

## Gimme Shelter

Psalm 57:1-11

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to the 57th Psalm. If you've peeked ahead and looked at the Psalm, you'll notice that it bears a relation to the Psalm that we studied the last time together, the 56th Psalm. Both of these Psalms come from that time in David's life in which he was fleeing from Saul. The last time we were together in Psalm 56, we saw David headed straight for Gath, the city of Goliath. So bad were things in his home country, so isolated was he from all support that the one who was the anointed king of Israel had to find shelter in the city of the champion of the enemy of his people. That's how bad things were. And David cries out to God in Psalm 56 and does it in this setting, in Gath, in which God in His mercy gave deliverance when the Philistines had captured him and he escaped their clutches. Now in Psalm 57 David is again in the midst of that same flight from Saul, but now he's in the cave hiding out. And this event, of course, is covered for us in the book of 1 Samuel, but in this Psalm he directs us to the prayer that he lifts up to the living God in the time of his need. Let's give attention to God's word in hearing it, and before we do so, let's look to God in prayer and ask Him to bless the reading and our hearing of God's word. Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is truth, and we pray that we would accept it as such. We pray that we would not be tempted to think that though Your word is truth in the abstract, that it is not applicable to us...for it is. Your word is truth and it is profitable, and so we pray that our souls would profit from Your truth in Your Spirit helping us to hear and to believe and to embrace and then to live the truth of the word we will soon hear. And we ask that this would bring You glory and will do our hearts and lives eternal good, for we're praying this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.*

This is God's word.

*For the choir director; set to Al-tashheth. [Which means, by the way, 'destroy not,' or 'do not destroy'—perhaps your translations or the margins will say] A Mikhtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave. 1 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, / For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge / Until destruction*

passes by. / 2I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me. 3 He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me. God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth. 4 My soul is among lions;I must lie among those who breathe forth fire..." Let me pause and say it's possible that those last words, "who breathe forth fire," should be translated something like, "those who consume." One translation says, "I must lie among man-eaters," which goes well with the sentence before, "my soul is among lions." "My soul is among lions;I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, / Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows /And their tongue a sharp sword. 5 Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth. 6 They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They dug a pit before me; They themselves have fallen into the midst of it. 7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;I will sing, yes, I will sing praises! 8Awake, my glory!Awake, harp and lyre!I will awaken the dawn. 9 I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples;I will sing praises to You among the nations. 10For Your lovingkindness is great to the heavens /And Your truth to the clouds. 11 Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

God tells us when this Psalm was sung. It comes from the time when David was there in the cave and Saul came *this close* to getting him. Inches from being done for was David, and God delivered him. Apparently, the name of that tune, "Do not destroy," was a personal prayer of David's which he had occasion on many circumstances to utter. 'Lord, do not let me be destroyed. Do not let me be eliminated. Do not allow me to be rubbed out by my enemies.' And it became such a constant refrain that it worked itself into the title of one of David's tunes to which the song was to be sung. You'll notice, by the way, that Psalm 58 was also to be sung to that same tune, "Do not destroy."

In this passage David gives expression to the Christian experience of seeking refuge in God alone, even when we are in perilous circumstances. And David directs us to the right object of our hope and to the right place of refuge, and that right place of refuge is in God alone. David's circumstances have nothing to encourage him here. He's in a cave, and though a cave may be shelter, and though rocks may provide a stronghold, they can also provide a situation that you cannot get out of. And so David's trust is not in the cave. In fact, it's being caught in that cave with Saul that's giving him heartburn. No, David's trust is not in finding a good place to hide, but a good God to hide in.

And David not only lifts up his praises in this Psalm directly to God, and you see that especially in verse 1 and in verses 7-11 where David...it's almost as if he forgets that we're here. But also in this Psalm it's as if David wants to pause and

turn to *you* and encourage *you* in whatever tight spot the Lord has you in. Because in those middle verses, from verses 2 to 6, he turns to you and he tells you how he responded to his God in the time of trouble, almost exhorting you and encouraging *you* to come along with him and trust in the same living God.

I'd like to look at the Psalm with you in four parts tonight. It would be fair to divide this Psalm into three parts. Verses 1-3 do indeed go together, but if you'll notice...This is how I'm going to break it down: The first part is in verse 1. In verse 1 you'll notice that David is *directly* addressing God. Then in verses 2 and 3, same subject matter, but now he's not speaking to God in the second person; he's speaking *of* God in the third person. You see how he went from "You," speaking to God in verse 1, to "He," third person? Now it's as if he's turned his eyes from God, and he's turned to you and he's telling you how God enabled him to trust in Him in the midst of this tight spot, so to encourage you to turn your eyes to the God to whom he had turned.

And so in verse 1, we see his heart's cry to God. In verses 2 and 3, we see him focusing our hope on that same God. In verses 4-6 we see the third part of this Psalm, and there again David comments to us at the almost delicious irony of God's care of His people. And then finally in verses 7-11 David shows us how God's deliverance led him to a heart for worship, and we could even say led him to a heart for missions...and I'll explain that later. Let's look at this in four parts.

## **I. David's heart cry to God.**

First, direct your attention to verse 1, "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, / For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge / Until destruction passes by." This is David's heart cry for God to show him favor, 'Be gracious to me. Be merciful to me. Show me Your favor and help me, aid me, O God,' David cries out. And you know, as David cries out to God we're reminded in that very first verse that while life lasts we will never be done with crying out to God for mercy.

While this life lasts there will always be occasions where we need to cry out to the living God and say, "Lord, God, have mercy on me. I'm out of my depths. I can't touch the bottom. I can't figure my way out of this circumstance. Something is hitting me that I have no control over. I need Your favor. It's my only hope." You see, David is pointing us here to the only sure place of refuge, and he is reminding us that all other comfort will abandon us unless we seek comfort in God. And the way to seek comfort in God is to trust Him. "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, / For my soul takes refuge in You."

Notice that David's hope is expressed not in, 'Lord, give me a strategy for getting out of this cave. Lord, remove me out of this circumstance.' It's, 'Lord, I'm trusting in You.' Have you ever noticed that in Psalm 90? "Lord, *You* have been our

refuge.” Psalm 90 doesn't say that the Lord provided refuge; it says that He is our refuge. And David's reminding us of that truth here: God Himself is our hope. And he's pointing us to the only place from which help can come. You see, there's no getting on in the Christian life without trust in God. There's no getting on in the Christian life without confidence in God. And without trust in God, without confidence in God, all our other comforts are annihilated. But with trust in God, with confidence in God, the comforts of the favor of God flood our souls. We are never safe unless God alone is our refuge, because there's nothing else that can't be taken from us. We're never safe unless God alone is our refuge, because if our refuge is in anything else, it can be taken from us.

But though the earth move and the mountains fall into the sea, God cannot be taken from us, because He will not let Himself be taken from us. I was reading an article by a friend of mine today, and he was commenting on those “Got Jesus?” signs that you see—you know, that plays off of the “Got milk?” slogan? And he said, “You know, the real question is not ‘Got Jesus?’ Question mark, as in “Do you have Jesus?” The real question is, ‘Does Jesus got you?’” That's what he said. He says, “It's terrible grammar but it's good theology.” God's got you. You can't be snatched out of His hand. Unless you run to Him in confidence of that truth, no other comforts can avail in this life. If our confidence is in anywhere else, we're undone. We're never safe unless God alone is our refuge, but if God alone is our refuge we are never unsafe. We can be in the lion's den; we can be in Adullam's Cave; we can be in the fiery furnace—and if our trust is there in God, what can man do to us?

Do you remember what Ulrich Zwingli said in 1530 at the Battle of Cappel? He was a chaplain to the Swiss-Protestant armies. He had just received a mortal wound in the battle. Do you remember what his last words were as he lay dying in the arms of a fellow soldier? “They may kill the body, but not the soul.” He was safe. What could man do to him? We're never safe unless God alone is our refuge, but if God alone is our refuge we are never unsafe. And David is pointing us right to the place of our hope, of our refuge, the One who helps us. “Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, / For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge / Until destruction passes by.” There's the heart's cry to God for His helping favor.

Do you remember how we sing of this in Martin Luther's version of Psalm 130? Why don't you open your hymnals with me?—because it's a wonderful stanza. That great hymn “From Depths of Woe,” it's #554. It's the last stanza. It's over on the top of the page that begins hymn 555. “Though great our sins and sore our woes, His grace much more aboundeth. His helping love no limit knows; our utmost need it soundeth. Our Shepherd good and true is He who will at last His Israel free, from all their sin and sorrow.” Isn't that a glorious thought that His helping love knows no limits, and even when we can't see the bottom of our need, His helping love sounds out the bottom? He knows exactly what we need, and that's why we run to Him and we run to Him alone. That's what David's

teaching us by his own example. He's running to God, and in the midst of this perilous circumstance he's saying, 'Lord God, You're my only hope. You're my only refuge.' And it is his trust and confidence...if we could put it this way, it is his faith in God that serves to be the conduit of all God's comforts into his soul. You see there's another way that faith works for you. When you trust God it becomes a conduit of the comforts of God's promises into your soul. And David's pointing us that direction.

## **II. David focuses our hope on that same God.**

But he's not done. Look at verses 2 and 3. Now it's as if he turns his eyes to you. "I will cry to God Most High, to God who accomplishes all things for me. 3 He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me. God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth." Now David's turning to us and he's teaching us this great truth: The only hope we have is in a great God. Our hope is not in favorable circumstances, good luck, positive thinking. Our hope is in a great God. And he points us to God and he asks us to contemplate God.

And he asks us to do four things as we contemplate God. First of all, he wants us to remember two names of God. You see them there in verse 2. God Most High is the first name. That's the God that we're dealing with: It's God Most High. This is the Most High God! There is no one greater than which we can think. This is the Most High God. Have you ever been in the presence of a high-ranking civil official? Maybe even one that you've known for a long time before he was elected, and you get just a little tongue-tied because you suddenly realize that this person bears a significant office. It might happen when you're in the presence of the governor or United States Senator, or maybe even the President of the United States. And you may have known him before as George, but you can't get anything but the words "Mr. President" to come out of your mouth; because there's a sense...you sense you are in the presence of someone who holds a status and position of dignity and it deserves to be treated with dignity. And David's asking you, 'Contemplate who your God is! He's God Most High. There's no one greater to conceive.' And *that's* the God who is your refuge, and *that's* the God who is on your side.

But that's not the only title that he wants you to think about. The second title is in the last part of verse 2, "To God who accomplishes all things for me." You want to know something really depressing? In Hebrew that's three words. "To God who accomplishes all things for me"—three words. I can't even figure a way to express that in English. But you see David's point. 'You're not only God Most High; You're the God who does everything for me.' That's who You are. There's not a thing I need that You don't do. You're the God who does everything for me. It doesn't matter how great a general I am, or what a strategist I am, or how faithful I am in fulfilling my responsibility in the courts. Nothing that I do can provide for me what I really need, but You're the God who does everything for

me. And David turns to me and he says, 'Think about your God. That's who He is. He's the Most High, and He does everything for you. Think about Him.'

But David's not done yet. Notice what he goes on to do here. Verse 3, "He will send from heaven and save me." You know, a lot of people make fun of the Christian concept of the transcendent God, and they say, "Oh, you Christians, you talk about a God out there, and we need a God that's in us and around us and in the streams and in the trees, a God who's imminent." But I want you to notice that the Most High God of whom David speaks in Psalm 57:2, he also says "will send from heaven and save him." His Most High-ness is not a distance which He cannot transcend; His Most High-ness means that there is no impediment between Him getting to you in your time of need. If you're between that God and His child in the time of His child's need, I certainly hope you get out of the way, because there's no impediment between Him and His child. Have you ever seen a mother rushing to her child in her child's time of need? You better get out of the way. And David is saying, 'This God Most High, in my time of need, there is nothing...there is *nothing* which proves an effective barrier to Him getting to me. He'll send *from heaven* and save me.'

Thirdly, notice what he says, "He reproaches him who tramples upon me." David is confident that his God will set things right. He's going to judge those who are trampling on him. David in this Psalm is the victim of man's wretchedness and wickedness, and we too, living life in a fallen world, experience that. And David says, 'Lord, You're going to set things right.' And then he says, "God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth." So he asks you to think about who God is, and he gives you the two titles. And then, secondly, he asks you to remember that the Most High God is near to us; He is able to send from heaven and save. And, thirdly, he reminds you that God will judge those wicked men in the world who trample you. And, fourthly, he will build you up with His favor and faithfulness.

Remember again, "His helping love no limit knows." His lovingkindness, His truth will be upon you. You see, we don't cope with hard things in this life by scaling down problems. We don't cope in this life by being optimistic. We cope in this life by thinking of the greatness of our God. God doesn't say, 'Make light of your problems.' God doesn't say, 'Think positively; it'll all be better.' He says, 'Your problems? Mm-hm, they're bad. They're real bad. In fact, they're worse than you think they are. You don't know the half of it. But I'm bigger than You can possibly imagine. I'm greater than you can possibly imagine. And there's nothing that's going to stand in between Me and you in your hour of need.'

When we're ministering to friends who've gotten that verdict from the doctor, six weeks to live, the way we comfort them is not to say, 'It's not as bad as it seems,' or 'Think positive thoughts; you'll get better.' It's we weep with them and we remind ourselves of the greatness of our God, because we don't cope with this life by scaling down problems or positively thinking them away, but by

remembering that the God who is our help is God Most High.

### **III. David recounts his circumstance to you.**

Thirdly, in verses 4-6, David recounts his circumstance to you: “[His] soul is among lions.” He’s lying down amongst man-eaters. They want to consume him. And these men, their “teeth are spears and arrows,” their tongues like “a sharp sword.” They’ve prepared a net for his steps and his soul is bowed down. He’s so depressed that he can hardly lift his head. That’s the circumstance that David is in. And you know what David tells us that he does in this circumstance? He cries out to God in delirious joy with the desire that God’s name would be exalted above the heavens.

Read what he says in verse 5, “Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth.” What in the world could lead David to do that in that circumstance? Well, you find out in verse 6, “They dug a pit before me; They themselves have fallen into the midst of it.” You see what David is doing? David is reminding us that God often...in this life and universally in the Judgment Day...but God often in this life will use the wickedness of the wicked against themselves. And David is teaching us to glory in the marvelous irony of God’s wise justice in the way He protects His children. Now I’m not saying it always works out for us like this, and David isn’t claiming that either; although it *will* work out for us this way universally in the Day of Judgment.

The wickedness of the wicked will be the very thing that condemns the wicked in the Day of Judgment in every case. But in this life, in God’s mercy from time to time, He shows us what the wickedness of the wicked will finally do to themselves without us lifting a hand. And in this circumstance, here is David, trapped, surrounded by man-eating lions, and what happens? The very trap they lay for him, they fell into. David is boggling at the irony of this. The very means used by the enemy of God against him proves to be his enemy’s own final undoing. What’s David...? David’s saying, ‘Look, you can be confident in the wisdom of God. The kind of God that can make this happen is the kind of God who can take care of you.’ You know, the man who invented the guillotine and for whom it is named was the first person to have his head removed by a guillotine. Fairly ironic, isn’t it? And David is saying, ‘That’s how God will do with the wicked. The things they had planned for His people He will visit upon their heads.’ Do you remember the plagues of Egypt? Do you remember that the plagues of Egypt began with a declaration of Pharaoh that he would see to it that the male children of Israel were put to death? Do you remember how the plagues of Egypt end? God will use the stratagems of the wicked against themselves. And David, David is not saying it always works out like that for us, but he’s saying, ‘Friends, when you see that happen in life, you are just seeing the wisdom of God at work in the way that it will work one day—perfectly, completely.’ And you can be confident in a God who works like that. What God has planned is better than anything that

you could've thought of. And so you don't need to spend your life consumed with the desire for revenge, because His justice will be sweeter and more appropriate and indeed more equitable than anything you could've imagined.

#### **IV. David shows us how God's deliverance led him to a heart for worship and for missions.**

One last thing—David goes on to say, “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!” You see, divine deliverance leads to divine worship here. David now turns back to God and he's singing in thanks for the deliverance which he has received. And notice, the first thing it does is it leads his heart to be steadfast. When we're under pressure where our hearts waffle and we're not sure whether we can trust in God...but now because God has delivered, because David has trusted, now David's heart is fixed; it's steadfast; it's stabilized. He's found some equilibrium. He's found some fixative.

And then that leads to purposeful praise. “I will sing Your praises, O God.” And then that leads to world-wide witness, “I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to You among the nations.” David's purposing to show the Gentiles the praiseworthiness of God in the deliverance which he has received from God. And, my friends, that's the heart-attitude of every believer. We can't keep quiet about the deliverance that we've received from God, and we want the nations to know of that deliverance. We'll have a desire for the glory of the Lord to be in all the earth because He is bigger than the sky, bigger than outer space, bigger than the whole of the universe—and we want the whole earth to be filled with the knowledge of that glory. And that's an Old Testament hope. Missions in the New Testament begins there with that hope that all the nations would come to know the one, true God. Now David gives us a Psalm here to pray in perilous circumstances. May God give us by His Spirit the grace to pray it. Let's pray.

*Lord God, this is Your word. By it comfort every trembling heart and make our hearts fixed, steadfast to sing Your praises. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Would you stand for God's blessing? Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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