

What Can Man Do To Me?

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. And if you could keep your Bibles open at Psalm 56, that would be appreciated. As you know, I'm not somebody that chooses a verse or a particular thing, but this Psalm, in two occasions, asks what man can do to me. Now, I don't know if you remember the last time I was here, but when I was here, the passage we studied was in the previous chapter of 1 Samuel, and it was David's great love for his best friend, Jonathan, and all the things that David and Jonathan did to protect that love and how that endured through lots of difficult times.

Psalm 56, it follows on from that. It's obviously an early psalm, David's life, as it was written and refers to the time just after that, just after the time that Jonathan had given him the cryptic sign that he should flee the palace as Saul, the king at the time, wanted to kill him. And we read 1 Samuel chapter 21, which explains what happens after that. And the psalm was written about the events that happened in verses 10 to 15 of 1 Samuel 21. Initially, after he fled the palace, David went to Nob and met Ahimelech the priest. And it's sad when you read that, because what we read was that he lied and lied and lied to Ahimelech. He lied about why he was alone. He lied to Ahimelech that he was on a secret mission that clearly didn't exist. He lied to Ahimelech to get food. He lied to Ahimelech to get weapons.

And after that, he immediately fled to Gath, which, as I've said to the children earlier, it was the hometown of Goliath, whom he had killed a number of years before. And when there, in a strange attempt to protect himself, he acted like a madman. He scraped doors. He allowed his saliva to run down his face like somebody who was medically insane. And this is the situation that he wrote this Psalm 56.

His sudden rise to fame, it had come to an abrupt end, an abrupt and complete end. His star hadn't just waned. It had totally stopped shining. He started off when we first meet him. He started off as a very competent and brave shepherd boy. He went on to defeat Goliath. He had been the nation's darling.

He had been secretly anointed as the next king. And what we saw with David was he was brave. He was young. He was good looking. He was a successful warrior. He was charismatic. And if you look very quickly with me, back in 1 Samuel, you see the peak of his fame, it's in chapter 18, verse 7. I'll read it out quickly. As they danced, they sang, Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands. And that was repeated when he was presented to the king in Gath. So that was the peak of his fame. But it was also the start of his decline. And it was the start of his fall. It was the first time that we read that Saul wasn't happy. He was angry. His pride was hurt. Saul was jealous. He was deranged and he started to plot and attack David to get rid of him. And it was a time that we also read that David's faith started to fail. His hammed up plots with Jonathan, his lies to Saul. I've already mentioned his numerous lies to

[4 : 21] Ahimelech the priest. He fled to Gath. And gone was the crystal clear thinking that he had when he faced Goliath. Because the nation, the children of Israel, they were scared of Goliath, this big and fearsome man.

And David seemed to be the only one in the whole nation that understood that he may be big, he may be scary, but he's no match for God. David's faith at that time gave him real clarity of thought. But that clarity had gone because his faith had gone. And instead of relying on God, he started relying on himself and his own plans and his own schemes. And what this psalm does is it shows the journey he had from the utter death of despair to someone with a vibrant faith in God. And I think the first thing you need to notice about this psalm is his state of mind. I read it to the children, but it does no harm to read it again. Verse 1 and 2. Be merciful to me, my God. My enemies are in hot pursuit. All day long they press their attack. My adversaries pursue me all day long in their pride. They are attacking me. I've touched on it already. But David, he was lonely. He fled for his life

from the court of Saul on his own. And earlier, we've already referred to his meeting with Ahimelech. And Ahimelech asked him where his men were.

And the truth was, there were no men. He had nobody with him. He had nobody to help him. He was 100% on his own. And it was worse than that. We didn't read it. But if you read on in 1 Samuel, that Ahimelech was killed for helping David. And not just him, but all the other priests in the village as well. 85 men were killed because David went to Ahimelech for help. So David, he was alone. And he had the knowledge that anybody who helped him faced death themselves. So not only was he alone, but he was desperate and he was irrational. Again, I refer back to the lies. He fed to Ahimelech to get food and a weapon. He flees to Gath. And I'm sure you're all sitting there and you need to stop and think and ask, what was he thinking? What was on his mind? He flees from Israel where he had friends.

His best friend, the king's son was there. He flees from there and he ends up in Goliath's hometown. Israel's greatest army and the town where he was probably most at risk in this whole universe.

[7 : 27] And not only that, he doesn't even go there to keep a low profile. He presents himself to the king of Gath and he walks into the building with Goliath's sword. And Goliath's sword wouldn't have been an ordinary thing. He was a huge man. He was nine or 10 feet tall. His sword would have fitted his frame. It would have been instantly recognizable to all that was there. And the people did recognize him. But that, he did these things. He was desperate. He was afraid. And in his deluded and irrational thinking, he thought that was the best course of action, which it clearly wasn't.

But he was also scared and he was afraid. He was living his life in fear. And this is a horrible way for anyone to live. He couldn't go home or he felt he couldn't go home because his life was in danger there. Already by this stage, Saul had tried to kill him a number of times. And now he was in Philistine territory and his life was in danger there. He had no safe place to go. He had nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide to, nowhere where he could just lay down and rest and be left alone.

And so the dangers that he faced, they were relentless. They were continual. There was no hour of the day where he got any relief from it. And there was just nowhere, nowhere for him to turn. And what we find at the start of this psalm is a man who's totally overwhelmed and at his tether's end. But that's not all. He's clearly worried about the physical danger that he's in. But the thing he seems more worried about in some way is his reputation. Look with me in verse 5.

All day long, they twist my words and all their schemes are for my ruin. They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps hoping to take my life. He's worried about their slander. He's worried about their reputation. And it's similar some ways to the conversation he had with Jonathan before he fled.

[9 : 51] He had done nothing wrong. He was the innocent party in that situation. And people were trying to kill him. And he had fled from the country and people were still trying to kill him. But what they were doing was they were twisting his words. They were saying things that he hadn't said. They were making him responsible for things that he hadn't done. And the reason for that was they wanted to damage his reputation to give justification for killing him. And I think there's maybe a suggestion in the psalm that the reason for doing it was so that they could use the legal process to have him killed. And what that means, not only is there a personal dislike or a personal jealousy from Saul and his men, but it means the weight of the nation and its legal system is being used against him as well.

And you take all that together and his faith failed. He was lonely. He was afraid. He was acting irrationally. And in his irrationality, everything he did just seemed to make the situation worse and worse and pull him lower and lower. And we find him at the start of the psalm that he's not in a great spot.

He can't see any way out. And I think this has to be familiar to many of us here. You know, we have quite a big church. We have quite a wide variety of people in terms of skill sets and ages and male and female and all these sorts of things. So it's highly likely that people in our church are going through similar things or have gone through, be it health issues, physical or emotional pain. Maybe it's a sense of isolation or loneliness. And a few months ago, earlier in the year, I was doing a children's talk. And as happened this morning, the children in the church didn't like to answer the question. And one of the older ladies in the church, we were asking a question, are you scared of it? I can't remember, but are you scared of anything? Or is there anything that hurt you? And a lady who lost her husband a few years ago said, I'm lonely. I've lost my husband.

I have nobody to talk to at night. And this was during the children's talk. So this is, these are real life things. And I go further because I know that over the years, as some of you have gone through difficult times, and we look at the world around us and we've never been more aware of difficult times in my life. We live in a world that seems to be broken and it concerns us.

You know, I'm not taking sides on the argument. Maybe it's Brexit and the uncertainty that brings. Maybe there's a rise of independence movements throughout the whole of Western Europe.

There's, you know, even this week, you turn on the news, there's unrest in Hong Kong, Lebanon, and Chile. We live in a world as well where brutality seems to become normal. In our own city, we almost read about it every day. We read about knife crime in London. We looked at the incidents in northern Syria last week, and it's a major deal for somebody to be sent to eternity, no matter how wicked that person was, but how sad it was to treat it like a cartoon event.

[13:32] So the world we live in individually, we're just like David. We have things which bring us low. We have things which concern us. We have things which we don't know how we're going to get through or out of. And this is the situation that David was in. We may feel lonely. We may feel afraid for the future. We may feel totally overwhelmed and not understand what our role is or how to get through it, whatever the situation. But if those are the circumstances, Psalm 56 is the psalm for you to read and to sing today. So I think I've talked a lot about the difficulty that David was in, the low point that he had hit, because David had hit rock bottom. He couldn't go any further.

He was totally in the dark and didn't know which way to turn. But this, the psalm, what it does is it goes on to show us how he got through that and the lessons that there are for us. And I think the first thing I want you to notice, turn to verse 8, record my misery, list my tears on your scroll. Are they not in your record? In other translations, it talks about putting tears in wineskins or in bottles. David asked God to keep a record. He said, record my lament. Write it down. He asked God to preserve his tears in some way. And it wasn't just some sort of random or hopeful request. He was asking God to record all the things that he was going through and all the harm that he was experiencing and the threats that he had and the total knowledge that God knows and that God will not forget.

And that God keeps all his problems in some kind of metaphorical diary. So God, if you're having problems, God does count your tears. He does know your problems. He doesn't forget them. He doesn't need to write them down in the metaphorical way that it's done here. But he does know and he loves and cares for you. But even better than that, not only does God know, because so often we think we're alone, but God knows. Even better than that, God also, he understands. Often when we face issues, we feel that we have nowhere to turn. We feel maybe forsaken by friends or family or work colleagues or church or whatever it is. We think in our lowest moments that our problems are so unique. They're so complex and there's nowhere you can go to, no help that you can get that will erase, help, ease, or fix the things that you're going through. And that's not right. It's sinful to think that it is right.

Because in the New Testament, God tells us that he even knows about the sparrow who falls out of the tree and hits the ground. And if he knows that about a seemingly insignificant sparrow, well then what, how much more does he know about you? And how much better does he understand? He's sovereign. He created this world. He orders it. And remember, he sent his son. He watched what his son endured. And he watched his son dying on the cross, taking the punishment for sins that weren't his. So God has been exposed to pain or been exposed to these things as well. He understands. So there's no problem that you will have, no problem that you have had or will have in the future that he does not know about. There's no problem that's too complicated or too messy or has just gone too far. God knows. God understands.

[17:49] And God cares. And God will help you whatever you're going through. But I think the final thing to notice is that David, he shared his problems. And that's what you should do. Share your problems. Tell God like David did. And David was forceful here. He was urgent. He repeats himself throughout this psalm. He tells his problems. And then he praises God. And then he goes back and explains them again. And one of the commentators I read calls it the relentless pursuit for mercy. So tell God your problems and tell him relentlessly. But don't ever think that God can't, won't, or couldn't help. David knew it. And he acted on it.

So that's the first point. God knows. God cares. And God understands. Next thing I want to say is submit to God. I am repeating myself a little. But David had his issues. Saul was jealous of him. Tried to kill him and failed.

He took the solution on himself. His schemes with Jonathan to ascertain Saul's state of mind were a series of lies and stupidity and lack of faith.

He knew that he had to escape, but he didn't know where to escape to. He fled, but he had no food. He went to enemy country and ended up in the one place carrying the one weapon which highlighted him and pointed him out and put him in even more danger than what he was in already. He feigned madness to try and escape with his very life. Now clearly not everything was David's fault. Saul's jealousy, Saul's megalomania was not his fault. The Philistines wanting to kill him was not his fault.

[19 : 43] The slander, the lies that people were telling about him to destroy his reputation to make it easier to kill him legally was not his fault. But the thing that David did wrong was he tried to take on the solutionizing himself and he made the problem so much worse not only for himself but for others who tried to help him.

Ahimelech died and 85 others along with him because David thought he knew better than God.

David had a high opinion of himself and his ability to deal with his problems.

It made it worse and it drove him down to rock bottom and took everybody with him. And looking at it from a distance you can see that he had much more confidence in himself than he had in the God who had never let him down.

And that maybe is the crux of the matter and the lesson for us. God does allow us to face issues and problems. He does permit us to be in situations that are much more than what we think that we can bear.

And David had learned a painful lesson here that however undeserved however well meaning your own plans are it won't get any better until you submit yourself to God and leave it in his hands.

[21 : 10] David had to be broken before he could be fixed and that caused him so much pain. But David had to learn as I've said that relief and deliverance would not come until he accepted that God's plan for him was so much better than his own plan for himself.

But this didn't mean that his problems are going to weigh what I don't want anybody to think here is if you trust God if you submit to him if you have faith in him everything will be wonderful because that clearly is not the case.

Often what God does is just give you the means to cope not take the problem away. And this is what happened with David here he learned to cope because he was still on the run he had many years of running of being chased and chasing.

He had many years of hiding in caves and trying to get away but the situation that he was in would not improve until he submitted himself to God.

And that is the lesson we should we should not lose confidence in God we should not get impatient if things do not happen at the speed that we want we should not develop our own schemes and plans we shouldn't throw in the towel if things don't go our way submit to God's plans for your life for whatever that is however easy or good or successful or otherwise it is it's so much better than any plans that you will have created for yourself and it will protect you from pulling yourself and everybody around you down.

[22 : 51] So submit to God in your troubles. I think the next thing is be confident or have faith in God and David he had the knowledge that God knows of his issues he understood that God understood he knew that God was recording and keeping note of his situation and those that were harming him and he was now in a position where he was able to submit to God's plan for him and notice the change in David first of all in verse 4 in God whose word I praise in God I trust and I'm not afraid again he repeats himself in verse 10 in God whose word I praise in the Lord whose word I praise no longer is he trusting in himself or his own schemes but he is trusting in God the situation he is in it's not gone away as I've said but now he is trusting in God but not only is he trusting in God but he's trusting in God's word and that's the lesson for us for God he will not let you down trust God because he he will help you through he will help you cope for some he may even take the problem away and if you're a Christian this morning think about this logically you have trusted him for your salvation and trusting him in that is the most important thing because the consequences of not doing that are ones that will last for eternity so any temporary problem or issue that you have now is much less trusting him in that is much less than what you have already done and turn with me just to the psalm before psalm 55 and verse 22 cast your cares on the Lord and he will he will sustain you he will never let the righteous be shaken trust his word as well

David's confidence come from the knowledge of God and that came from reading the Bible so read the Bible it tells you what God is like it shows you practical proof of what we've read just read in Psalm 55 it shows how this verse is proven only the Bible does it only the Bible is complete and it tells us all we need to know about the spiritual things and all we need to know about God so this is the lesson this is our lesson in tough times trust God read his Bible and trust it too and I think I'm going to finish this morning with probably the hardest thing of all from this I know it's hard and I mentioned it when we sang the psalm earlier in tough times what do you do well you do maybe do different things you cry out for help you beg for mercy you doubt God like David did you do silly things sometimes you cut yourself off from God or others and when times are tough the last thing on your mind is to praise God but that is the one thing that you should that was one of the things you should do because it unlocks the door to an even closer walk with God in David's case he looks back in history and he looks back to his own life about how God protected him in the fields with his sheep and against Goliath and other battles he had fought he obviously had been taught what was in the Bible from a very young day and he could look back in history and see how God had protected his covenant people through every situation that were in and he delivered them and he never let them down and his praise it shows that confidence in God but it's the thing that finally moves him away from the loneliness and the stupidity and the isolation and all the things he felt because his praise allowed him to see things clearly because if you look at look at verse 13 for you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling that I may walk before God in the light of life he praised God because he now had light he now understood his situation he understood that no matter how bad it was that God would not let him down and I think by the end of the psalm gone gone was the man whose charade in gaff of scratching doors and foaming at the mouth and he could say in God

I trust I will not be afraid and finally gone as well was the man wallowing in his issues floundering about and making things worse and what we find is a confident and defiant statement what can mortal man do to me and he doesn't answer it because he doesn't need to because he knows the answer but the answer is mortal man can do nothing to you he can do nothing to separate you from the love of God Amen