must come to me as a result of my sin, I am going to accept it." Hear him in verse 4:

They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position; they delight in falsehood; they bless with their mouth, but inwardly they curse. (NASB)

Let us understand David's action under the bitter attack of Shimei. While David was on the throne Shimei bowed like the rest of them, but when he was free to express his heart of hatred we find him cursing and hurling rocks after David as he fled from Jerusalem. David had a loyal captain by the name of Abishai, a son of Zeruiah. He said to the king: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!"

My friend, if you want an example of what the Scripture means by "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19), listen to David as he replies to his captain:

But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’” (2 Samuel 16:10)

In other words, David told Abishai, “God has permitted him to curse me; you let him curse me.” Have you ever stopped to think, my friend, that God has given you certain enemies for a definite purpose to test you that you might become a better Christian? Do not become alarmed at the presence of enemies and difficulties that God has permitted to cumber your path. He is not being hard on you. How we need to trust God to the extent that we would not cry out at a time like that!

The Time of Faith

The second stanza brings us to “the time of faith,” and this is the entire life of any man. The moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ you are saved. It is an important moment, but we should not be majoring upon our birthday. Unfortunately, there is today a neglecting of the life of faith. It is one thing to be born; it is another thing to *live*. And it is the life of faith that counts. So David is talking about “the time of faith.”

When is the time of faith? Is it on a sunny day when there is not a cloud in your sky? Is it a time when everything is going exactly right, with nothing to mar your outlook? David’s answer is that the best time to trust God is at the crisis moment of your life – “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him” (Psalm 62:5 NASB). This is a Bible definition of prayer, by the way.

I once had a little card sent to me bearing this message: “True prayer is the Holy Spirit speaking in the believer, through the Son, to the Father.” That is prayer; it is real prayer. “My hope is from Him.” David said that he was not making some wild prayer, some audacious statement – that he was not demanding that God do anything; instead David avowed, “My hope is from Him.” David expected God to put into his heart the thing that He wanted done; therefore, he would be praying for the thing that was best.

We wonder again if some pious people around David might not have suggested to him that he was in such a tight place that they should have a prayer meeting. To this David would have said to them that his whole life was a life of prayer, “My hope is from Him.” Here is an illustration of what Paul had in mind when he said, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Now by this Paul did not mean that you are to get on your knees and remain there twenty-four hours a day. But Paul did mean for you to get on your knees and pray and then live in the expectation of that prayer for twenty-four hours every day. So David did not call a prayer meeting. In fact, the amazing thing is that this psalm has no prayer in it at all. But we find that the entire psalm is in the atmosphere of prayer. David was a man so committed to God that his life and actions were that of prayer.

Now we see this old king going out of Jerusalem; we hear him weeping. But these exterior things fade away when we glimpse the depths of his heart, for he was a man who was committed to God, and he would go with God regardless of what the outcome might be. Other men would have become bitter, but not David. He was saying something here that is tremendous:

My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. (Psalm 62:5, 6 NASB)

“He only is my rock.” That is the central truth of the psalm, and that is the central truth of David’s life. That is the dynamo that ran his life. That is the thing that caused him to stand head and shoulders above other men on the horizon of history. It has caused him to cast a long shadow down the corridor of time.

When we come to the New Testament we can see what the Lord Jesus meant when He made this tremendous statement:

And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. (Matthew 21:44)

Christ is that stone, that Rock. There is coming a day when the stone cut out without hands will fall on this earth. Today you and I can fall on this Rock, and those who fall on it will be saved. But if you wait, it will fall on you and you will be crushed.

A little Scottish woman got up in a testimony meeting and gave this as her testimony: “You know, sometimes I tremble on the rock, but the rock never trembles under me.” Are you on this Rock? Whoever falls on this Rock shall be saved. This is what Paul meant when he said,

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

David said, “He only is my Rock. He is the One I am trusting. Oh, the throne is toppling, Jerusalem is in convulsions, the people have turned against me, but I am on the Rock!” David had learned that glorious lesson.

The Triumph of Faith

We find now in Psalm 62:9 that David could say:

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. (NASB)

He had learned that one cannot trust the mob; they could not be expected to be loyal all the time for they were fickle. He had found that men of high degree, such as Ahithophel, were not to be trusted; they could not be leaned upon. This is the first thing that a new Christian must learn: *not to look to men but to look to God*. Many new Christians have become discouraged, disappointed, and disillusioned, for they set their eyes upon a man. A young Christian once told me that he had set his eyes upon a man, and it had all but made a shipwreck of his faith. David knew all of the time that he could not trust men, so his faith was fixed utterly upon God. He rested upon a Rock that could not be moved.

Then he made the point that we cannot trust in material things either:

Do not trust in oppression, and do not vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart upon them. (Psalm 62:10 NASB)

Why is it that you can trust God? David said,

Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God. (v. 11 NASB)

Friend, you can trust God because He can do anything that requires power. He has all power, and He can do anything He wants to do! We catch the thinking of the psalmist that power belongs to God. It did not reside in David. He was simply a great king because God made him a great king. Now He had permitted that David be made to leave Jerusalem, and if it was not God's will that he return, then he would not go back. But David was resigning all to God, for He is the One alone who has all power.

The mad rush to gain power is the destroying element in the world at this hour. In the effort to gain power, the bomb has been created. This form of power wreaks destruction. It is man's effort at power. But David discovered that with true power there is another element that goes with it always:

And lovingkindness [mercy] is Thine, O Lord, for Thou dost recompense a man according to his work. (v. 12 NASB)

If you have power, you ought to be able to exercise mercy. David was saying that his God, who can exercise power, is a God who can also exercise mercy. David said to Zadok that he wanted him to take the mercy seat back to Jerusalem and place it in the tabernacle, for David knew he would find mercy with God.

At the very heart of Old Testament religion was the mercy seat. At the heart of the Christian faith today is mercy. "Come, every soul by sin oppressed – there's mercy with the Lord."¹ I think that is also what Brother George Bennard meant when he wrote: "I will cling to the old rugged cross."² Mercy!

Here is a little story for your thinking. Stonewall Jackson received his name at the Battle of Bull Run. General Cox had already given the command to retreat, and his men had begun to withdraw when he looked across the creek to the other side of the hill. There stood General Jackson. Cox stopped short, reversed his order, and said, "Men, look! Over there stands General Jackson like a stone wall." General Stonewall Jackson was a Christian, and he had learned what David learned: when you can say, "He only is my Rock," then you can stand adamant against the battles and issues of this life. "He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken."

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