

Psalm 57

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

When others seem to be against you and there's nothing you can do to change it, when you feel that there's no easy escape from the difficulties you are facing, what do you do?

How do you respond in hard circumstances? And you know, your circumstances may be severe or they may be trivial.

You may be facing a life-threatening illness or you may have spilled your coffee all over your clothes five minutes before you walked out the door to come to church this morning. But no matter how serious or how trivial your circumstances, when they are difficult, when they are hard, things aren't going your way.

[1 : 58] How do you respond? I don't know if you're like me, but I know that I have an unerring heart response to it, and that is that I want to fix it.

And I might fix it by trying to correct it and make it right, or I might want to fix it by escaping it and simply getting out of it.

But whatever I'm trying to do, my heart cry is, make it stop. Whatever the circumstance I'm facing, I want to make it stop, either by making it right or by removing myself from it.

And you know, I don't just simply want to make it stop, but I become consumed by it. I find that this then becomes my number one priority when life doesn't go the way I think it ought to, is how do I fix it?

And in doing this, then all of my life energies and all of my thoughts, and in fact, the very affections of my heart, become focused on this task of somehow addressing my situation, my circumstances.

[3 : 13] I become distracted from everything else by this. And you know what I find? I become a fairly joyless person when I do this.

When I am trying to fix my life one way or another, I am not a joyful person. Maybe you, like me, are tempted in those situations to run, to escape somehow, to find some pleasure of the world, some distraction, some little entertainment.

Some little entertainment to take the sting out of your disappointment. Some of you may have the impulse to become the crusader, to not only fix it in your life, but to fix the whole world so it will never happen again.

But whatever it is, the driving force is, in the face of hard circumstances, to want to fix in some way or another.

And where is God in this? Where is God in this process of wanting to fix the world? Well, it seems that often, as circumstances are hard, as things don't go our way, as it builds up over time, our hearts turn to bitterness, resentment.

[4 : 39] We question God. We question God. We ask God, God, why does it have to be so hard? And that's if we account for God at all.

Sometimes, in the midst of a circumstance that we want to fix, we just exclude Him altogether. And in our frustration and our drivenness or our escapism or whatever it is, we end up actually living in despair because there's no God in there at all.

It's just us and our circumstances. Well, as we turn to Psalm 57 this morning, we will find that there is another way.

I forgot to note it, but it's in your bulletin. It's probably right in the middle of your Bible, Psalm 57, if you want to turn there with me. And as we turn and look at that together, this psalm is going to point us beyond our circumstances.

It's going to point us to something else. Today, our psalm points us to the glory of God. And so, let's read it together and then explore it.

[5 : 50] Psalm 57. Be merciful to me, O God. Be merciful to me. For in you, my soul takes refuge. In the shadow of your wings, I will take refuge.

Till the storms of destruction pass by, I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills His purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me.

He will put to shame Him who tramples me. God will send out His steadfast love and His faithfulness. My soul is in the midst of lions.

I lie down among fiery beasts, the children of man whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth. They set a net for my steps. My soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way.

[6 : 51] But they have fallen into it themselves. My heart is steadfast, O God. My heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody.

Awake, my glory. Awake, O harp and lyre. I will awake the dawn. I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples. I will sing praises to You among the nations.

For Your steadfast love is great to the heavens and Your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Let Your glory be over all the earth. Let's pray. God, we pray this morning that You would show us Your glory.

Even as Moses long ago stood on the mountain and pleaded for You, saying, Who will we be, God, if You do not go with us?

[7 : 55] So go with us and show us Your glory. God, we pray this morning that You would show us Your glory. That our hearts might be captured by all the greatness of who You are.

Spirit, we pray that You would open our hearts to the truth of Your Word this morning. I pray that You would give me words to speak. That You would be exalted, O God.

That Your glory would be seen. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. When you look at the superscription, you realize the situation that David is in.

Remember, this is David who at the tender age of, we don't know, young, he was anointed to be the future king of Israel while he was still a shepherd of his father's sheep.

We know that he was the one who God led to the front lines in the battle against the Philistines and won a tremendous victory over the giant Goliath and sent the enemies of God's people scattering.

[9 : 08] This is the David who was brought in to the king's house, who was made a leader and a captain in the army and who had great success. And yet, as we see in the superscription, he is now in a cave pursued by that very king.

Saul is now seeking his life in his jealousy, in his hard heart. He has now spent time pursuing David, and David is on the run.

David's army is outmanned six to one probably. A small band against a large army seeking to capture and destroy him.

And not only that, but David has become poison to others who seek to help him. Earlier in the account in 1 Samuel, if you remember a couple weeks ago, Pastor Nick preached on the psalm that talked about Doeg the Edomite.

Those who helped David lost their lives because of the vengeful wrath of Saul. His circumstances were dire. You see how he describes them in the psalm.

[10 : 23] In verse 1, he says, they are like a storm of destruction. Verse 2 says, they want to trample me. I'm sorry, verse 4.

They want to trample me. It says that they are like... He is surrounded like a man camping out in the wilderness where he knows that there are dangerous wild beasts and that he's encircled by these lions prowling.

Imagine him putting his head down every night, and every snap of a twig, every sound that he doesn't know what it is will make him jump. That's the kind of danger that he is in.

They're like hunters laying traps with nets and pits to capture him and to destroy him. They seek his death. And in the midst of these most difficult circumstances, and in the face of the disappointment that he must be feeling and at times he must have, you would have thought, humanly thought, God, what are you doing?

I'm going to be the anointed king, and I'm hiding in a cave. In the midst of this, David does not seek to fix his circumstances.

[11:48] He does not seek, in fact, to escape his situation. But instead, he employs a different strategy to respond to his circumstances.

Rather than fixing his circumstances, he fixes his heart and his eyes on the glory of God. And this is what I want us to hear this morning, is that it is not in fixing our circumstances, but in fixing our eyes on the glory of God, that there is real help for us today.

Want to unpack the word glory? John already did it some at the beginning of the service, but just to take it one step further, in the Old Testament, according to a biblical scholar, the Old Testament, the word translated glory was originally expressed in the idea of weight.

And so glory came to be applied to the characteristic of a person that makes him weighty, that makes him... that is, that in the eyes of other people, they are seen as weighty, and it prompts them to honor him.

And to respect him. So it is the characteristics of a person that makes them honorable or praiseworthy. And that's what glory is.

[13:11] And you see in this psalm, this refrain in verse 5 and verse 11, Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be seen over all the earth.

And this is David's cry in the midst of his circumstances. And as we see that refrain frame our psalm, we see it gives us our structure as well.

The first part of the psalm gives us David looking to a God whose glory fills him with confidence.

And the second part from 6 to 11 is David looking to a God whose glory fills him with praise.

So first, a God whose glory gives him confidence. One of the things that struck me is that this psalm starts out like a lament.

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful. And many other psalms will continue in this strain for long... for verse upon verse upon verse. But David almost immediately in this psalm turns to statements instead of confidence.

[14:16] He knew how needy he was and how dire his circumstance was. He said, God, I need your mercy. I need your grace.

I need you to save me because I can't save myself. I need you to be my refuge because I don't have the wherewithal to be my own refuge.

And yet, in the midst of all of that neediness, he says, God, I am confident in you.

Look, in verse 2, he says, I am confident that you are a God who will fulfill your purposes in my life. My life is in your hands and I won't be let go. Verse 3 is confidence.

He will send from heaven and save me. He will send his steadfast love and his faithfulness. He will put to shame those who trample me.

[15:20] He had confidence in God that he would do all of these things. He had confidence because he knew that God was a God who was able to do all of these things.

Think about David's story. Think about what he could remember. In his past, he saw God help him as he was a shepherd fighting against lions and wolves and God preserved his life.

He saw God preserve him as he walked onto the battlefield against Goliath. He saw God preserve him when Saul tried to kill him while he was still living in the palace.

David had seen God's faithfulness and there was a track record of it. There was also a promise.

There was a promise of the anointing that David had received that Samuel came and anointed him and said, you will be the king one day.

How will God anoint him and then kill him? He will live. To reign on the throne of Israel. And not only that, but David's confidence is in the steadfast love and faithfulness of God.

[16:37] You see it in verse 3. And friends, any Hebrew reading this text, these words, steadfast love and faithfulness, will resound. And I'm hoping you will hear me say this enough from this pulpit that you'll begin to see it for yourself.

Steadfast love and faithfulness, these are the words that God used on Mount Sinai when Moses cried out, God, show me your glory. God said, you can't see my glory and live, but I will put you in the cleft of the rock and I will pass by and I will declare to you my name.

And the name is the Lord, the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. This is who God is. And David knew that.

And so both from the past faithfulness of God and the future promises of God and the covenant reality of who God is and how he has revealed himself, David faced his situation with great confidence.

Now some of you may be sitting there and thinking, how could he do that? I mean, really, how could God be trustworthy if all these terrible things are happening to David?

[17 : 58] And maybe you're asking that question because that's a question you ask in your own life. How can God be trustworthy? How can this glory be so wonderful if my life is so messed up, if my life is so hard, if my circumstances don't get better?

How can God be good? Friends, that's a huge question. I can't give you the full-blown answer. But what I want you to see is that David's confidence and our confidence, while it may not be watertight, it is reasonable.

Because we too can look back and see God's faithfulness. For many of you, you can think of instances in your life when God has provided for you, when God has protected you, when God has taken care of you in particular ways.

And God wants you to remember those times and cling to them when you don't see Him doing it right now. There are promises that God has given to His people.

[19 : 09] I will never leave you nor forsake you. Though you die, yet you will live if you have believed in Me. There are promises that God has given.

He is a heavenly Father who knows what you need. He will not give you stone when you ask Him for bread. And so there's both past faithfulness and future promises that are yours as much as they are for David.

And so there is a reasonableness to trusting in God even when right now you can't see it. because the glory of God has been revealed in so many various ways, in so many rich ways, that David's confidence is reasonable.

And I say to you, it is reasonable as well for you to have confidence in this, in this God, in this God who has shown His glory in so many ways.

most of all, and we'll return to this later, in the cross of Jesus Christ, He who loved us enough to die in our place and to take our sin and to rise again, God would not let His anointed one see death, but He would let Him live.

[20 : 38] He would raise Him again. And that is the ground of our confidence because that is the display of the glory of God.

And so for you this morning, the question I wanted to ask is, do you let your circumstances define you? Have you allowed your desire to fix your circumstances, to consume you, and to distract you? Father, friends, our psalm this morning points us to a different way, to confess your need for God, to rehearse His faithfulness and His promises to you.

And it is okay to cry out for help. It is good to say, God, will You help me in my circumstances? Will You heal me? Will You reconcile this situation?

It is okay to cry out for those things and to ask God to do them. But ultimately, our confidence is not in God doing those things, but in the glory of God Himself.

[21 : 56] That He is a God who can save you from every circumstance. And if He can, if He will, He can. He can save you and so we set our heart and our hope on Him.

The second half of the psalm moves beyond just this statement of confidence in God to an even, perhaps, more surprising response. For we see David fixing his eyes on a God whose glory fills him with praise.

in the midst of his circumstances, he is in the back of the cave and likely, not only is he in the back of the cave, but Saul and his army are camped in the front of the cave between him and the exit. David is not filled with worry or fear. Instead, he is filled with praise. Look with me again at the psalm starting in verse 7.

My heart is steadfast, O God. My heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody to you. He calls to his heart, awake!

[23 : 11] He calls to the instruments, awake! He says, I will be up before the dawn. I will awaken the dawn with my praises to this God in the middle of these incredibly hard circumstances.

He would be the one singing, crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon the throne. Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for me. This is what's happening in David's heart.

He's not looking at his circumstances. He's looking up at the glory of God and his heart is filled with praise. And we see again in verses 9 and 10, thanksgiving.

I will give thanks to you among the peoples. I will sing praises to you among the nations. Why? And I don't have to explain this to you, right?

I just did it. For your steadfast love is great to the heavens and your faithfulness to the clouds because you are a God who has made a covenant with his people and you in your glory will not forsake me.

[24 : 30] And so, instead of seeing my circumstances and being consumed with worry, being consumed with fear, trying desperately to fix it, in fact, interestingly, in this account, if we place it right in the story, David had a chance to kill Saul and to fix the situation himself and he didn't because Saul was God's anointed one and David chose to honor God and to honor Saul because of what God had done for him.

And he chose not to fix his circumstances when he could because of his commitment to God and God's glory in all that he did.

and so he did not try to fix his circumstances but he fixed his heart on the glory of God and up from his heart welled steadfastness, joy, praise, thanksgiving.

And again, our refrain, be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all of the earth.

God, may the world see your grace and mercy, your power and strength, your steadfastness and faithfulness, your righteousness and justice, your right to be honored and worshipped and served.

[26 : 03] May all the world see it. That is my heart's cry. That is my greatest desire. God's cry. So again, friends, maybe some of you are thinking, well this sounds like a whole lot of really religious self-talk.

Isn't this just the power of positive thinking? I think things are going to get better and I believe in God so I'll sort of pin it on Him. But isn't this just trying to hope that things are better?

I don't know if you've ever read Voltaire's *Candide*. There's a character in it named Pangloss who walks around the world saying, this is the best of all possible worlds in the face of dire circumstances and terrible suffering.

And do you know what? Voltaire was making fun of the church and the church's hope in God as he wrote that. And maybe you think that too.

Maybe you're sitting there going, this is just a bunch of hopeful, unbelievable, like mysticism.

[27 : 15] You think that the world is going to be better just because you hope it will be? And you pin it on God? No, I don't think it's that. That's a straw man.

That's an empty picture. Because the amazing thing is that David, and note this, David did not say, my circumstances are fine. I'm great. This is not hard.

This is easy. We rehearsed it earlier. David walked through how dire his circumstances were. He said, the storms of destruction ride over me again and again and again.

The men who seek me have these sharp teeth. They're seeking to devour me and trample me.

David is not saying the world is not hard.

He is not saying that your circumstances are not dire. He is not saying that the world is going all as it ought to be in ease and comfort.

[28 : 19] What David is saying is in the midst of the very hard things, in the midst of the most dire circumstances, as well as the most trivial inconveniences, there is something greater that we were made for.

There is a deeper reality of God and His glory and His kingdom and His purposes in the world. And this is the foundation upon which then we experience our circumstances.

And when we see that foundation, it undergirds and shapes not only what these circumstances truly are, but also how we can respond to them.

David says we can look beyond the circumstances to the eternal weight of glory of a God who is faithful, of a God who is love, of a God who sets His strength and His power to do right and to do good in the world.

Not to fix it, but to bring glory to Himself. Do you remember the story?

[29 : 38] Tragedy happens and they ask Jesus, Jesus, why did this happen? Who sinned? Who is to blame that this was God's judgment? Jesus said, no, no, you're thinking about this wrong.

This happens so that you might see the glory of God. So you might see a God who is able to save. So you might see a God who is able to redeem out of the pit, out of the most difficult circumstances. Friends, when we see this kind of a God, we are able, like David, to be steadfast, not consumed with worry or anxiety, not pursuing our strategies of escaping or correcting, not fixing them, but in the midst of them, fixing our eyes, fixing our eyes on God whom we were made for.

The Westminster Catechism tells us that the chief end of man, that is, the reason for which we were created, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

That is, to see Him in all of His manifest glory and to reflect back to Him the praise and the honor and the worship and the service that is due.

[31 : 02] And in doing that, we enjoy Him and we are satisfied at the very core of our soul. And we no longer seek the satisfaction of a comfortable life, of an easy life, of a life where our circumstances are not hard.

But instead, we seek this God and with Paul we can say, whether we live or we die, our greatest desire is that God would be glorified in us.

In us. this is my greatest hope for us as a church as well as for each of us individually.

My hope is that in our circumstances, when they are hard, we do not become distracted and consumed with fixing all the little things that don't go just as we planned.

Oh, we want to pursue excellence. Oh, we want to pursue goodness. We want to pursue good things in our midst. But friends, if we are a church that is consumed with the glory of God, if we lift our eyes out of our circumstances, what God will do in us and through us, how God will make the glory of the gospel shine in us, resound in us.

[32 : 33] And friends, of course, we, even more than David, have a greater reason to fix our eyes on the glory of God because we have seen Him.

We have seen Him come. John 1.14, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, the glory of the only begotten One, the One who has come from the Father.

We have seen His glory. And the passage, it was read earlier from John 12. If you ever want to read the book of John, watch this.

Jesus says, my hour has not yet come, my hour has not yet come, my hour has not yet come, my hour has not yet come. And then in chapter 12, He says, now has the hour have come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

He says, unless a wheat of grain falls to the ground and dies, it cannot produce fruit. Where is the greatest glory of God? Where have we seen God show His past faithfulness and His future promises and His covenant love most clearly?

[33 : 47] You know the answer to this already. It is at the cross of Jesus Christ and in His resurrection where He did not forsake His justice, but also committed to showing grace and mercy to sinners like you and me.

He sent His own Son. Jesus displays this glory by taking the punishment for our wrath, by taking the alienation, He who was separated from God so that we might be brought back to God.

He who faced the worst circumstances ever on this earth as God poured out on Him the wrath against the sin of the world so that we might not, so that we might be saved.

This is where we see it. And you know what? This glorious Christ who has died and risen for us, He does not promise to fix our circumstances in this life.

In fact, He says, if I suffered, you will suffer too. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too. The message of the gospel is not that it will make your life easier.

[35 : 10] In fact, it often means your life will be harder and your circumstances will be filled with greater opposition and difficulty. And yet, in that, as Paul says in Corinthians 4, we carry around the death of Christ in us so that the very life of Christ may also be manifested in our mortal bodies.

The glory of Christ is that the worst circumstances here on earth cannot shake the glory that God has set on us and that we have Christ in us, the hope of glory, and we know that one day Christ will return and He will make all things right and we will be raised with Him.

And finally, God will fix the circumstances of the world in His judgment on evil and sin, in His exalting of those who have put their faith and trust and confidence in Christ.

So, friends, this morning, if you are here and your circumstances are hard, I appeal to you.

This psalm gives you language. It gives you words to cry out to God with. And it may be a cry that has no heart behind it when you first say it because you're so overwhelmed and so filled.

[36 : 58] But I pray that you would take this psalm and put it on your lips this week. Be exalted, O God. Be exalted in my life. Be exalted in our church.

Be exalted in our city. Let your glory be seen. Awake, my soul, and sing. I will give thanks and sing praises to you.

This psalm gives you language in the worst circumstances. And friends, if you're here this morning and you've never trusted in Christ, I hope that you will look at His glory at the cross and you will think this is what you were made for and this is the only place where your circumstances ultimately can be made sense of and can find ultimate hope and resolution in.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I want to end with a quote. It's from a book called Shattered Dreams written by Larry Crabb.

This is a testimony of a man who he had been counseling as he worked through it and I want to leave these words with you. Faith, as I'm growing to understand it more, is about looking beyond my circumstances to a person.

[38 : 19] To have faith in better circumstances, even in God creating better circumstances is not true faith. I want to be the kind of man who can watch every dream go down in flames and still yearn to be intimately involved in kingdom living, intimately involved with my friend, the King, and still be willing to take another risk just because it delights him.

And my flesh shivers to think about that. Friends, if all of your dreams go down in flame, will you fix your heart on the glory of God?

Will you continue to trust in Him and have confidence in Him? Sing praises to Him because He's loved you so well.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Spirit, we ask that you would show us where we have been committed to fixing, committed to trying to correct or to escape our circumstances in pursuit of an easier or a more comfortable life.

God, we pray that as you show us this, that you would, Lord, remind us and show us your glory. Lord, capture our hearts.

[39 : 50] Lord, for we can't simply will ourselves to do this, but we plead for you. Capture our hearts with your glory, with your steadfast love, with your faithfulness, so that we might be filled with confidence and songs of praise.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.