

# The God of Glory

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 July 2016

Preacher: Canon David Short

[ 0 : 00 ] If you would take your Bible and open to Psalm 57 on page 477. As you look that up, there's a strange and wonderful consolation to be found in this psalm.

It's one of a couple of psalms that's written from a cave. And you can see from the front of the bulletin that we're trying to get glimpses of the glory of God. First run through at first sight, this psalm looks like it's just one of our stock standard prayers.

Lord, I'm in trouble. Help. I'm very sad. Things are difficult. Help. And if you help, I'll go to worship. But please don't forget my main point, O God, and that is help.

That's not what the psalm's about. And I hope you'll see as we go through it that the flavor is confidence in the middle of distress. David's in real trouble.

But as we go through the psalms, his horizons open up in the most staggering breadth and depth and height. He goes to the highest heavens above the clouds and to all the nations around the world.

[ 1 : 21 ] Because it's in this prayer we move from the cave to God most high above the heavens. But it's the discrepancy between the highest heaven and the cave that gives the consolation in this psalm.

So I've got two points. The first is the view from the cave. The second is the view from the clouds. And then we'll see if we can bring them together. So firstly, the view from the cave.

If you look at the top of the psalm, the writing that's in capitals, the heading of the psalm, is part of the original text. So to the choir master, according to Do Not Destroy.

That's a tune, Do Not Destroy, which Dan's going to hum the first few bars of. We don't know how it sounds. It's a mictam. We don't know what that is. But we know that David is fleeing from Saul in the cave.

It's one of those psalms where we know at least two times David fled from Saul in a cave. He's being hunted for his life.

[ 2 : 28 ] King Saul, with all the armies of Israel, are hunting David south of Jerusalem into the hills. He's in mortal danger. It's extreme. It's unfair. It's unjust. And he takes refuge in this cave.

And, well, if it's the one I'm thinking of, there are probably a couple of hundred other guys in the cave as well, which just adds to the putridity of the situation.

I'll leave it with you. Now, likely none of us here are being pursued by armies and generals wanting to kill us. But every single one of us knows what it is to be hemmed in by circumstances without any easy way out.

To be overwhelmed by things that are more powerful than we are. To be overwhelmed by the cares of this world, by the deceitfulness of riches, for example, and the desire for other things.

And the Bible is very realistic about the concrete details of everyday life. You know this, don't you? The Christian faith is not nice, inspiring ideas or powerful spiritual notions.

[ 3 : 39 ] The Christian life deals with real life and real pressure. If you want a religion that brings you peace of mind, calm and detachment, Christianity is not for you. You should try Buddhism. The life, real life with the real God of the Bible is always awkward and lumpy.

And the glory of God is not to make us relax or to cope or to have equanimity. And it comes at the most inconvenient times into our lives with the message of the cross in ways that change us more than changing our circumstances.

And David is doing it tough here. This is the future king of Israel. And if you look through verse one, he's facing storms of destruction. He's got enemies who are going to trample him down.

Verse three, he's amongst lions and fiery beasts who are telling lies about him and digging holes that he'll fall into. There's nothing romantic about being in a cave.

And the lovely thing is that David is not in denial. This is something that we Christians do all the time in suffering. We say it's not really happening. Either that or we take the position of we wallow in self-pity.

[ 4 : 52 ] We say, Lord, you are to blame. Get me out of this. David does neither. He's open and truthful about the reality of his difficulty and he brings it to God most high.

He's hemmed in in this space of the cave, but he prays to the God who is exalted above the heavens. And that's why he starts in verse one. The first thing he says is not save me, rescue me, get me out of here.

By the way, there's nothing wrong with praying about your circumstances. It's a good thing to do. But the essence of prayer is not making God make my life happy.

The essence of prayer is knowing God, taking refuge in God, coming close to him. That's why David says, be merciful to me, oh God, be merciful to me.

It's the word for grace. I don't deserve it. Please, I throw myself on your grace. And how does he do it, first one? In you, my soul takes refuge.

[ 5 : 54 ] Under the shadow of your wings, I take refuge. It's only in prayer, I think, that we come to see that it's not the cave that gives us safety and refuge.

It's our gracious God who stretches out his wings of grace over us. That's where the place of safety is until the storms of destruction pass by. And just in case we miss it, David stops in verse two and turns and addresses us.

He stops praying and he speaks both to himself and to us and he says, I'm not just calling out to anyone here. I'm calling out to God most high, who's not remote or removed, but who fulfills or literally fills over me his purpose, working glory for me and in me, even in the cave, even under threat.

Now, I think one of the great gifts of Psalm 57 is that it enables us to see something of the invisible glory of God in spatial terms.

The Psalm is a kind of a study in spiritual space. David describes spiritual realities using space language. That's what he's been doing.

[ 7 : 12 ] I'm in a cave. I'm going to be trampled down. I might fall in a pit. So I call to the God most high. Now, I want to pause here for a moment. This is very important.

It's it's we use spatial language to describe almost everything. It's invisible to us because we use it all the time. Most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatial metaphors.

So we talk about feelings in spatial terms, don't we? Are you up or are you down? Are you on top of the situation or are you buried under? You're feeling high.

You're feeling low. We talk about good and evil in spatial terms. Are you upright? Are you upstanding, high minded? Or are you underhanded doing what is beneath you?

We talk about close relationships in spatial terms. Just imagine a young man comes and says to you, well, my girlfriend and I, we were on the path to romance.

[ 8 : 16 ] You understand the spatial language. But we hit a wall. I went over the edge. I was over the moon in seventh heaven. But she brought me down.

She threw me under the bus. She said we're on a treadmill. She's left me behind. Everything went pear shaped. I was in deep.

She said I was too shallow. And a little bit square. And now our relationship is on the rocks. Up the creek.

And I am beside myself. Thank you very much. So we use it all the time. We use this language all the time.

And good is up. Bad is down. Happy is up. Sad is down. So when David turns to us and says in verse 2, I am praying to God most high.

[ 9 : 12 ] He's talking about spiritual reality. The God of the Bible isn't one amongst many gods. He's not a tribal deity. He is not just a high God.

He is the most high. He alone rules supreme. He is exalted above the heavens. His glory covers the earth. Which means that David prays in a context where life is not random.

That the most difficult and distressing context in which we find ourselves serves his glory and his exaltation. We're not really enclosed in the cave of our circumstances.

If we belong to God most high, there is something bigger in our lives. Something higher. Something greater going on. God is filling the world and filling us with his glory, which is going to extend from earth to heaven.

That's the view from the cave. So let me quickly move secondly to the view from the clouds. Okay, you say, how on earth does that help me? I mean, if God is most high, I'm still in the cave, right?

[10:17] Well, the answer is that in verse 2, God sends out to us two envoys, two representatives, two ambassadors.

You see them at the end of verse 3? He will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness. Two very powerful missionaries.

One call steadfast love and the other call faithfulness. And they are at the heart of what the glory of God is. That's what makes God's glory glorious.

Remember back in the book of Exodus? Moses... It's amazing. Moses had tasted something of the glory of God. And he asked God, please show me your glory.

And God says to him, no one can survive if I show them my glory. But I'll show you my goodness. And somehow God protects Moses and allows his glory to pass before him.

[11:15] And this is what we read in Exodus 34. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses there, proclaiming the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

At the heart of the glory of God are two things which overflow. He is the source, the fountain of these two things, steadfast love and faithfulness.

And steadfast love is his stubborn commitment to us. His tender, compassionate, gracious, showing, revealing, continuing with us despite our spotty record.

The spontaneous, sovereign, determined, overflowing love. And his faithfulness literally means stability. His reliability.

When he says something, he stands behind it. He is, he's not open to corruption. He's not open to favoritism. This is the glory of God.

[12:35] When David says he sends out his steadfast love and his faithfulness, what he means is that God sends himself. God himself comes to us and serves us in love and faithfulness.

That's why David does not pray, get me out of here, Lord. He's praying, Lord, send yourself here into my difficult context. That's why the Son of God ultimately came into the world, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

That's the embodiment of steadfast love and faithfulness. So you see, the view from the clouds is a view of goodness. The glory of God is not just about his power and majesty and strength and ability to do stuff.

It's about goodness and it fills our world and fills our lives. So look down at verse 10 for a moment, please. David says, for your steadfast love is great to the heavens and your faithfulness to the clouds.

The words literally, they're like a balloon. So the steadfast love and faithfulness of God are increasingly blowing into this creation and filling to the clouds and to the heavens.

[13:56] And that leads David to the core prayer. There's one core prayer of this psalm, just as there's one core prayer of the Christian life.

It's repeated twice. Did you notice? Verse 5 and verse 11, they're the same. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.

Now, what does that mean? We don't use that language, do we? I mean, Dan loves it when I say to him, be exalted, O Dan. I think it's a little like the Lord's Prayer, which we've prayed already.

You prayed, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. You don't make God's name any more holy than it is. But we're praying that his name would be seen as holy, treated as holy in our lives and in the lives of others.

Just so. Be exalted above the heavens. God already is exalted. There is no one higher or happier or holier than God.

[15:04] So when we pray or sing, be exalted, we're not asking God to move up a notch. We're saying, O Lord, let everyone see how amazing, just how remarkable you are.

And I think the two parts of that prayer belong together. Be exalted, O Lord, above the heavens. Let your glory cover the earth. It is as his glory covers the earth, like a tablecloth.

As he spreads his glory over the earth, that is how he is exalted. Or put it the other way around. He exalts himself to spread his glory. Just think about this for a moment.

What makes God's glory glorious is he gives it away. He shares it. He sends out his love and his faithfulness. He sends out himself. This is the God who is the most high God who seeks us and serves us and saves us.

Gives himself to us in the person of his son. The other gods, they're tribal deities. They exalt themselves by demanding service.

[16:15] But our God exalts himself by stooping low and showing love and mercy. He exalts himself in serving those who trust in him.

He sends out his love and his truth to meet our needs instead of demanding us to meet his needs. And I think without the exaltation of the glory of God, this world is a very empty place.

We live in an empty world without the glory of God. We fill it with all sorts of things, with toys and trinkets and trivialities. But in the first creation, remember, right back in the first chapter of the Bible, it was God's great purpose to fill the world with his glory, to fill our lives.

He takes that lifeless void and fills it with goodness. And when we go to the end of the Bible, we find God's people face to face, filling them with fruit and healing and the blessing of his presence.

And I think the richest irony about this psalm, if we step back from it for just a moment, is that David here is prophesying and standing in the footsteps of the Messiah, the coming true Messiah, who God sent from heaven with all the fullness of God dwelt in him bodily, who gives over that fullness to death.

[17:33] And God raises him from the dead and gives Jesus as head over all things to the church, which is his body. Listen, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

So let me try and make application. Just two things I think we want to take away from this. How do we do this? What does this mean for me today and tomorrow? How do we connect the cave and the cloud?

And I just, I want to say two things. The first is pray in the cave. I know it's obvious, very, very obvious, but this is a prayer.

It's a prayer to God. He's in distress. He's not panicking or politicking or strategizing or organizing. He's trusting and seeking the glory of God.

It's in prayer, you see, we receive the assurance from God that he will send from heaven. It's in prayer we learn how to rest. We don't have time, but if you just look at verse four, it should be translated, my soul is in the midst of lions.

[18:48] I can lie down amid fiery beasts. The beasts are still there, but because I'm praying to God most high, I'm able to lie down there.

He's still in the cave. But in prayer, his heart is filled with God and the confines and the constriction of the cave drop away because in God we have something that's much greater, greater than life itself, greater than our hearts can contain.

And the mark of that is the growing desire that God would be exalted above the heaven, that his glory would cover the earth. So pray in the cave. And secondly and finally, pray out of the cave.

And this afternoon, if you get time, go through Psalm 57 because David uses the same spatial language he used about God about himself.

Very interesting to chase it through. In verse one, he says, I take refuge in God, in the shadow of his wings. In verse six, my soul is bowed down, not burdened, but humbled.

[19:58] And in verse seven, my heart is set on God. My heart is set on God, in God, under God. And I don't want to pretend this is easy.

I don't think this comes naturally. And sometimes you pray and I finish praying and all I can think about is the cave and the fiery beasts around me. And what we do, I think, is what David does here. We keep on praying. We focus on the grace and glory of God. And we remember that what is the confining place of greatest difficulty can become the place of grace and the space of goodness. So we set our hearts on God, in God and under God. And sometimes, just sometimes, what happens is the glory of God then begins to overflow. And I think that explains what happens from verse eight onwards.

So let me just read these words. David says, Awake my glory. He's speaking about himself. All that's best about me.

[ 21 : 05 ] Wake up, he says. Awake, O harp and lyre. I'll awake the dawn. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples. I'll sing praises to you among the nations, as Jesus does now.

For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. be exalted above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. That's our prayer today and every day.

Amen.