

Psalm 53

Here the spirit of godlessness reveals itself in 2 ways: flouting Gods law (1-3) and oppressing his people (4-6)

v1. Notice where the 'fool' makes his statement. "... *in his heart*" In other words this need not be open and verbal but inward and private. However the belief is revealed in the behaviour. The most apparently religious of people can be the most godless at heart. Think of Jesus encounter with the religious authorities. He exposes their claim by pointing to their behaviour (John 8:39-41 & 44)

Often atheism is presented as being the intelligent option. The Bible's judgment is different. "*Claiming to be wise they became fools*" (Rom 1:22) And this because "*what may be known about God is clear to them*" (Rom 1:19)

V2,3 What is writ large in v1 is then applied to all humankind. Left to ourselves we don't '*understand*' (2) We neither seek God (although we may seek his gifts) nor do we do good as he defines good. (Mark 12:29-31) The implication of that statement is that if we are among his people (4) its not because we sought God but the other way around.

We are invited to view things from Gods perspective '*God looks down from heaven*' (2) Not only does he assess humankind but he is aware of the opposition directed at his people and is able to take action. (5) The Bible contains illustration of God spreading dismay among his enemies. (eg 2 Kings 7:6f)

It ought to be a spur to pray the prayer of v6.

- We need to be clear that if we trust God its not because we have been wise but rather because he has been gracious
- The Bible invites us to see things from Gods perspective.
- We ought not to be intimidated by the atheistic culture we find ourselves in today.
- Pray for God to restore his people.

Psalm 54

The background to the Psalm is found in 1 Sam 23:19ff & 26:1ff. David's troubles are not confined to King Saul and the Philistines. The Ziphites are members of his own tribe. David has rescued one of their towns but these people are opportunists who prove treacherous and deadly.

The psalm has valuable lessons for us.

David directs us to Gods name (1) In contrast to the fickle Ziphites Gods reputation points to his faithfulness and the steadfast love of his character.

He lays the matter before God (3) We are not to imagine our little lives are of no significance to God. Jesus teaches us that he is Father, and the expression of that relationship is we are to ask him for the things we need confident he will never give his children that which is evil or dangerous (Matt 7:7-12)

He affirms his trust in God (4) and leaves room for the wrath of God (5) See Rom 12:19

The psalm ends on a note of thanksgiving.

The psalm points beyond itself to the one who will be referred to as the Son of David. It is Jesus experience par excellence that is described here in the betrayal by those who should

be friends and supporters. Re-read it as a description of his experience and his response of faith. Consider how his prayer (Luke 23:34) takes us beyond v5.

- Give thanks that the Lord Jesus has taken on and defeated our enemies.
- Commit v4 to memory.

Psalm 55

All of life is found in the psalms. These songs and prayers describe the authentic spiritual world where trouble is real and believers struggle and answers sometimes take a long time in coming.

The crisis is largely internal. (1-5) *My thoughts trouble me.... My heart is in anguish within me.... Horror has overwhelmed me.*

It is a consequence of what is being said. (3) *because of what my enemy is saying, because of the threats of the wicked.*

The result of all this is a strong temptation to run away. (6-8)

There are spiritual giants who have found words and threats hard to deal with and in some cases have runaway (Elijah in 1 Kings 19:2,3) Let that be an encouragement.

The heart of the problem emerges in v12-14 & 20,21 where it becomes clear his enemy used to be a close friend. John's gospel describes Jesus' distress at the betrayal of Judas. (John 13:21) The intensity of these experiences will be foreign to many of us. Reading them gives us insight and helps us to know how to pray.

The turning point comes in 16-18. Despite the sense of almost internal collapse at the start we learn that there are structures in place in David's life. *Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress... (17)* Like Daniel who continued to pray 3 times a day when he faced Darius's edict David's life was sustained by his godly habits.

His anguished ordeal has bequeathed to us the gem of v22. Notice God doesn't promise to carry our cares but to sustain us. And whilst others will prove untrustworthy, he '*will never let the righteous be shaken*'

- David complained of his friend's treachery but in time he would prove treacherous to Uriah one of his faithful friends (2 Sam 23:39) Check your relationships.
- How is the spiritual scaffolding in your life? (17)
- Commit v22 to memory.

Psalm 56

The introduction indicates that this psalm arose out of David's experience when he fled to Gath. (1 Sam 21:10-22.1) This is a period in David's life when he makes a series of bad decisions. It is good to know prayer is not restricted to godly people nor ignored when offered from mistaken locations.

This is a song about being pursued. Note the repeated '*all day long*' (1,2) This is David's life, whether it's Saul or the Philistines the sense of being hunted sums up his experience.

V3,4 describe his resolve. There are many possible responses to fear: flight, despair, compromise. He chooses to meet fear with faith. *When I am afraid I put my trust in you.* To trust God is to believe his word. For David that maybe the specific promise to place him on the throne or it maybe some of the more general promises of the Scripture. It brings him to a place of confidence. *What can mere mortals do to me? (4)*

We can win a battle but find that the war goes on. The emphasis moves from pursuit to scrutiny. He is a man who is being watched. (5-7) His words are twisted, schemes are devised to ruin him, people conspire to take his life. But as the word of God is allowed to inform his thinking he understands that there are not only men watching his step but God is counting his tears. (8). There is an echo here of Jesus words in Matt 10:29-31.

And so he goes back once again to affirm his trust in God and his word. (10,11). But he does not merely rest in Gods promise of protection. He resolves to keep *his* promises. *I am under vows to you, my God*. God has delivered him from death not so he can live a life of pleasing himself but so that he *'walk before God in the light of life'*

- *When I am afraid I will trust in you*. What will you do the next time you are afraid?
- Make a note of those aspects of Gods character that are mentioned in the psalm. Let these encourage your faith.
- Have you made promises to God; are you keeping them?

Psalm 57

The psalms have one aim and that is to bring life in all its variety and complexity into the presence of the Lord. They invite us to tell him the details of our lives and to see life from his perspective.

1 Sam 22:1-5 provides the background. This is the start of David's life as a fugitive. He has fled from Saul to this cave (see introduction) at Adullam. But David's security comes not from his hiding place but from God. He describes himself taking refuge in the shadow of God's wings. It is a great invitation to consider that whatever our circumstances however great the difficulties, our lives sit under the overshadowing care of God. (1-3)

The threats are real and dangerous: lions, ravenous beasts, *they spread a net for my feet*. (4,6) But God is sufficient. He can make trouble boomerang on the perpetrators. (6) He can rebuke the aggressors (3)

From v7 on, David's preoccupation moves from his difficult circumstances to God and his glory.

He is settled. (7,8) It is knowing we live our lives under the tender care of God (take refuge under the shadow of your wings v1) that promotes a 'steadfast heart'. Those who are 'steadfast' speak to themselves. *"I'll get up early and sing Gods praise"* (even if I have spent the night in a cave)

He is confident (9,10) Gods concerns are not parochial but universal. David's outlook includes the nations. This is a truly missionary vision.

He is prayerful asking God to exhibit his glory throughout the entire universe. (11)

- Read the psalm through the eyes of the Lord Jesus.
- Do we need to follow David's example in 'handling' our hearts?
- Do we make the connection between the extent of God's love (reaching to the heavens) and his concern for the nations? (9,10)