

The Classic Bully Fight

Psalm 59:1-17

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March 10, 2004

As we continue our look at the Psalms, turn with me to Psalm 59, Psalm 59. Hear the word of God from Psalm 59.

1 For the choir director: set to Al-tashheth. A Mikhtam of David, when Saul sent men and they watched the house in order to kill him. Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; set me securely on high away from those who rise up against me. 2 Deliver me from those who do iniquity and save me from men of bloodshed. 3 For behold, they have set an ambush for my life; fierce men launch an attack against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, 4 For no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me. Arouse Yourself to help me, and see! 5 You, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to punish all the nations; do not be gracious to any who are treacherous in iniquity. Selah. 6 They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city. 7 Behold, they belch forth with their mouth; swords are in their lips, for, they say, "Who hears?" 8 But You, O Lord, laugh at them; You scoff at all the nations. 9 Because of his strength I will watch for You, for God is my stronghold. 10 My God in His lovingkindness will meet me; God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes. 11 Do not slay them, or my people will forget; scatter them by Your power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield. 12 On account of the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be caught in their pride, and on account of curses and lies which they utter. 13 Destroy them in wrath, destroy them that they may be no more; that men may know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth. Selah. 14 They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city. 15 They wander about for food and growl if they are not satisfied. 16 But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress. 17 O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness.

Let's pray. *O God, our heavenly Father, we come now asking that Your Spirit would open Your word to us and teach us. Father, we ask this...I plead with you, because I know my own soul; I know my own heart, as much as You have shown*

me; and Father it's not pretty. I need You, Father, to communicate Your words to these folks. I need You. And, Father, we all know that we have ears that are oftentimes stopped up and don't hear. And so, Father, I pray that You would open our ears that we might hear, that we might love You and that we might praise Your name. And these things we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I hope when you got your bulletin you did a double take—"The Classic Bully Fight." Now if you are bored on Christmas Day, you can always turn to TBS and you can see the 24 hours of *The Christmas Story* replayed. Now right here with *The Passion* going on and everything, it's not that Christmas story. It's the story of a young boy growing up wanting a BB-gun, wanting all kind of things, and his adventures at Christmas time and his family's Christmas.

Now some of you might not consider it a classic; my mother doesn't. She can't even understand it. She doesn't even like it. And I don't really like it that much but my children love it. In it, it has a classic scene of the boy, the kid in the story, walking home with his little brother and their friend. And they come and they're walking down the alley that they have to go down every single school day. And there waiting for them is the "Mutt and Jeff bully," a tall one and a short one. And they're mean and they have fangs. They grit their teeth. And it's just a great example of what this Psalm is all about. Maybe some of you can remember your own classic bully story or fight. You remember walking home from school—I know it was snowing and you know it was 20 miles and all that kind of stuff—but you remember coming around a corner and suddenly, "Oh no!" This Psalm begins with an "oh no," as it were. It begins with an "oh no" because here is this Hebrew writer, David, remembering back to what happened to him when he was ambushed by Saul's men, when he was set upon by them. They were outside the house that he and Michael lived in and he knew they were there. He knew that Saul wasn't quite pleased with him. Saul had tried to pin him to a wall with a spear. David had grown in reputation and so he knew who the bully was, but now, all of the sudden, unawares the bully's are outside and he's in an "oh no" situation. But because David is a good Hebrew he's not going to just say it once; he's going to say it twice. So we're going to see this Psalm, as it were, this prayer that he prays, but it's like a song because it's got two verses and each verse has three sections. So let's look together and see how David handles "uh-oh" of coming face to face with a bully.

I. Young King's Bully (1-10)

The need of the future king

If you'll notice first, in verses 1-5 you have the first situation, the need that hits David right between the eyes. It's a big need and it's a need where David feels alone for a moment, and you see it in the verbs that he uses in the first couple of

verses. "Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; set me securely on high away from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from those who do iniquity and save me from the men of bloodshed." In other words, he's in trouble and he sees it, and he's asking God for help. Now David here is probably remembering what happened back then, and the reason that we think so is because later he starts talking about "my people" as he starts talking as the king. And so the beauty of what's happening here is you're getting David remembering a situation that's probably related to another situation that he's going through. You're not told about the later situation. You just kind of have to catch up with it as you look at the person, but we know what happens in the first one.

So here's David: He sees his enemies and he knows he's in trouble. "Deliver me," "set me securely on high away from them," "deliver me [again] and save me from the men of bloodshed." He's praying. He's asking. He's saying, 'Uh-oh, I'm in trouble.' And then, he says, 'Look at what they're doing to me.' He's kind of looking around saying, 'Wait a minute, where are you God?' And he uses some interesting terms. Look at verse 3, he says in verse 3, "For behold, they have set an ambush for my life." And then he says, 'They have launched an attack against me.' So he sees what they are doing. He's very concerned but he's saying, 'Look, God, can't You see what's going on?' So there's a sense in which David feels...David is unsure of whether God knows what's going on. Now go back to your own bully situation in your life. When you cut that corner and there that bully is, you're not prepared. You don't have your BB-gun. You don't...you don't...you don't have! You're not ready! You're caught unawares, and you're looking for help. And that's exactly what David is doing here.

But then David throws in something that you and I might not know a whole lot about, but I think we do, when he says here, 'I haven't really done anything to deserve this.' Look at what David says, he says, "Not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me." Now the reason I say that is, if you got in a fight with your brother or sister, it was probably because one of you was doing something wrong. But when the bully comes along, you really weren't doing anything; you just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. You didn't do anything, and David in this situation is in that circumstance where he hasn't done anything. As a matter of fact, David has operated very wisely by God's grace in the court of Saul. He's been obedient to Saul. He's done the things that Saul has asked. He's saved the people from Goliath and the Philistines and his reputation has increased, not because he promoted himself but because he was simply doing the things that God had called him to do. David knew that God had anointed him to be king but not everybody knew that. Saul knew it, I think. His whole attitude toward David was one of competition, one of "get rid of the competition." And so in that sense, he sends these men and David says, 'What have I done?'

Now the reason you and I might have a hard time with that is, is because we know that there are rare times where we just really haven't done anything wrong,

aren't there? Maybe there are the times when the bully stands up there and we really shouldn't have opened our mouth. We should have said something that we said. We were a little antagonistic. We were a little proud or something and so we probably got what we deserved. But just for the sake of identifying with this, that's why I picked the bully story, as an illustration, because in almost every bully story, you hadn't done anything. The bully is just being mean. He's just being cruel. Whatever His reasons are, you're on the "uh-oh" end of it.

And so the next thing you see is David saying, 'Okay, God, wake up. Wake up!' verse 4, "Arouse Thyself to help me and see, O Lord, awake to punish all the nation; do not be gracious to any who are treacherous in iniquity." In other words, he's so caught by surprise that he thinks God is caught by surprise and then he says, 'God, wake up and please solve this problem.' He says, 'Solve this problem. Deliver me from my enemies. Set me on high away from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from those who do iniquity. Save me from men of bloodshed.' They've set an ambush for my life, fierce men. You see David is caught by surprise. David has been ambushed by a bully.

Enemies of the future king

Now here's David in this situation as a young man, but then in he moves from the obvious need that he has to a description of his enemies. It's a little different than the description he just gave. If someone is out to take your life and you need deliverance, if someone is rising up against you, you're getting the picture that they don't like you for some reason. But you don't think of suddenly trying to describe them, yet David does. And in the next two verses he does some. It says, "They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city. Behold, they belch forth with their mouth; swords are in their lips, for, they say, 'Who hears?'" You see, all of the sudden, David is now describing them in ways that kind of give you a broader picture, not a picture of what they are doing to David but a picture of their character.

It's interesting the way that the Scripture sometimes defines enemies of God's people. Here it's "dogs." And that's the way to deal with a bully isn't it? The bully comes up and you call him a dog. Don't ask me why David did it but he begins to. But notice, he says, "They return at evening, they howl like a dog." He draws the picture of a pack of dogs. Now in the United States, most of us when we think of dogs, we think of "Fluffy." We think of "Spot." I think of "Salt" and "Pepper," the black lab and a white poodle...you know, whatever your dog's name is, your tame dog. But we forget that in most countries of the world, dogs are not considered as pets and they roam in packs and in the cities. It's even known that these packs will howl all night long. And that's what David is describing of these men, these bullies who have come to ambush him. Now he could have called them "swine." He could have called them "donkeys." He could have called them "silly doves"—that's the way the Scripture describes, sometimes, unbelievers who are out for our blood. And yet he calls them here "dogs." And they return. He

can't get rid of them. You know that's kind of the reality of a bully. He was trying to go around this way; he moves over. You try and go around this a way; he moves over. He keeps returning and as he continues to return, as he continues to come back, he's also noisy and nosey. Did you see that? Now, okay, maybe this is just the classic passage for a campus minister, former campus minister to read, because it's got a word in there that we don't say in normal company. It says what they are. It says, "Behold, they belch forth with their mouth." Now look, it wasn't me. I didn't pick it. It was in the text. If this kind of noise occurs in public company and social company, it's inappropriate, right? And these dogs are belching forth, and what are they belching forth? "There are swords in their lips." In other words, it's painting the picture of destruction, painting the picture that they are overflowing in their hatred and in their destruction. "Their mouth is full of swords"—points to this...the whole idea, you know... what it's like. You've never seen the movie *Jaws* right? How can you help it? It's on all the time. The shark with all those teeth when he opens his mouth, you're going, "Oh no." That's the picture that's drawn here, but not only a sword, destructiveness, but also blasphemy. Look at how they, what they say, "Who hears?" In other words, "Who cares? You're going to plead to God; we don't care. Who cares? Who hears?" These are people who don't care at all about God.

Now this is why the classic bully story is so much fun, because the next line reminds the bullies of reality. And it also reminds David of whose presences he's in. Look at it: "But thou, O Lord, dost laugh at them, though dost scoff at all the nations." Now the picture that came to my mind when I read that was facing the bullies, his knees are knocking, and suddenly there's a chuckle behind you, and who is it? It's your daddy. And your daddy isn't saying anything to the bullies. All he has to do is say, "Hee, hee, hee." Can you see the picture? Can you see the picture now of David? He goes from an "uh-oh" to an "oh yeah." He's wondered whether or not his daddy was awake. He wondered whether or not God was with him, and suddenly he hears God's laugh. Now this points us back to Psalm 2 where God laughs at those in rebellion against Him. But the picture here is so interesting because it has God, I would say, chuckling. Why? Not because of my sacredness or my inability or David's inability or your inability, but because He knows the end of the bully and He laughs and He chuckles.

Praise of the future king

Then we see David's dawning awareness of reality. He suddenly remembers something. Though the bully's in front of him and the bully is strong and looks horrible, he remembers something. Look at verse 9, "Because of his strength, I will watch for Thee for God is my stronghold; my God in His loving-kindness will meet me. God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes."

Isn't it amazing what just that laughter of God does for David, the sound of his Father in His gentle way, deriding the enemies of David? It's the Father who has anointed David as king of Israel. It's the Father who has said to him that he is to

honor Saul and that God will take care of Saul. It's his Father who is taking care of him when he fights Goliath, when he fights the Philistines, when David kills his ten thousands. And even now when he's afraid of the bullies because they might take his life, because they wait in ambush for him, he is still amazed. 'I'm amazed.' The laughter of God reminds him who is with him. God laughs and suddenly the strength of Saul is nothing. The strength of these bullies is nothing compared to God's strength.

Now that strength could also be that he's contemplating God's strength. It's either the strength of Saul that makes him remember God or the strength of God that draws him back, but either way he then sees that he will wait and watch for God. What does he say there? "Because of his strength—" in verse 9. "Because of His strength I will watch for You, for God is my stronghold." Now he's talking about what he's going to do. He's going to watch God at work and think about it. That's the incredible joy of having God laugh behind you, because with His very presence and His laughter, the bully is all of a sudden in trouble. And he can watch God operate, and that's what he says he will do, "I will watch for Thee." 'I will pay attention. I will remember who you are.' For why? "For God is my stronghold." 'He is my protection. He is my defense. Not only is He in my defense, my God in His loving-kindness will meet me.' In other words, God will deal with him, why? Because He is the covenant God, the covenant God who cares for David and is dealing with David. And so you see...even here you see God reminding David of who He is and David praising Him for that reality.

II. King's Bully (11-17)

The need of the present king

Now, verse we get the same things almost repeated but yet with some different things. Here we see the need of David again, but notice his need. He says, "Do not slay them, or my people will forget; scatter them by Your power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield." Notice the change of pronouns that let's you know that David's not talking about the situation he was in with Saul, but he's now talking about the situation that he has as the king of Israel and as he says to them...he is saying them, 'Okay, God, don't slay them but scatter them. But do it for a reason and that reason is because God's people forget.' We forget very quickly that God deals with bullies, don't we? We forget that God will deal with those who oppose Him and who oppose His children. And so David says to God, 'Okay, God, don't slay them, lest my people forget.' And then he asks some interesting things, "Scatter them in Thy power." Notice before he was saying, "Deliver me"; now he's saying, "Scatter them in Thy power, bring them down, cause them to totter, cause them to fall, O Lord our shield. On account of the sins of their mouth and the words of their lips let them be caught in their own pride." The bully is in front of you because he thinks he's outnumbered you some way or another. He's caught you by surprise. He thinks he has the advantage and yet

that is his downfall because he is not dealing just with you, he's dealing with your daddy too. Your daddy who stands behind you and he's got to deal with Him so he says, "Destroy them in wrath, destroy them that they may be no more." Now you think, "Wait a minute." He just said, "Don't slay them" and now he's saying, "Destroy them." We forget sometimes that God will allow unbelievers to pursue and to prosper so that later He might demonstrate His power. And notice that's the exact same thing here. God allows the bullies to move along, to be scattered, yes, to continue to live, but eventually He's going to destroy them. And why is He going to destroy them? Look at the end of verse 13, "Destroy them in wrath, destroy them that they may be no more; that men may know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth."

Now that's hard for us to understand when we don't have a bully in front of us. But when we have a bully in front of us who is picking on us simply because they want to, suddenly we can see the exact reason why God might do it: so that God would prove Himself to be God, so that not only would we know it but even our neighbor whose been watching out his window would know it. Then our neighbor, who's coming along behind us, would see God dealing with the bully and know that our God protects His people that He has bought. He protects His people that He's in a covenant relationship with.

Enemies of the present king

Then the passage goes again back to the dogs, so to speak. In verses 14 and 15 you see again he returns to this kind of refrain, "And they return at evening and they howl like a dog." You've heard that before. But notice, "and they go around the city again," but now there is a difference, "They wander about for food and growl if they are not satisfied." They are still noisy. They are still nosey. They are all over the place but they are not being satisfied. Why the bully's out there, who knows? But he's not going to be satisfied when he deals with us—no, when he deals with our God. He's going to think by dealing with us a certain way he's going to accomplish something and yet our God will frustrate him, our God will scatter him, our God will destroy him. He may have numbers but he's in trouble already. Praise of the present king

And then we come to the final verses, verses 16 and 17, and here we see something very interesting. Listen as I read it, "But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your loving-kindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me loving-kindness." Now what's interesting is [that] in the parallel before this where we read "Because of his strength I will watch for Thee, for God is my stronghold," the word for *watch* and the word for *sing* are almost the same identical words except for one letter, one letter change, one letter change. It's almost as though David is saying, 'I remember what it was like when I was expecting God, when I was hoping God would provide protection. Now I know that He has and I know that

He is consistently doing it, and so what is my response? My response is not that I will wait for God but my response now is that I will sing. I will not just sing; I will sing *joyfully* (and that would also mean aloud). And then I will sing with praises to God where I'm concentrating not on what God has delivered me from but on God who is the deliverer.' And so you see that here where he concentrates on who God is and what God does. "I shall sing of Thy strength." In verse 16, "Yes, I shall sing joyfully about loving-kindness in the morning." And why? Because God has been his stronghold, a refuge for David in the day of his distress, a protector, one who preserves him...and why? Because of God's lovingkindness, because of His covenant relationship with David, because of His promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, because of His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

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