

To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

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.
² I cry out to God Most High,
 to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
³ He will send from heaven and save me;
 he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah
 God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!
⁴ My soul is in the midst of lions;
 I lie down amid fiery beasts—
 the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
 whose tongues are sharp swords.
⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
 Let your glory be over all the earth!
⁶ They set a net for my steps;
 my soul was bowed down.
 They dug a pit in my way,
 but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah
⁷ My heart is steadfast, O God,
 my heart is steadfast!
 I will sing and make melody!
⁸ Awake, my glory!
 Awake, O harp and lyre!
 I will awake the dawn!
⁹ I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
 I will sing praises to you among the nations.
¹⁰ For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
 your faithfulness to the clouds.
¹¹ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
 Let your glory be over all the earth!

Announcements:

1. Membership is available at info@redemptiondenver.com
2. Bible reading plan
3. Take down Christmas decorations.

Psalm 57 | 2020 in Review, Song from a Cave

The Gulag Archipelago is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's account of his time in the soviet Gulag's in the 40s and 50s. I began reading this book because Jordan Peterson, so frequently mentioned it in his lectures. The great surprise is not that communism is bad, but that hidden within the rock of tyranny are countless gems of Christian resistance. A ten year old girl, Zoya Lescheva refused to take off her cross necklace, and more importantly refused to adopt the Gulag survivalist culture of theft and

cursing. “A mother as sacred as mine must never have a daughter who is a criminal,” she said. (Solzhenitsyn, 277). Or Boris Kornfeld, a Christian doctor who shared his faith with the author, only to be executed the following day. Living inside the Gulag he remained a “gentle and well-mannered person” (310). In the presence of these Christians, Solzhenitsyn’s own heart began to transform.

“Formerly you never forgave anyone. You judged people without mercy. And you praised people with equal lack of moderation. And now an understanding mildness has become the basis of your un-categorical judgements. You have come to realize your own weakness - and you can therefore understand the weakness of others. And be astonished at another’s strength. And wish to possess it yourself.”

Reading through this, I began to reflect back upon my own experience of 2020. So much lighter than the Gulag, but unfortunately I would not count my own story in line with those of our Christian brothers and sisters encountered by Solzhenitsyn. I’m afraid over this past year my judgement of others has become far more categorical than personal. And my weakness, though ever present, has filled me with a resentment of the weak and a fear of the strong, rather than sympathy and hopeful admiration.

Perhaps as we reflect on 2020, we might do well to encounter a Christian friend in the same way that Solzhenitsyn did. Another Christian who finds themselves in a time of confusing and unjust suffering, who instead of descending to become a mere feature of the chaos by which he is surrounded, ascends to his highest calling. How? By prayer. In the psalms David is that friend to us. Eugene Peterson in his book on David says this;

“[In David] we see a young man hated and hunted like an animal, his very humanity profaned, forced to decide between a life of blasphemy and a life of prayer—and choosing prayer.”

In Psalm 57, David is trapped in a cave, hiding out from Saul the King of Israel who is seeking to kill David. It is perhaps not the same as a Gulag and certainly not the same as 2020, but perhaps we can fit each of these under the category of a cave. A place we might currently feel trapped or stuck, which by prayer becomes a place of ascent. Here is how David shows us to ascend from the cave. **1. Take refuge in the Lord immediately, 2. Compare the Lord to your circumstances 3. Seek glory not relief.**

1. Take Refuge in the Lord Immediately

Take refuge in the Lord immediately. Few of us have cultivated the habit of taking refuge in the Lord. Instead our lives are full of coping and dulling for some respite from life’s pressures. We think that God does not provide comfort when in reality we have never sought comfort in the Lord. Now I think there are many reasons we resist the Lord as our refuge, but behind all of them is a misapprehension of God’s character that he has revealed to us in his word. David knows the heart of God and therefore turns to the Lord for refuge.

Psalm 57:1 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.

First, David asks for God's mercy towards him. Twice he repeats his request. This call demonstrates David's understanding of God's very character. When God reveals his name to Moses in Exodus 34 the first description of himself that God provides is merciful. "The Lord, The Lord, a God merciful and gracious." David is so immediately willing to call on God to grant him mercy amidst his current situation because he understands who God is.

What is the first adjective you would use to describe God? "The Lord, The Lord, a God strict and perfectionist? Absent and disinterested? Lenient but impotent? No, it is merciful. God is eager to be the immediate refuge of your soul, not for any other reason than that is who God is.

David provides a picture of what the mercy of the Lord is like. It is like a mother bird stretching out her wings to protect her young from a storm. This means whatever rain, snow, or hail the storm throws down will land upon the mother bird instead of her young. God's heart of mercy is so complete that he will take upon himself our torment to provide us refuge. David takes refuge in the Lord immediately because he knows the heart of God is mercy.

Psalm 57:2-3 I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills
his purpose for me. ³ He will send from heaven and save
me; he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah
God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!

Secondly, David entrusts God with the outcome of his life. This means that David is in a sense removing his own hand from his life's outcomes and instead shifting all of his weight onto the deliverance of the Lord. What matters to David is not David's purpose for David's life, but the Lord's purpose for David's life. And David can have utter confidence that the Lord's purpose (1) will be accomplished, because God is most high! That is, powerful enough to accomplish it. And (2) He is eager to save because of his steadfast love and faithfulness. Meaning that God's purposes for David are both certain and good.

Understanding that God is merciful to the point of giving himself for you, powerful enough to accomplish his purposes for you, and loving so that you know his purposes are good, means that your soul can find refuge in the Lord immediately. Even in the cave, or the gulag, or right after 2020.

2. Compare the Lord to your Circumstances

Next David compares the Lord to his circumstances. He begins by describing the situation he is in.

Psalm 57:4 My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts— the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

David describes his soul, it is as though he is surrounded by lions, attacks from all sides. There is no rest because when he lies down he is around beasts that seek to devour. He compares his pursuers to the beasts but instead of teeth they have spears and arrows and their tongues are like swords with words designed to cut. Surrounded, no way out, restless. David says of this time;

Psalm 57:6 They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down.

David's soul is bowed down. He just didn't have any fight left in him. But in the midst of him recollecting his circumstances and the condition of his own heart, he breaks out into a call for the glory of the Lord:

Psalm 57:5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!

The comparison here that David is making between God and his circumstances is not between their power, but their importance. In the midst of danger and fear and attacks, David cries out, "hallowed be your name!" He says, the Lord is the one who will be glorified in this, it is the Lord who's mercy will reign over all the earth. God's glory will prevail, so what can flesh do to me? And you see this is a spiritual victory in itself. Perhaps David will not make it out of the cave, but God's glory will not be halted.

3. Seek Glory, not Relief

Finally, David seeks glory not relief.

Psalm 57:7-8 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! ⁸Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!

From the repetition of have mercy, to the repetition of my heart is steadfast! David now sets his mind to sing for the glory of the Lord. Calls for his glory to be awakened. God's glory is expressed in his saving grace and his steadfast love towards his people.

Psalm 57:9-10 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. ¹⁰For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

David's heart now begins to spill over, as he participates directly through praise with the renewed object of his desire. David no longer mentions his enemies, he no longer mentions relief, instead his focus has shifted from receiving relief to the infinitely higher desire to glorify God among the peoples and the nations of the world.

Freedom from the cave would have sufficed for a lesser person. But they would have remained trapped in their own glory, masters of their own lives. David's prayer ends with the deepest desire of his heart.

Psalm 57:11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!

There is another phrase for all of this, that David cultivates regarding his circumstances; adventure. It is a heart that lifts up from their situation to view their journey. David lost his life in the call of the Lord, and because his life was hidden in the shadow of the wings of the Lord he was able to live fully, adventurously. How much more do we know than David? We've seen the cost paid to rescue us, we've seen how deep the father's love is for us. Let us lose our lives in God that we might live adventurously for him.

Take refuge in the Lord immediately.
Compare the Lord to your circumstances.
Seek his Glory, not relief.