

Trial, Trust and Triumph

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Date: 31 May 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn for a short time now to the book of Psalms, Psalm 56. We're going to look at the whole of the Psalm, or the main points at least through the Psalm, as we find this is a prayer of David.

Sometimes in the islands, not just in the islands, but in the islands we find birds that normally don't inhabit the islands here, blown off course.

And of course that attracts all those who are known as twitchers, these avid bird watchers. They come from all parts, sometimes to the islands, just to see any particular bird that's rare to the islands that can't be seen most of the time.

Many times these birds have been blown off course by a violent storm, or perhaps have got disoriented through something else, but they're not really where they normally are.

David, in this Psalm, feels a bit like that, because in the title he speaks about himself as the dove. I think he's referring to himself there, according to the dove on far off terebinth.

[1 : 0 8] Now the word terebinth is difficult really to know precisely what the meaning of it is. So it's left here in the ESV as terebinth, just like the word is in Hebrew.

It's something also in the av, which is just left as literally the Hebrew word, as you look at the title in av. But whatever it means, it can mean gods.

Maybe he's thinking about gods in terms of the Philistines. He was surrounded by them there at the time. But the main thing to notice there, there is a reference to the dove in the previous psalm as well, where he's saying in verse 6, Oh, that I had wings like a dove, I would fly away and be at rest.

Yes, I would wander away, I would lodge in the wilderness. But in verse 56, he's picking up that theme of the dove in a sense in the title, but what he's talking about is that it's far off.

It's not where it usually is. It's not where he'd rather be. He's somewhere far off from where his heart is. He's being pursued by Saul.

[2 : 1 5] He's fled. He's in the land of the Philistines. He's in Gath. He's surrounded by enemies. He's being seized by the Philistines. They have him at a disadvantage.

And David is afraid. What's he going to do? Well, we know that in the psalm he tells us a number of times what he is doing, and what he's doing is trusting in God.

And it reminds us, this psalm, that in our journey of life we're not tourists. We're not traveling through this world just to admire the scenery.

We're travelers. We're spiritual pilgrims. The route that God takes us on is not so that we'll stop and just confine ourselves to the things around us, the things of this world, the things of the present life.

We're travelers on the way to eternity. And in that wisdom of God, sometimes in bringing us to the right road home, because that's really what it's about, isn't it?

[3 : 25] It's not like a tourist that can spend time looking at things and yet know that home is somewhere else, and yet you've got time to take in what you're doing on holiday or on a trip or whatever it is.

The spiritual life, the Christian life, is a life where God takes us on this journey that he calls the right road. And the right road home is really the important issue for David here as well as for ourselves.

And that is God's wise choice for us because sometimes that road that leads us ultimately home will take us through the land of the Philistines.

It will take us through experiences that we wouldn't choose for ourselves. It will be very frequently for us a road in which we have to face various enemies, people who don't like us and like what we stand for, and even people who are determined to undermine and to overthrow the things that are valuable and precious to us.

That's what the Christian life is about. That's what Jesus himself so frequently taught his disciples in advance of their going into the world. He said, don't be surprised if you meet with opposition, with hatred, with things which are going to be against you.

[4 : 42] That's how it was, he says, for me. And it will be for my followers. Well, what do we learn from this psalm about the right road home? It's a psalm that we can call, or a study that we can call, trial, trust and triumph.

Because these three words really encapsulate what the psalm is about. It's about trial, but it's also about trusting in God in trial.

And it's about triumph, as David overcomes triumph or anticipates, or has overcome triumph, trial in triumphant faith.

First of all, trial. You can see how he's talking here, firstly, of a relentless pursuit on the part of those who are after him. Be gracious to me, Lord. 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. Verses 5 to 6. All day long. They injure my cause.

[5 : 48] It's translated there. It could be that they just, you can translate that. They rest my words. They misrepresent me.

We'll see that in a minute. But you notice the emphasis in these verses repeatedly on all day long. This is a relentless pursuit. His enemies are not giving up.

His enemies are not going to say about David, well, it's not worthwhile chasing him anymore. And we'll just leave him as he is. And that's how it will be in your life as a Christian and my life as a Christian as well.

Because it's the relentlessness of the pursuit that really sometimes gets to us. Because that's really what you find as you live as a Christian in the world that you live in today.

And in the generation that you live in today. Whether you're young or middle-aged or old. It's tough and it's a struggle living as a Christian. It's a struggle because of all the things that you face and need to face up to and need to overcome.

[6 : 49] And it's a struggle because of the relentlessness of the pursuit of those who are actually seeking to get one over you. To make you stumble. To cause you to turn back.

To deny you, Lord. You can see that in the generation. In the day we live in. Just look at how relentlessly certain people, certain groups are pursuing those who are faithful to God.

And stand up publicly especially for God and for faithfulness to his word. And for the teaching of his word. And for the principles of the word. It doesn't matter what you think about a bakery in Northern Ireland that wants to be true to their conviction.

And refuse to publicize something like same-sex marriage in the decorating of a cake. Don't they have rights? Don't they have the right to act as Christians as well even if they're running a business?

The law says no. You don't. The same with education. With free speech.

[8 : 02] All the issues that you actually face in the world that have to do with people's rights and people's opinions of themselves. And especially their opinions of the gospel and of Jesus Christ and of his rights and of God and of the people who want to be true to him.

You're facing a relentless enemy. An enemy who will pursue you to the death. An enemy who will actually be on your tail right through life. Now Jesus didn't say this to us to discourage us.

Jesus didn't say that this would be the kind of life a Christian life is about. And he didn't say this to us so that we would say well there's nothing else in the Christian life but trouble and struggle and a relentless pursuit.

It's not like that. There are things in the Christian life of course that overcome the relentless pursuits. That the joy you have in the Lord. There's the sense of God's companionship.

There are all of these positive things that God gives his people and sometimes fills their lives with. But Jesus did say this is what a Christian life would face because the realism of the Bible is one of the things that we're thankful for.

[9 : 13] It doesn't pretend things to be other than they are. It doesn't actually hold back from giving you the very rough things of life as they are.

And the things in people's lives even like David that ought not to be there. But they're there. They're shown. It's a book of realism.

It's something that we're thankful for. That it doesn't pull the wool over your eyes. It tells you things as they are. And you see there's no holds barred as well.

Because the enemy is not just stalking him and harassing him. What the enemies are doing as well is as it says there injure my cause. You can translate that twisting my words.

They rest my words as the A.B. puts it. They take my words and they give them a twist so that it appears to mean something other than what it really is. And that's such a feature of life as you live it today.

[10 : 19] Because especially the things of the Christian life and of the gospel, they tend to get twisted out of context. And things that you say can be twisted out of context.

And one of the dangers, and I'm not highlighting this because I'm anti-media. Because the Christian should be anti-media. I'm not suggesting that at all. But one of the real dangers, if you like, that we face.

And one of the ways in which the anti-gospel powers can actually have their views expressed powerfully. Is through the media.

Because it makes a huge difference. If you edit something that someone says. So that it comes across as very different to what actually was meant or what was said in the first place.

And you can find that those who actually oppose the gospel will very skillfully use the media. They will misrepresent. They will put across things which we have not said as if we've said them.

[11 : 25] Things which we didn't mean as if we meant them. Now please don't think that I'm saying that the media is just a group of bad people. That everything about the media is sinister.

That they have an agenda to undermine the gospel. Many people in the media are Christians. Many people in the media are impartial. They want to present things as they are. But nevertheless the media such as it is can be used.

We have to be aware of that. And the Christian can never stoop to misrepresenting. To twisting people's word. To taking things and making them out of context appear to say something different.

You don't stoop to that. You don't take up that sort of mechanism. But it does mean that you and I have to use such things as the media. And the opportunities that the media gives you to present your case.

Don't just say, well they're just going to edit it anyway so it will come across as something I didn't say. The truth needs to be presented clearly through every mechanism that God provides.

[12 : 30] The truth needs to be presented today. By which he can honor himself. But here is David saying, this is what I'm facing. Not only is it a relentless enemy. An enemy that's not giving up.

Just like you find today they're not going to give up on the attempts to introduce the legalizing of assisted suicide. Things like that that Christians object to.

And vociferously stand against. But the enemy keeps coming and keeps coming. And you've got to keep coming. And you've got to keep coming back at them. We've got to stand for the Lord just as much as those who are against the gospel are coming back again and again relentlessly.

There has to be a relentlessness about the gospel and about presenting the gospel. Just as surely as there's a relentlessness on the part of the enemy. Except it's by different values and by different ways of doing things.

But you notice something else. They are doing this proudly in verse 2. My enemies trample on me all day long for many attack me proudly.

[13 : 40] One of the things that we're constantly referring to. And this is quite similar in fact to Psalm 12. If you look back later on just look back and read through Psalm 12 and see how this is brought out.

It's the sheer arrogance. The self-confidence of unbelief. Especially in days when enemies of the gospel have a freedom to exercise their opposition and their unbelief in the ways that you have today.

There's an arrogance. There's a pride. There's a sense of self-importance. That's really going to the root of sin, isn't it?

That's what we should not be surprised about. That's what's in every one of us. That's what God is dealing with. In His grace and His salvation.

He's dealing with pride. He's dealing with our obstinacy. He's dealing with what we are naturally. But that comes to the fore when there is no restraint by God's word, by God's law.

[14 : 47] When that's tossed aside. When people say God doesn't exist. When people say I'm the master of my own destiny. I have rights to live as I want to live. Or to have a relationship as I see fit.

Or to deal with how I have children as I see fit. All of these things are just a throwing over of restraints. The restraint that the Bible imposes. And you're facing a generation.

And I'm facing a generation where there's a no holds barred approach to opposing the gospel. Be prepared for that. Be aware of that and face that.

Because it's a reality. And many people are struggling because of it. So there's the trial. The relentless pursuit of his enemies.

The no holds barred approach. The methodology that stoops even to misrepresentation and twisting of words. That's the world in its wordliness. That's the world in its opposition to the gospel.

- [15 : 47] But secondly, trust. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. A number of times he speaks about trusting in the Lord. That's really, in a sense, the refrain or the repeated note throughout the song, the psalm.

In God I trust. I shall not be afraid. Well, it literally says, when I'm afraid. Literally, it means in the day that I'm afraid. And that really puts it, or in the old way of putting it, AV style.

Well, what time my heart is overwhelmed. What time I am afraid. And it puts it very vividly by leaving it as literally as that. Because that's literally what the Hebrew text says.

What time, in the day that I am afraid. It makes it so meaningful to every single moment of our being afraid. It's not a general thing. It's a very detailed thing.

And David is saying here, in this deliberate act of faith. It's whatever time I'm afraid. Whatever things make me afraid. Whatever my circumstances are.

- [16 : 52] And they're not always going to be the same, of course. But when it makes me afraid, the one thing I will do is I will trust in you. Faith can do different things.

Fear can do different things to us. When you're afraid, sometimes you just freeze. You're afraid, sometimes you just panic.

You don't know what to do. When you're afraid, you feel very lonely, very isolated sometimes. Fear can also just make you fight.

Sometimes irrationally. Against what you're afraid of. But David's saying, the only proper, adequate, sufficient way of dealing with fear is just to collapse yourself into the care of God.

That's what he's saying. When I am afraid, I will trust in you. I will make you my security. What are you afraid of today?

- [17 : 57] Not just what are you afraid of, what things are you afraid of? You can be afraid of the development of your life. You can be afraid of illness. You can be afraid of bereavement.

You can be afraid of coping with changes like that in your life. Massive changes. Changes that are so hard to deal with. So hard to overcome. So hard to adjust to.

Afraid of the future. Afraid of how your prospects will be. Leaving school. Leaving college. Afraid of perhaps something that's happened that's been a disappointment to you.

What next for me? How are things going to work now? Every single day we've got things that in themselves will make us afraid. It doesn't matter.

David says, when I am afraid. You see, that's the beauty of the Psalms. When you come across Psalms like this. And very often you'll find this in the Psalms. You can put yourself right into the context of David.

- [19 : 01] You may never have been in the middle of Philistines, literally of course. You may never have been actually in the situation in which David finds himself in. But because he's saying, when I am afraid.

You're saying, well that applies to me as well. I can take this word into my own context. This principle into my own context. And I can say, well that's me. I find myself there.

And amongst all my fears. And amongst the things that makes me afraid. Here is where David is leading me. Here is where the word of God is leading me. I will trust in you. I will make you, Lord, my refuge.

I will find my security in you. Is really pretty much what he means. And in that he speaks about the word of God and the God of the word.

In God whose word I praise. Both are reliable. The word of God is reliable because it is God's word. It takes his character from the God whose word it is.

[19 : 58] And that's why so much of the opposition of today. Not just outside the church. But sadly within the wider church as well. Is an attack on the nature of the Bible.

And once you lose your sense of what the Bible is. And what this is as God's word. And how reliable it is. And how it doesn't change in its principles.

For conduct and for our outlook on life. From generation to generation. If you lose sight of that. If you let go of that as a principle.

Then you're in trouble. Because then you can just make it mean. What people want to make it mean. Instead of the plain truth of the matter.

As God speaks of it. We say this so often. There's nothing in the word of God. That's unclear. About what's necessary. For your salvation. Everything that you need to know.

[20 : 59] For your salvation. Is absolutely clear and plain. In the word of God. There are things that aren't clear. And things that aren't plain. And things that are difficult to understand. And things that people differ in opinion over.

But there is no truth at all. Necessary for you to know. For your salvation. That's unclear in the word of God. So if you come across somebody.

That says all the Bible. The Bible is not clear about repentance. The Bible is not clear about. The resurrection of Christ. Whether he rose from the dead or not. The Bible is not clear about. The need to be born again.

When you change these things. As people discover various things. About human lives. And scientific discoveries. And all the rest of it. When you come across somebody saying that to you.

Be suspicious straight away. Because you know. That's not how my Bible is. I can trust my Bible. It's reliable. It's God's word. And David is saying here.

[21 : 58] In God whose word I praise. Look at the word. Now he's saying that more than once. In the Lord whose word I praise. So there's the word of God. Stick to it.

Don't be tempted to change from its obvious meaning. Into something else. But there's the God of the word. And although he praises God for his word.

And praises the word of God. It's God himself. That he trusts in. The God of the word. In God I trust.

When I'm afraid I put my trust in you. And there's a wonderful description there. Of God's bottle. And God's book.

In verse 8. You have kept account. I think the word tossings. There is not. Such a good translation. Actually for the word. Better as wanderings. David is.

[22 : 56] Somebody who knows what it is. To be wandering. To have to go from place to place. From one experience to another. And although tossings. Actually includes being.

Disrupted. And all that is included in that word. Wanderings fits the context better. And the word wanderings. Is the best word there in translation. You have kept count.

Of my wanderings. The different places I've had to go to. The different experiences I've had to experience. And to put up with and overcome. And we can all see that.

Life is not a straight line. Not as it just ups and downs. Life is a meandering journey.

That takes you from place to place. From one experience to the next. Very different experiences. The equivalent of wandering. In a literal sense. Well what is David saying?

[23 : 54] You have kept count of my wanderings. You have put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

What does he mean? God's bottle. God's book. Well a bottle. Normally is something that holds this kind of bottle. At least a small. Flask of some kind.

It contains something very precious. Like ointment. Or perfume. And if it's very very very expensive. And very precious.

Whoever owns it. Will actually want to count. Every single drop of it. Every time it's used. You count the number of drops you give out. Because it's so precious. And of course a book or something.

In this instance it's a record. Something in which you record details. So what David is saying is. God actually stores. Stores in his memory.

[24 : 50] As my life goes on. Every single detail. Of that life. Every single detail. Of my wanderings. However much I can say.

David is. You could put this into it as well. However much I can say. That nobody understands my predicament. Nobody understands what I'm going through. Nobody can really follow me.

In this experience that I have. In my life presently. Maybe that's your situation today. Or has been your situation. From time to time. David is saying. I'm so so thankful.

That I can say this. With conviction. The Lord has counted. Every drop. Of my wanderings. And he's put them into his bottle. He's kept record of them.

He knows them. They're in his book. Isn't that deeply precious to you today.

[25 : 49] That this great God. This creator. This mighty. Infinite. Eternal being.

Has such a detailed. Precise. Care of his children. That every single wandering. Every single tear drop indeed. He puts it into his bottle.

He remembers them. He stores them up in his memory. Why? So that he can actually. Measure. If you like. His grace. Accordingly.

So that he can take. His care. And apply it. Most. Particularly. And precisely. To whatever your wandering is.

To whatever your tears are caused by. God is never caught out. God is never behind the situation. So that he has to catch up.

[26 : 50] God is always right on top of it. Indeed he has known about it. Before it happened. That's why David is so thankful. For God's loving.

And caring. And personal. And detailed. Pastoring of his life. As he says elsewhere. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not.

Be in want. Thirdly. Triumph. Just. I'm going to close with this. As the time is gone. Triumph. There's confidence. In this triumph. That comes through in the psalm.

There's nine there. Then my enemies will turn back. In the day when I call. He's saying. I know that my prayer is heard by God. And that. It will come. It will come a point.

When the enemies will lose the fight. Here he's talking about them. Turning back. Even though he has said. They're relentless. And you know the same. The enemy. Of.

[27 : 46] Your soul. And the enemies of the church. The enemies of the gospel. They're not going to gain. The upper hand. Ultimately. How can we be sure about that?

How is David sure about that? Doesn't always feel like that. Well he says. There's one thing. That really makes me absolutely certain.

That this is the case. What is it? God is on my side. God is on my side.

God. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Whether I'm facing Philistines. Or Amalekites. It doesn't matter. What the enemy is. In our own day. Or any particular generation.

It doesn't matter. What age they're at. It doesn't matter. How afraid they might make me. It doesn't matter. How right they may seem to be. And how confident. They may be in their cause.

[28 : 45] One thing. God is. David is saying. Because. God is with me. I know this. I know this. He's saying. God is for me.

In verse 9 there. This I know. For God is for me. Is the better translation. My enemies will turn back. And the day when I call. This I know. For God is with me.

And for me. Well with God on your side. You're bound to win. You're bound to be triumphant. It might not be obvious.

In the whole of this life. But it is here. Here's faith giving. A death blow. If you like. To. His circumstances.

Your fear. Giving way. To faith. Here's faith. Overcoming. His very emotions. In the context.

[29 : 41] In which he's speaking. And you can see the way. The New Testament uses this. Very precisely. I won't read it just now. Just read it yourselves. When you get back. Romans 8. Well known verses. Hebrews 13 as well.

But Romans 8. Verse 31. Right through to the end of the chapter. That magnificent conclusion. To Romans 8. That note of triumph. All the way through these verses.

If God be for us. Who can be against us? Then he gives you a list. Of all the things. In the whole universe. In existence.

That are against you. But God is on your side. And if God is with you. Then you're going to overcome. All these things. Including death itself.

Which is why I think. He's finishing the psalm here. For you have delivered my soul. From death. He's giving. He's triumphant in thankfulness. And that's a point. That's. That's important.

[30 : 37] Though we're just touching on it really. I must perform my vows to you. O God. When he was. Vowing to God. That he would be. Giving thanks to God. That he would. Thank him for the victory.

For hearing his prayers. Now he's done that. And because victory is assured. He's coming with his offering to God. Now there's a question. Do you regard.

Do I regard. Thanking God. As the equivalent of bringing an offering to him. Just like in the Old Testament. You had.

An animal. Given and sacrificed. By someone. So God is saying. Think of thanksgiving in that way. It is actually an offering.

A spiritual offering. Consciously to God. For all that he is. For all that he's done for you. For he says. You have delivered my soul from death.

[31 : 30] My feet from stumbling. That I may walk before God. In the light. Of life. What is salvation? It's two things.

It's not just. Deliverance from death. Though it is that. That's the first thing. You have delivered my soul from death. Why has God delivered our soul from death? So that he can.

Introduce us into. And install us in life. There are two sides to salvation. Deliverance from death. Installation in life.

This is why I'm thanking you. He says Lord. Triumphant. Trusting. In the midst of trial. For you have delivered my soul from death.

That I may walk before God. In the light. Of the living. In the light of life. Are you on the right path?

[32 : 31] Are you taking your wanderings to God? Are you able to trust. To be triumphant.

Even in trial. Do you know deliverance. From death. And installation. In life. You have it all.

You have it all. In Jesus Christ. The way. The truth. The life. Let's pray. Lord.

We bless you for. Your care of your people. For the way your promises follow them. And for the way that through your word. They are able to. Live upon those promises.

Even in times of distress. We bless you for your word. And for its. Dependability. We thank you today. That you are the God. Who. Leads your people.

[33 : 28] And whose wisdom. Has devised for them. That route. That leads to eternal glory. Bless us then we pray. And bless us throughout this day now. For Jesus sake. Amen.