

Psalm 55

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you all this morning. Our sermon text today is Psalm 55. We're going to continue in our summer series in the Psalms.

Hey, there we are. Psalm 55, that's where we're at this morning. It's page 475 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn along there with me. We're going to continue our series called Thirsting for God. Good series title for a hot New Haven summer. Let me pray for us as we turn to God's Word.

Oh, Lord God, we do indeed thirst for you. God, we thirst for you because we have dug out so many cisterns that can't hold water, and we go to them and we try to drink and we find that the water is just stale and stagnant.

Lord, but we know that created things are not for what our hearts were created for, to love and to cherish eternally, God, but to love and to cherish you and to find our deepest satisfaction in you and to be plunged into the depths of your love for us.

[1 : 14] So, Father, as we come to your Word this morning, we pray that indeed your Spirit would come and allow us to drink deeply from the fountain of your presence as we come to you in your Word.

So, God, speak so that we might listen, and in hearing may we be fulfilled. God, we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Psalm 55. Let me read this for us.

To the choir master with stringed instruments, a mascal of David. James, I'm going to pull this down a little bit. Is that all right? No, don't do that. I feel like I'm in an echo chamber. Am I in an echo chamber? No.

How's that? Is that a little better? Well, that's a little better. Okay. Psalm 55. To the choir master with stringed instruments, a mascal of David. Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy.

Attend to me and answer me. I'm restless in my complaint, and I'm... ..because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

[2 : 32] My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me, and I say, oh, that I had wings like a dove. I would fly away and be at rest.

Yes, I would wander far away. I would lodge in the wilderness. I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest. Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues, for I see violence and strife in the city.

Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it. Ruin is in its midst. Oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace. For it is not an enemy who taunts me, then I could bear it.

It's not an adversary who deals insolent with me, then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.

We used to take counsel together. Within God's house, we walked in the throng. Let death steal over them. Let them go down to Sheol alive, for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.

[3 : 40] But I call to God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I waged, for many are arrayed against me.

God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, because I do not change and do not fear God. My companion stretched out his hand against his friends.

He violated his covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain

you.

He will never permit the righteous to be moved. But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction. Men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in you.

Now, I think you notice that our psalm this morning is about betrayal. You see that in verses 12 through 14, and again in verses 20 through 21.

[4 : 51] There, David describes someone who once was his close friend, his intimate companion. He talks about how they used to take sweet counsel together, or even go to the worshiping assembly together.

You know, finding a good friend, a really good friend, is a gift and a blessing, isn't it? Many of us find only a handful of true, intimate friends in this life.

But you see, as humans, created in God's image, we were created for relationship. The triune God is a relational God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So when we find a true friend, when we forge friendships, the sweetness that we experience in them, well, that's because we're living out something deep in the very core of our God-given, God-given, imaged nature.

In other words, friendship, you see, is an echo. It's a reflection, not just the very core of our human nature, but of ultimate reality of self, of God's very self. And you know, that's why betrayal is one of the most painful experiences that we can imagine.

It cuts against the grain of who we were created to be. And it's that painful experience of betrayal that lies behind this psalm.

[6 : 22] David says in verse 20, He violated His covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in His heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. If He were an enemy, I could handle it, David says.

If He were my adversary, I could at least deal with it. But it was you, he says, my friend. Betrayal. So now what are we to learn about betrayal from this psalm?

Well, in many ways, verse 22 is the climax or the main point of the whole thing. And we can actually look at the whole of this psalm through the lens of that verse. It helps to bring all the various pieces together and into focus.

And here, I think we see three things through the lens of verse 22. We see that there's a burden and we see that there's a duty and we see that there's ultimately a promise.

In other words, there's a burden that betrayal creates in our hearts. But betrayal also presents a duty before us. And ultimately, it holds out a promise.

[7 : 34] So that's what we're going to look at this morning, those three things. So first, look with me at the burden. In verse 22, David calls our experience of betrayal just that, a burden. Back in verse 3, we see that it's like trouble has been dropped on him like a stone.

And of course, it's not an external weight that David's talking about, but an internal one. Verse 4, it's his heart. And his heart is in anguish. Now, that word for anguish is a word that's used of pregnant women when they go into labor for their labor pains.

Now, as you can probably guess, I've never personally been in labor. But I've watched it a couple times. And here's what I've learned secondhand about labor.

First, it's total. Your whole body is involved. There isn't an inch of you that doesn't feel like it's going through a labor pain. And second, it's sudden. You really can't predict when it's going to start.

It comes. And third, it's kind of scary. There are moments when you don't think you're going to get through it alive. And David's saying, that's what betrayal does to the heart.

[8 : 49] A total, sudden, scary, wrenching burden. And if you think that's being a bit melodramatic, I think it's helpful to remember who's writing this psalm.

You know, David wasn't the skinny kid in your freshman English class who would write bitter poems on his blog every time a girl didn't accept his friend request on Facebook. You know what I'm talking about?

David was a war chieftain, so successful in battle that people used to sing songs about how he struck down the 10,000s. David was a guy who went out and collected 200 foreskins as the bridal price for his wife.

That's a tough dude, right? The Bible doesn't necessarily condone that, by the way, but hey, there it is. David, with all of his thick skin, right? So this isn't melodramatic.

David was certainly a passionate man, but I don't think he was exaggerating when he described the experience of betrayal and its burden.

[10:00] Now, you have to see that the burden of betrayal naturally does two things in our hearts, and we see both of them in this psalm. On the one hand, it creates a longing for escape, and on the other hand, it creates a longing for justice.

Now, in verses 4 through 8, you remember, you saw that longing for escape. David says, oh, that I had wings like a dove, I would fly away and be at rest. Perhaps you've been in David's shoes. You know, the burden gets so unbearable that you just want to get out. You just want to get away. You just want to drop everything and leave. That's a very natural response to betrayal. And then, and then in verses 9 through 11, and again in verse 15, we see this longing for justice. When we're betrayed, we know that a wrong has been done, and we long for it to be put right. Now, as you scan through those verses, I know at first glance, those verses sound like David's just kind of praying for personal vengeance, right? He's praying that God would sort of even the score for him. But when you look more closely, that's not actually what's going on.

[11:05] Not at all. You see, David's main concern in verses 9 through 11 and verse 15 isn't his own personal hurt. Not his own personal hurt, but the welfare of the city, right?

Do you see that? Verse 9, the city, the city is supposed to be a place of safety, but these guys are making it a place of violence. And the walls are supposed to be things that keep evil out, but they're using them to sort of promote evil within.

In verse 11, the marketplace is meant to be a place of equity and fair trade, but they filled it with fraud. Sometimes when we're betrayed, we can have a moment of clarity and see how it's not just about us, but about how other people are going to be hurt or damaged or led astray. And in those moments of clarity, we long for justice. Not for our own personal score to be settled, but for that ever-widening circle of wrong to be put right, for the evil and for the pain to stop spreading and to stop getting worse.

So when we're betrayed, it's like a burden and we naturally long for escape and we long for justice, but you know, here's the problem. Here's where it gets pretty complicated. You see, this burden of betrayal in our hearts becomes almost immediately spiritually dangerous, spiritually deadly.

[12:35] When we experience betrayal, it's as if we're a person treading water who's suddenly been strapped with a 200-pound weight. And you know, we might stay afloat for a couple of seconds if we're a really strong swimmer, but sooner or later we're all going to sink.

And here's what it looks like to sink under the weight of the burden of betrayal. That natural longing for escape from the situation quickly becomes a heart that never trusts anyone ever again. Perhaps you've known people like this. People who were burned relationally in the past and now they refuse to open up to anyone so they stay walled off and alone and no one can come in. They flew into the wilderness for rest, but their hearts got cold. And oftentimes this whole heart attitude is driven by fear, isn't it?

Fear that we'll be hurt again and rather than be hurt, we never get close to anyone ever again and we never love anyone ever again. And of course we know that that means spiritual death.

[13:44] Here's how C.S. Lewis put it. He says, love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal.

Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your own selfishness.

But in that casket safe, dark, motionless, airless, your heart will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is hell. That's one way the burden of betrayal becomes spiritually deadly as we sink under its weight.

That natural longing for escape becomes a hard shell of self-protection and self-preservation where we never trust and we never love and we never open up again.

[15:00] But the second way it's spiritually dangerous is that it takes that natural longing for justice and it quickly twists it into selfishness and self-righteousness.

It's as if the experience of betrayal starts to bend us in on ourselves. Like a mirror that once reflected light out to the world it starts to curve in on itself and only reflects back what's already there and we become totally self-absorbed.

And this can take many forms, can't it? We can start to view ourselves only and always as the victim and everyone else must cater to our needs and attend to our hurts. Or perhaps in that state

of heart we never allow ourselves to see our own faults and failures to admit that we could be wrong and we put ourselves in the place of judgment over other people and we feel as if we actually have the right to do so after all the hurt and the betrayal that we've experienced.

Or perhaps as we curve in on ourselves we start to despise ourselves and we start to hate what we see and self-pity just consumes us.

But because the focus always remains on ourself we can never escape. And as the burden of betrayal causes us to sink further down into darkness less and less light enters in and we bend more and more and more in upon ourselves.

[16:27] So this is what the burden of betrayal this is the danger this is what it will create in you. On the one hand a heart that never trusts and a heart that never lets others in and on the other hand a heart that never admits wrong is always the victim is always consumed by self-pity always pushing people away.

You see there's a tragic irony here isn't there? In betrayal you lose a friend but if you can't deal with the burden of betrayal it will eventually destroy your capacity to ever be a friend at all.

Now of course this is a burden no one would choose in fact the Hebrew word for burden here is literally the word for your lot something that's given to you. No one chooses to be betrayed but you know the fact that even David was betrayed tells us that being a believer being a Christian doesn't make us immune from this.

It will come. We can expect it sooner or later and as we've seen it will break us if we're not prepared and it will cause us to sink down into that coldness and selfishness and of course I would never wish betrayal upon anyone but you know we can't promise it won't come and in fact who of us hasn't already felt it right?

if even in small ways perhaps from a friend or that biting word from a spouse or from the child who's gone out of home and has never come back or from a colleague at work or even from a fellow church member and if you've felt it then you've already begun to feel its burden causing you to sink.

[18:22] And the question is what will you do? What will you do with this burden? And that brings us to our second point the duty of the betrayed verse 22 again cast your burden on the Lord in other words something beautiful opens up for us in this song the possibility opens up before us that we need no longer carry this burden but we can cast it and in fact the psalm is not just inviting us to do so but it's commanding us to do so cast your burden on the Lord and in many ways that's what this whole psalm is it's David doing just that casting his burden on the Lord David's both telling us to do so and he's showing us how to do it so we have a lot to learn from this psalm and it's critical how does David cast his burden on the Lord well ultimately he prays and he doesn't just pray the way we normally pray right we read this psalm and you thought man this guy's intense right

I mean I've never prayed a prayer like this in my life but he's showing us the kind of prayers we need to be praying and we see here two things we see how he prays and we see what he prays so first how he prays how does David pray in this psalm and I think we see two things it's frequent and it's fervent it's passionate and it's persistent it's both it's fervent he's calling out to God he says attend to me and answer me God in verse 2 all the anguish and turmoil that David feels in his heart he's letting it loose to God it's passionate but this prayer is also frequent evening and morning and at noon verse 17 says you know isn't it funny and isn't it common that when we experience hurt or when things take a turn for worse in our life we often let the sort of structure of our spiritual life go downhill and our self-discipline go downhill we think we kind of get a pass because we're undergoing hardship but you know this is exactly the time when we need to be all the more diligent all the more structured because the stakes are so much higher

David says evening and morning and noon I'm calling out to you God I'm not going to let those regular hours of prayer slip especially not now when I need you the most and are calling out to God it has to be frequent in these moments doesn't it because healing from betrayal is not a once and done sort of thing our hearts don't just magically heal overnight when we say a prayer right we need to go back to the Lord again and again and again with our burden and cast it on him you know I think it's interesting when we see how David prays here how he's teaching us to pray I think we can see now why we can't just cast this burden on a human friend alone of course having human friends to turn to is critical in moments of hurt and betrayal but you know even the best human friend can't sustain all the fervent and frequent casting that needs to take place when you've been betrayed you'll wear anyone out if you try and that's why we have to cast it on the

Lord so that's the how David prays and now the what what does David pray well first see here how he acknowledges his emotions he doesn't pretty himself up for God he's honest he admits that he's restless and moaning he admits that he's terrified he admits that he wants to run away and that's all a part of casting our burden on the Lord casting our honest emotions that we feel upon him in prayer and then second what else does he do not just acknowledging his emotions but acknowledging the sort of gritty reality of his situation he sort of brings his betrayer before the Lord he doesn't try to whitewash the situation he isn't trying to work up a forgiving spirit before he prays about this person in particular again he's honest God this is what happened and honestly I don't know what to do about it I wish it were an enemy I wish it were an adversary but it's my friend and his words have cut me like swords so he brings his situation before God in honesty but third what does

David pray prays a prayer of trust in God's redemption and you know this is the real meat of casting our burden on the Lord how often do we only stop at the first two sort of acknowledging our emotions and acknowledging our situations and we don't push on into the real heart of prayer we don't push on into the character of God so what does David confess and trust in here first that God hears verse 16 is a turning point in the psalm and what does he say in those verses he hears my voice verse 19 God will give ear how often have we been disappointed by human friends who don't have the time even to listen and yet here is

[24 : 22] David saying that we have a true friend who always hears and who always will give ear whenever we call God hears next David confesses that God redeems verse 16 the Lord will save me verse 18 he redeems my soul in safety literally he says he redeems my soul into shalom into the very holistic peace of God you remember what David was looking for back in verse 6 when he was longing for escape in escape he was trying to find rest for his restless heart but now he's come to see that there's an even better rest that can be had God's own peace and after all we know that running away doesn't work right we know that escape doesn't actually work one writer put it this way no wings of doves or eagles could bear us away from the sorrows of a trembling heart inward grief knows nothing of place you see what he's saying if the grief is inside of you it doesn't matter where you go it's still there but

David says he the Lord redeems my soul into his peace it's in him where we find the rest that we long for and that we thirst for when we're betrayed God redeems third David confesses that God humbles verse 19 God will give ear and humble them here is the justice that David is longing for in this verse he's trusting that God is the judge and not him he doesn't have to be God will take care of it he trusts that God will make things right finally and fourthly David trusts and confess that God reigns see that little line in verse 19 he who is enthroned from of old Selah which most scholars think that that little word Selah is sort of a moment of pause in the singing of the song for meditation and reflection he who is enthroned from of old at the end and at the last

David lifts up his thoughts to God's majestic and eternal kingship this is the one who hears David says this is the one who defends you and who is for you an everlasting God the eternal one who does not change and who does not break any of his promises and who is utterly completely trustworthy he who is enthroned from of old so this is what it looks like to cast our burden on the Lord on the one hand to pray fervently and to pray frequently but what do we pray we bring our honest emotions and our honest situation before him but ultimately we rest our minds on him and we remember and we confess that he hears and that he redeems and that he humbles and ultimately that he reigns and he does not change even in the midst of our own personal betrayal so friends here's the question for all of us will you carry your burden or will you cast it carry it and it will crush you but if you cast it on him here's what he promises he will sustain you and that's our third and last point the promise that's held out to the betrayed cast your burden on the

Lord verse 22 says and he will sustain you note that he doesn't promise to whisk us away or take all the hurt and pain immediately but rather to sustain it's a beautiful image isn't it when you look closely you cast your burden on the Lord and he reaches down and he picks up not just your burden but you he sustains you and in betrayal isn't that really what we're looking for and isn't that really what we're longing for for someone to come down and meet us where we are and to embrace us and to sustain us and isn't that the definition of a real friend someone who understands us and even when everyone else and everything else lets us down they won't let us down and you see this psalm is saying that the Lord is just that the Lord is the one who will carry your burden and sustain you even in the heart of personal betrayal but of course we ask how can that be how can

God understand and embrace and sustain me in my personal betrayal we were just saying how God is the eternal sovereign king what is that kind of God know about my betrayal offering but don't you see when you come to this Lord you don't just come to an eternal unchanging king who never breaks a promise yes you come to that but you also come to one who became a servant and who knows exactly what it's like to be betrayed because he was in the garden in his darkest moment in his hour of need Jesus sees the soldiers coming with their torches and their swords and who comes out from the midst of the mob but his friend who betrays him with a kiss friend he knows the pain of betrayal and because he knows it that means he can sustain you in yours you see even when our closest human friends have betrayed us we have an everlasting and sustaining friend we can trust the Lord

[32 : 18] Jesus Christ who was betrayed for us an old hymn I think sums it up well it goes like this it says what a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer oh what peace we often forfeit oh what needless pain we bear all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer do thy friends despise forsake thee take it to the Lord in prayer in his arms he'll take and shield thee thou wilt find a solace there before I close let me say one more thing maybe you're here this morning with a real burden but maybe it's not the one we've actually been discussing maybe the burden that you're carrying is not the burden of being betrayed but the burden of being the betrayer maybe it's a burden of guilt that you bear and you're wondering if there's anyone who can take that burden from you if there's anywhere you can cast that burden that weighs you down and brings anguish to your soul where do you take the burden of wronging another and the guilt that it brings where do you take the guilt and the shame of dishonoring

God and living your own way and the guilt that weighs you down where can you cast a burden like that well friends the answer is again the Lord that is exactly why Christ came not just to bear the burden of the betrayed but all the more to bear the burden of the betrayer he went to the cross for sinners like you and me to stand in your place and to bear your burden and to forgive your sins and to give you a righteousness not your own but yours in him in just a moment Teresa is going to come up and he's going to be baptized and we're going to celebrate this great and awesome public symbol of being washed clean through faith in Christ you see that's what baptism is all about it's a picture it's an image of the way in which

Christ's death and resurrection has washed all of our guilt and sin away how in his death and resurrection and through faith in him the burden of our guilt is unshackled from us and we are free friends that is the promise that's held out to everyone everyone who will repent of sin and trust in Christ today today you can know that the burden on your soul whether betrayed or betrayer you can know that it has been lifted and you can know that he sustains you cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you let's pray together Lord Jesus as we think about the times that we have been hurt and the times when our earthly friends have betrayed us

God we are so glad and thankful that we have a true heavenly friend who never turns away and never forsakes us Lord Jesus that you would go through the horror of betrayal and abandonment and crucifixion for us and Lord not for us in our innocence God who is innocent before you but for us in our guilt God for us in our shame for us in our sin God if we're honest with our own selves this morning who of us has not betrayed another Lord none of us have not in our own way turned away from you so Lord we thank you and praise you for the message of this psalm that we can cast our burden on you and you will sustain us Lord in your death and resurrection our guilt and our shame can be taken away

God God would you give us the courage to cast our burden on you Lord lift us up and hold us and sustain us we pray Amen God God