

Psalm 31

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[0 : 00] Last week in Psalm 63, Matt brought us a great gift of finding our satisfaction in the Lord. ! And as I was looking at that psalm and meditating on it, one of the verses in it, Psalm 63, verse 7, For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. That idea of finding refuge in our Heavenly Father is what Psalm 31 is all about, and so we are going to continue along that theme today.

So will you bow your heads with me and seek the Lord's help as we walk into His Word, and I pray that this would be a blessing for us all. Lord God, You are so good to Your people. Lord, we do not deserve anything from You. Besides separation and judgment that You give gifts, what a Father, what a Savior.

[1 : 11] Lord, may we know You and love You more as we consider Your Word today. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen.

Psalm 31 begins, In You, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame. In Your righteousness deliver me. Incline Your ear to me. Rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge. A strong fortress to save me.

Do you feel like you have to get your act together Sunday morning before you come to church? Do you feel like you have to get your act together in order to go to God? You know, when you go to church, you've got to dress up nice, put on a happy face, pretend like everything's okay.

[2 : 08] Okay? This psalm shows us that the Bible is for people who need refuge, not people who have it all together.

When King David penned this psalm, he didn't have a happy face on, did he? He needed refuge. When he penned the psalm, he wasn't trying to pretend that everything's okay. He needed rescue. When he penned this psalm, he wasn't concerned with how he looked to other people. He needed a fortress. Maybe you're here today and you feel like or you've been made to believe that you have to have it all together or else the church isn't the place for you. You have to have it all right and then you can go to church. Then you can go to God. The first lines of this psalm tell us a few things.

[3 : 13] And the first among them is that the Bible shows us that God does not expect us to have our act together before we come to him. You can come to Jesus broken and hurting, desperate, mourning, confused, ashamed.

You do not have to bring great gifts to him for him to accept you. And if you've ever been made to feel unwelcome in a church because you didn't have it all together, have the perfect family, have the perfect past, have the perfect words to say, have the perfect anything, I'm sorry that you've been made to feel that way.

God does not want you to feel that way. He is a refuge to his people. And so should his church be. He's shown that he's for broken people like David as he wrote this prayer in Psalm 31.

And so if you're here today and you don't have it together, you don't know which way is in it. Up? You don't know how you'll carry on. If you need refuge or if you need someone to hear you or if you don't know how you'll cope, you need a strong tower like David does.

The Lord says, this song is for you. Oh God. I am a strong tower. And if that's not you today, if you've been blessed and the sky is pretty sunny for you right now and the waters are pretty calm, pretty still for you right now, first let's rejoice and thank the Lord for his blessing.

[4 : 49] Then let's remember those people in our lives who are not there, who do need this right now. And since we live in a fallen world, let this song prepare you for the day when you need a strong tower.

And I think this song is going to show us something. That even though it might appear tranquil in our lives right now, we do indeed need a strong tower each and every day.

And so these opening two verses show us that this song is for people who need refuge, deliverance, rescue, a fortress to save them. And here's how, just to get your mind around it, the rest of this passage is going to work and the rest of our sermon this morning is going to be structured.

In verses 3 through 8, David shows us where to go for refuge, the Lord himself. And he gives us hints of what that refuge might look like, what shape it might take.

And then in verses 9 through 18, he's going to show us a pattern, how he finds refuge in the Lord. At that point, we're going to pause and briefly rethink who this song is actually about.

[6 : 09] And then in verses 19 to 24, we'll end with David in praise. So where do we find this great refuge? Verses 3 through 8 tell that story.

For you are my rock and my fortress. And for your name's sake, you lead me and guide me. You take me out of the net. They have hidden for me.

For you are my refuge. Into your hand, I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me. Oh Lord, faithful God. I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord.

I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love. Because you have seen my affliction. You have known the distress of my soul. You have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy.

You have set my feet in a broad place. Take a look with me at verse 3. Maybe when you think, or when you hear the words, you know, take refuge in God, seek a strong tower in Him, you think, well, you know, thanks, that's nice, but I don't need therapy.

[7 : 18] Thank you very much. But it's nice, it's quaint, that weak people can find comfort in God. Good for them. I want to push back against that.

If you feel like this psalm is for someone else, because you do have it together, I want you to look with me at verse 3. David says, That means, that part there, for your name's sake, that means that God is glorified when we find refuge in Him.

Have you ever considered that running to your Heavenly Father for help is an act of worship? It honors Him?

See, running to God means you aren't running to other saviors, including yourself. That's worship. Running to God proclaims, I'm confident that He is strong, that He is able, and that He is willing to rescue.

It's declaring, through our actions, His goodness and His greatness. That's worship. Running to God says, I remember my God.

[8 : 47] I remember His promises. I remember that He is good, and I am going to Him because I trust Him. Friends, that's the heart of worship. How beautiful is that?

In this one act, seeking refuge in Him, we receive His grace and His help while at the same time He receives honor and praise.

So, seeking refuge isn't just for the people that you or I think are weak. It's not just for the people that we think need therapy.

finding refuge in the Lord is for people who worship, not just with their lips, but with their lives. And so, we know that we should be running to the Lord regularly for refuge.

It's good for us. It's good for our church family. It's an act of worship, but how do we do it? What does it look like to actively seek refuge in the Lord in the hard things of life?

[10 : 03] See, God is spirit. So, David's strong tower, language here is, you know, a metaphor. We can't, like, run to a location in order to take refuge in the Lord.

And that wouldn't work anyway because, you know, verse 3 says that taking refuge in Him means being led and being guided by Him through life, not like stuck in a hermitage somewhere, secluded from the world.

Taking refuge in God does not draw us out of this world. He guides us through as we take refuge in Him. So, what does it really look like to run to the Lord for refuge every day?

Here's how David is going to give us a pattern. In verses 9 and 10, he's going to express his heart to the Lord.

In 11, 12, and 13, he's going to name the trials that he's walking through. In verses 14 through 18, he's going to ask the sovereign Lord for help.

[11 : 06] And then he's going to conclude in 19 through 24 with praise. So, the first thing he does in verses 9 and 10 is he gives voice to his sorrows.

He says, Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress. My eye is wasted from grief. My soul and my body also for my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing.

My strength fails because of my iniquity and my bones waste away. One writer remarked on this saying, The kaleidoscope of one man's experience lives before us, captivates us.

The variety is electrifying. If you look at those words, how broad is the hurt in his heart?

Some of our church family knows what it's like to be in distress. Verse 9. Conflict isn't just inconvenient, it saps the soul.

[12 : 16] Some here today know what it's like for overwhelming grief. To bring us to such tears that our eyes are wasted, as David says, and dry.

Our tears are spent, but our grief is not. And since God made us body and soul connected, some of us know what it's like for trouble to not only overwhelm our souls, but also drain our bodies.

To have our strength and bones waste away. Since we're whole people as well, stress and sorrow don't stay neatly compartmentalized, do they?

At home or at work. Some members of our church family know what it's like for our whole life. All our time, all our thoughts, to be spent on sorrow and the sighing and the groaning that it brings.

And David isn't being poetic here. He's being truthful. This is what trouble and sorrow, stress and conflict looks like in our hearts.

[13 : 33] And he's not afraid to speak these things to God, which might surprise some of us. Because it might sound like complaining.

Now certainly there are sinful ways to go to God with our problems. You know, it's blasphemous to go to God with a heart demanding, you know, how dare you allow me to feel this way. But it's completely appropriate to go to him with our burdens.

In fact, he wants that. That's, this psalm is proof of that. One writer put it this way, God encourages us to put the laments of our heart into speech.

God desires to hear the depths of our heart. Friends, God made our hearts. He made them to desire good and break over evil.

And so it honors him to go to him with your troubled heart. That's part of his good design. So maybe on that one hand, you might not want to go to God with your troubled heart because you feel like it's whining or complaining.

[14 : 48] Or, maybe you don't because you don't think he cares. Like, why would he want to hear this from me? I'm going to quote one author, one of my instructors actually in seminary at length here.

David cries out because he knows he's speaking to a God who hears. Because he knows he's speaking to a God who cares.

Because he's speaking to a God who will be moved by his plight. Because he has a God who knows his pain. An initial surprise to many people is that God actually encourages those who suffer to speak honestly to him.

Why is that a surprise to many sufferers? People who suffer tend to feel alone and isolated. They think that God is very far from them.

But God penetrates this isolation and prods us to put our painful experiences into speech. God encourages us to direct our speech to himself.

[15 : 58] And again, it's not just therapy. Yes, it is for our comfort, but it's also worship. Taking our lament to God honors him because it's saying, you are a God who hears.

You are a God who cares. You are a God who acts and is powerful to do so. Friends, that's worship. It takes the words of praise that we sing together here as a church family and sings them with our lives.

So they're not just empty words. So taking refuge in the Lord looks first like going to God and laying bare our heart.

Then, in verses 11, 12, and 13, it looks like getting specific to him with our circumstance, with our situation. What kinds of troubles is David walking through?

Verse 11, because of all my adversaries. That's conflict with other people.

[17 : 14] He says, I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances. Those who see me in the street flee from me. Friends, that's shame.

Verse 12, I have been forgotten like one who is dead. That's abandonment. I have become like a broken vessel.

I think what he means here is his heart is broken. For I hear the whispering of many, terror on every side, as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

That's conspiring. That's gossip and slander and backstabbing. these are the kinds of troubles everyone experiences.

No one's exempt from conflict. And so the question isn't will you deal with these troubles that David is expressing here. The question is how will you deal with them when they come?

[18 : 24] And because everyone everywhere does experience these kinds of troubles in their lives. There's all kinds of advice from every area about how to take heed of them and how to deal with them.

But the resources and the choices that you and I normally make or naturally would think to rely on and the help that the world would give us don't point in the same direction that David's prayer does. Our first thought isn't generally I'm going to trust in, run to, rely on the Lord. Instead our first instinct is to go to some lesser refuge.

refuge. A false refuge. And so David's prayer here in Psalm 31 establishes for us a pattern to follow to find our refuge in the Lord.

We all experience trials of various kinds. David has outlined numbers of them here. And our first instinct is to rely on something other than God in the midst of that.

[19 : 41] And this is broken for two reasons. First, false refuge will let us down always. And second, it's sinful. And so David is going to run to the Lord for refuge instead.

Let's take that first example, the very beginning of verse 11, because of all of my adversaries. He's talking about interpersonal conflict. And we know where that finds us everywhere.

Right? At work, among our friends, in our family, here at church. And it takes all shapes, doesn't it? Sometimes conflict comes from malice.

Someone attacks you. Right? Straightforward. Sometimes you get dragged into conflict when somebody kind of drags you into their drama.

Makes you pick sides. We can't be okay unless you side with me on this thing. Sometimes it comes from negligence. Right? Somebody does something thoughtless and it causes conflict in our lives.

[20 : 49] I have spoken to you. I have prayed for you. I know how some of us here in this room have, right today, have been either unfairly attacked or dragged into other people's arguments or mistreated.

Not the same way that David did, but similar. you've been treated with hostility, been called names, your motives have been called into question, tension lingers in the air, ultimatums have been given to you, and you can't keep that neatly boxed up in place, right?

Work conflict doesn't stay at work, it follows you home. Family conflict doesn't stay sealed up behind you on your way out the front door. It doesn't work like that. You're a whole person.

You take your whole heart with you wherever you go. And it's killer. It saps you. I was talking with some other pastors about conflict, and one of them echoed David's emotional state here.

He told me, conflict just rots your bones. That's all he had to say about it. That's all there is to say about it. Some of us know, even right this moment, what it is to have people going behind your back.

[22 : 10] Sometimes it's gossip, sometimes it's slander, sometimes it's something even more sinister. David's life was at stake here. Perhaps it's your reputation or your job, the stability of your family that's at stake.

And when people attack like this, David's description hits the nail right on the head. Terror on every side. God's life is God's life is While you feel your bones rot, what do you do?

Now, I'm going to draw a distinction here. This psalm does not tell us how to resolve the conflict, does it? Rather, it's about where we look while we're going through the conflict.

where our comfort, where our refuge comes from while we walk through the hard times. Now, if you are like me, your hope in the midst of interpersonal conflict is often the prospect of winning that conflict.

I want to be vindicated. I want to emerge the victor. I want to defeat my adversary. So, if my refuge is found in the hope of me winning, I'm going to double down on me, on my own work, on making sure I look good, that I've done it right.

[23 : 45] Right? Now, the first thing we said about false refuge, finding a refuge apart from God, is that it will eventually let you down.

and when I double down on me, right, trying to prove myself, I will eventually reach the end of my ability to win an argument.

I will eventually reach the end of my power to reconcile people who dragged me into their conflict. conflict. I might just be wrong, right?

I might be on the wrong side of the conflict. Even when I do win, it's hard to show love for someone you're invested in trying to defeat, and so I will still have sinned.

or it could be a situation where I have no agency, so to speak, right? The heart tongues this morning can't do anything of their own power to develop a premature infant's tiny lungs.

[24 : 57] There's nothing to rely on in themselves this morning. So, if my own ability to resolve trouble is really my hope for comfort, I won't find it, because it will let me down.

I will let myself down. What's more, relying on hope in myself won't just fail me. It's sin against God. If my hope, my faith, is in me, that's idolatry. me. Remember how we said taking refuge in God was worship?

You know, it declares, God, you're strong. God, you're good. Well, taking refuge in me says the same things about someone who isn't God, me.

God, you're going to going to God. sing songs on Sunday to myself. But does my life sing a different song?

[26 : 10] It's yours. God, you're God. When you go through conflict, you look for refuge, you look for hope.

That's just what we do. The question is where? Placing our hope in someone, whoever that is, is an act of worship.

So the question is, who will you worship? Yourself or God? God. So a false refuge will fail you.

A false refuge is idolatry. But there is a king who gives us a gift, a better refuge in himself. If I look to him for my hope instead, a bunch of things immediately happen in my own heart.

When I set my sight on God, it set on me less. That means I'll react less selfishly. When I set my mind on God, I'm taking that language, Colossians 3 verse 1, Jordan preached that, file that away.

[27 : 22] When I set my mind on God, I have my sights set on beauty and glory and grace. It lifts my heart out of the pit, even if I still have to walk a dark road.

When I set my mind on God, I remember that I'm not alone. even if my closest friend turns on me or my spouse dies or my family denounces me, I am not alone.

That changes everything. When I set my mind on God, I get perspective on my situation. How often do you see someone get worked up about something that you don't think is a big deal?

do you have eyes to see that you and I are just the same as that person? From an outside perspective, the things that you and I get worked up about sometimes, not all the time, but many times, are really not that big a deal.

And so we sing songs like, set your eyes upon Jesus, look full on his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

[28 : 38] We have our eyes set on God, it refocuses our perspective on how much we've been wounded and maybe causes us to take ourselves a little less seriously.

When I set my mind on God, I receive comfort. I remember to ask for his intervention in my situation. I remember to pray for my adversary.

I remember to ask him to reveal sin in my life. I remember to ask him to help me put on the new man and walk in the fruits of the spirit. And so finding refuge in the Lord doesn't mean that I won't do work to resolve conflict.

It doesn't magically resolve all my troubles. It doesn't transport me away from my conflicts. But it does mean I will bring a different attitude to the conversation.

It means that I'll walk through troubles with God by my side. It means that I won't be undone if things don't go my way. Because I have a better hope. A better hope than anything this world can give me.

[29 : 49] Down in Christ. Now, what we just did there was look at the first trouble that David names in the first part of verse 11.

He says, because of all my adversaries. And we've thought through what it looks like to abandon the false refuge, in particular ourselves, and to find refuge in God in the midst of conflict.

He names a bunch of other trials here. Shame, abandonment, heartbreak, people conspiring against him. And out of love for our children's ministers, I'm not going to walk through all of them again, one after the other.

But I hope that you have seen the pattern that David has established for us. When you feel ashamed, where will you go?

For the cleaning that your soul desires, your identity, wherever you go, will it be somewhere other than the Lord? When you feel abandoned, when you find someone that you depend on is a fair-weather friend, or when your job is cut with downsizing, when you feel abandoned, where will you look for a friend?

[31 : 21] will it be the Lord? When people conspire against you unjustly, whose voice will you listen to? The accuser or your father and heaven?

Now, if you need help walking through deep waters, and we haven't walked kind of through that, through David's process here, if you're walking through those things and you need help, please, please talk to me, one of the other elders, talk to somebody in your community group, who knows the Lord well, and loves you well, and will walk this with you.

I want to say in particular, if your refuge has become self-harm, in particular, shame on this list, for some people, a refuge is found in using food wrongly, or harming their bodies with cutting, or hair pulling, or many different ways of finding either a release, or diving into the shame, or many other things.

If that is you, please don't continue. Please reach out for help. Find refuge in God, not in something that harms you. David follows this.

In verse 1 through 8, he says, I need a refuge. In verses 9 and 10, he pours out his heart to God and lament. He says, God, I offer you my broken heart. In verses 11, 12, and 13, he has outlined the specifics of his trials, and he has sought to find refuge in the Lord, not in himself, not in some false refuge, but in God himself.

[33 : 24] And now that he has done those things, he makes a simple request to the Lord. Basically says, will you act? His prayer begins with a simple statement of trust in verse 14, but I trust in you, O Lord.

I say, you are my God. My times are in your hand. And then he asks very simply for the Lord's help. Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors.

Make your face shine on your servants. Save me in your steadfast love. O Lord, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you. Let the wicked be put to shame.

Let them go silently to the grave. Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt. You know, this is probably where we would expect the prayer to begin, right?

If you're going through a hard time, you're probably going to start with, hey, Lord, please fix this problem. Let's not forget that, but let it be on the heels of finding our hope and our refuge in him.

[34 : 42] And that leads us to an interesting question. If David models for us here, like, Lord, please intervene, can we trust him to intervene?

This whole idea of refuge requires God to, A, be strong to save, and be willing to do so.

Can we trust him as a refuge? Is he good enough? Is he strong enough? Is he faithful enough to be our refuge? How can we know that the one who is our hope will not disappoint us?

I'd ask you to look back verse five. Into your hand I commit my spirit.

Now, if you've ever been to a Good Friday service, you have heard this verse before, but it was not read from a psalm. It came from Luke chapter 23, verse 46.

[35 : 56] As Jesus hung onto the cross or was hung on the cross, after he had completed his work, the beautiful work of nailing our sin to his cross and extinguishing his own just wrath on it so that we might be reconciled to him.

These were his words. This is Christ's lament. Why this psalm?

Why would these words be on his lips? cross have to do with David seeking refuge in the Lord?

Why are those together? Why was this on his lips on the cross? I think that David hints at the answer in verse 10. My strength fails because of my iniquity.

This is the only reference to sin in the entire psalm. But David is praying to a God who is holy. And David's sin and ours earns his holy judgment.

[37 : 30] Death in this life and eternal punishment in hell in the next. So David because of his own sin shouldn't even be able to go to God for refuge.

Except that Jesus took this psalm into his mouth on the cross where he made a way back to God. David's sin was blotted out.

His heart was made spotless before the Lord by the Lord. And so this great gift of the coming king being able to go to him for refuge this is how he secured our right to run to him.

The cross is what makes refuge in God a possibility instead of wrath. And if Jesus our Lord knows what it means to have adversaries because he had them he was abandoned He was betrayed!

He was left alone to die falsely accused He was put to shame openly We read verse 7 again in a new light don't we?

[38 : 46] David says I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love because you have seen my affliction you have known the distress of my soul Jesus life completely transforms how we read that verse He hasn't seen our afflictions from afar He doesn't know our distress the distress of our souls like He knows things He's read in a book He has seen our afflictions in His own life He has known the distress of our souls in His own heart and so when we run to this refuge we know that He cares we know that He hears we know that He understands our troubles because He has walked the path of suffering and we know He is for us as He walked that path in order to reconcile us to Himself it was for us and we know that

He is strong because He didn't stay on the cross He didn't stay buried in the tomb no He rose to life because He is master over death and life and so no trial is too hard no conflict is too harsh for those who find refuge in Him because He is sufficient!

And that's why we can follow David in confidence and that's why he closes this psalm with a prayer of praise so brothers and sisters let's make this closing prayer our closing prayer please bow your heads with me oh how abundant is your goodness which you have stored up for those who fear you who worked for those who take refuge in you in the sight of the children of mankind in the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men you store them in your shelter from the strife Blessed be the Lord for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city I had said in my alarm I am cut off from your sight but you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when

I cried to you for help love the Lord all you his saints the Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride be strong and let your heart all you to wait for the Lord Amen