

Psalm 56
“A Proper Response To Fear”
Wednesday, October 20th, 2021

[PSALM 56]

To the Choirmaster: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. A Miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

[1] *Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me;*

[2] *my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.*

[3] *When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*

[4] *In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?*

[5] *All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil.*

[6] *They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.*

[7] *For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!*

[8] *You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?*

[9] *Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know: that God is for me.*

[10] *In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise,*

[11] *in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?*

[12] *I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you.*

[13] *For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.*

Intro:

Examining firstly the superscript above verse 1, where it says “To the Choirmaster; According To The Dove On Far-Off Terebinths. A Miktam Of David, When The Philistines Seized Him In Gath”. We know from our other studies in the Psalms that anytime we see the address, “To The Choirmaster”, we know that this was a Psalm used for temple worship. The second part where it says, “According to the dove on far-off terebinths”, is likely to have been a tune as in - this Psalm will be sung in the tune of such-and-such.

The next thing we see is that word “Miktam”. That’s one of the words lost to us today in terms of its meaning. Hebrew scholars have no idea, nobody knows. There are those who would *speculate* on the term Miktam and its meaning. Some say it could mean “golden”, some say other things.

The last part of that superscript **is** quite interesting because it gives us something of a *clue* as to what was happening when David composed this Psalm. Now it says, “when the Philistines seized him in Gath” - the most similar parallel we have is when David was in danger while in Gath after he had feigned madness before the king there, in order to get out of there alive. We find that account in 1 Samuel 21:10-15:

[1 Samuel 21:10-15]

[10] *And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.*

[11] *And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances,*

‘Saul has struck down his thousands,

and David his ten thousands’?”

[12] *And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.*

[13] *So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.*

[14] *Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me?"*

[15] *Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"*

So that's the possible parallel account. And even though that can give us a little bit of flavor to Psalm 56, we don't actually know **definitively** that this **was** the occasion in which this Psalm was written. The superscript includes the term "seized by the Philistines" - or even "taken by the Philistines" in some translations. Most theologians and scholars seem to believe that this was the likely event which prompted this Psalm but I think it's important to at least notate the fact that we don't know with 100% certainty - only that it seems to fit.

Verses 1 - 4:

"Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?". David of course begins his Psalm with a heartfelt prayer for God's divine intervention on his behalf. It's a common pattern within the Psalms to begin with a burden or a trouble. It's a common pattern in our own prayers. It frames the rest of the prayer, or in this case Psalm, but thankfully it doesn't end with it.

Fear does NOT equal faithlessness. Fear is common to all of us, at one time or another. Maybe we rationalize our fear, maybe we repeat mantras of positivity to ourselves in an attempt to flat

out *deny* our fear. But the reality is that at one time or another, sooner or later, all experience fear. And here's why:

Fear is really a gift from God when you think about it. Why? Fear serves to keep us from doing remarkably stupid things: it alerts us to danger, it causes us to take precautions, and it causes us to take action in aid of self-preservation. If indeed the account given to us in 1 Samuel 21:10-15 *is* the prompt for him to have written this Psalm, then we can deduce that it was the natural, God-given fear response that alerted him to the reality of the grave danger he was in that caused his brain to race to find a solution - which was to act like a crazy person in order to bounce out of there to safety. So fear is a good thing in that sense. Fear is a natural emotion that God has given us to help keep us safe.

It's not a sin to fear though some people believe that. Some assume it's sinful to have that emotion because they believe it somehow indicates a lack of faith or trust in God. We just saw David say in Verse 3, "**WHEN** I am afraid, I will put my trust in you". So the key word there is "WHEN". David acknowledges that at times he has fear, that indeed his natural reaction is panic. So that should encourage us in a sense that fear is not the measuring stick for our level of faith or trust in God. The measuring stick is our **RESPONSE** to the fear we feel, it's what we **DO** with that fear. Using myself as an example, I think back to a time as a kid, out walking with my dad in the neighborhood. I remember that I was starting to get ahead of him and pretty soon, I found myself walking near a fenced yard that housed a mean dog. And when it began to bare its teeth and snarl at me, I immediately ran back to dad. I felt fear but my RESPONSE was to immediately run back to dad. It's much the same with our heavenly Father. It wasn't sinful that I experienced fear. Actually, the fear I felt when the dog began snapping at me through the fence wasn't even an indication of a lack of faith in my father's ability to protect me. Putting our trust in God when we DO feel fear doesn't negate the fact that at times, we WILL feel fear, it means that

when we DO feel fear, it is TO God that we run. And we can trust Him to come through for us, according to His will. Bear in mind too, that this was David, the same one who killed the lion and the bear as a young man, a gifted soldier on the battlefield, a war-hardened veteran and yet HE never denies that he feels fear. It was a question of his **response** to it.

David expresses his trust in God during times of grave danger. *“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”*. We are always to put our trust in God, no matter what evil comes, no matter when we are afraid. A question:

1. What is it about God that we can trust?
 - *Who He is*. His nature & character. God is, by His very essence, a Savior.
 - His promises. Here are just a few:

Joshua 1:9, *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

Matthew 6:34, *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Isaiah 43:1, *“...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*

Romans 8:38-39, *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Deuteronomy 31:6, *“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”*

There is no fear that God can't deliver us from. God will either remove the thing we fear or He will remove our fear from the thing or situation. If you are indeed in Christ, that if you have been made regenerate by way of the Holy Spirit, and you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ,

then you have been foreknown to your heavenly Father since before He even placed the Sun in the sky. He knew you BY NAME. He cares more for you than you can even fathom in your carbon-based mind. He did not redeem you to bring you into fellowship with Him only to forget you in your trouble. So fear not, He is with you!

Verses 5 & 6:

In verses 5 & 6, we see a description of David's enemies. David writes, "*All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.*". They sneak around, they gossip and lie, they slander and talk behind the backs of others, intending to cause division and strife and pain. They're great at finding the problems and failings of others. Their sin always looks worse on someone else. But what of us? Does our sin look worse on others? Or are we truly the worst sinner we've ever met? Serious question: does the Lord point and laugh at us when we fall? Does the Lord LIVE to criticise us or question our hearts? So what's our excuse? Whenever you begin a sentence with, "I heard..." or start a question with "Hey, did you hear about...?", watch out.

Verses 7 - 9:

Continuing into verses 7, 8, and 9 we see David's expression of confidence that those who came against him would not escape by way of their iniquity. David writes, "*For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God! You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know: that God is for me.*".

Here's a profound truth that we can suss out from this text:

- **FROM** wickedness and iniquity and sin, there ***IS*** escape

- **THROUGH** wickedness and iniquity and sin there is **NO** escape: the mercy of God secures the escape of the one and the justice of God prevents the escape of the other.

Verse 8 tells us that even if we wander, that God's mercies extend to that. We are often so beset by our troubles and our fears that we have no idea where we are. We lose all of our focus, we lose our grounding, our horizon. Fortunately we only have to call upon our Lord Jesus who is All-Present to return to His safety whenever we have wandered off course because of all the troubles and fear we sometimes face. That's a mercy.

What about the tender mercy where even our tears are counted. He knows our sorrow, He knows the fragility of our hearts, He knows our frame - after all He made us BY HAND. And let us never forget His covenantal mercies. Those mercies extended to us because we belong to Him. We have been paid for with a price, therefore we are His and He is ours. Amazing!

Verses 10 - 13:

Finally in Verses 10-13, David writes, *"In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life."*

Remember that these things were written for our admonition. Just like David, I will praise God **FOR** His word because **IN** His word He is revealed and **BY** His word He will uphold me. Our thanksgiving is so often focused on the temporal, material things we've been given. I'm totally guilty of that. Notice the juxtaposition in verse 13 where David commemorates what the Lord has done for him in the PAST saying "For you HAVE delivered my soul" with what God will do for him in the FUTURE where David writes, "That I MAY walk before God in the light of life".

Let's meditate on what He HAS done for us YESTERDAY, His past deliverances and His past rescues, and then use that to soothe our anxieties about what God is capable of doing TODAY as well as TOMORROW.