

Sermon 68: Finding Strength in God's Mercy: Psalm 56:1-13

Text: Psalm 56:1-13 "Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

Introduction: The Psalm's Setting: "When the Philistines took him in Gath..."

- **This likely refers to 1 Samuel 21:10-15** "And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad...Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad..."
 - **He was afraid.**
 - **He was desperate.**
 - **He was alone.**
 - **He was confused.**
- **This period was one of the lowest and most lonely of his life:**
 - As a mid-teen he triumphed over Goliath.
 - Within a few years, he was leading Saul's men into battle.
 - He married the king's daughter and became Jonathan's closest friend.
 - Everything seemed to be falling into place until Saul began to envy him and plotted to kill him.
 - He went from national hero to fugitive and did the unthinkable.

Summary: Psalm 56 gives insight into how we must respond to God when our circumstances deteriorate into desperation.

Proposition: We must allow our fears to drive us to God.

Interrogative: How can we do this?

Section 1: His cry for mercy: 56:1-2 "Be merciful unto me, O God..."

- **His cry: 56:1** "Be merciful unto me, O God..."
 - Mercy notices the misery of the vulnerable.
 - It has compassion.
 - It is motivated to intervene for the good of the helpless.
- **His complaint: 56:1** "For man would swallow me..."
 - **He used vivid words:**
 - **"Swallow:"** To torment, crush or trample
 - **"Fight:"** To wage war
 - **"Oppress:"** To torment, crush or trample
 - **He described his enemy's relentless pursuit:**
 - "He daily oppresses..."
 - "He daily swallows me up..."
 - **He contrasted his isolation with his enemy's allies and armies:** "Many fight against me..."
- **His confidence: 56:2** "O thou most High..."
 - None is stronger than the LORD.
 - All are under His rule.
 - He is crying to the only one who can intervene for him.

Section 2: His decision to rest: 56:3-4 "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee...I will not fear what flesh can do unto me..."

- **When fear came, he chose to trust God rather than fret:**
 - **Fear is an emotional response to danger like anger is an emotional response to injustice.**
 - **It is natural and can be a healthy motivator.**
 - It can restrain irresponsible behavior.
 - It can motivate necessary defensive measures for protection and survival.
 - It can force someone to slow down and think carefully about their choices.
 - It can establish necessary boundaries.
 - **It is natural yet sometimes a destructive motivator:**
 - It can cripple and eat away at the soul.
 - It can cause destructive illogical thought patterns.
 - It can lead to impulsive destructive decisions.
 - It can develop into obsessive introspection.
 - **The problem is not the instinctive response, but what we do with that response.**
- **He chose to trust God as a way of life: 56:3** "What time I am afraid..."

- **Purpose 1: Trust God:**
 - **Character:** "I will trust in thee..."
 - **Word:** "I will praise [boast in] his word..."
- **Purpose 2: Reflect on the past:** "I have put my trust..."
- **Purpose 3: Build on what has been learned: 56:4** "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me..."

Section 3: His second cry for mercy: 56:5-9 "Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me..."

- **His expanded complaint:**
 - **They twist his words to establish alliances against him: 56:5** "Every day they wrest my words..."
 - **They are consumed with his destruction: 56:5** "All their thoughts are against me for evil..."
 - **They assemble an army to hunt him: 56:6** "They gather themselves together..."
 - **They have sinister plans to catch him: 56:6** "They hide themselves..."
 - **They constantly monitor his movements to catch him: 56:6** "They mark my steps, when they wait for my soul..."
 - **1 Samuel 23:14** "David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand..."
- **His expanded cry for mercy:**
 - **Do not ignore their unjust actions: 56:7** "Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God..."
 - **I know you have witnessed every detail: 56:8** "Thou tellest my wanderings..."
 - **Keep track of my suffering:**
 - **Commemorate my suffering: 56:8** "Put thou my tears into thy bottle..."
 - **Document every detail: 56:8** "Are they not in thy book?"
- **His expanded confidence: 56:9** "When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back...for God is for me..."
 - God will hear his cry.
 - He will take action to defend him.
 - God is defending David against injustice.

Section 4: His second decision to rest: 56:10-11 "In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me..."

- **He will boast in God's word: 56:10** "In God will I praise his word..."
- **He will boast in His covenant promises: 56:10** "In the LORD will I praise his word..."
- **He will trust Him: 56:11** "In God have I put my trust..."
- **He will not fear man: 56:11** "I will not be afraid what man can do unto me..."

Section 5: His decision to praise: 56:12-13 "Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

- **Reason 1: Faithfulness is on the line: 56:12** "Thy vows are upon me, O God..."
 - **Two possible ways to take this statement:**
 - The vows you have made to me.
 - The vows I have made to you.
- **Reason 2: You have saved me from death: 56:13** "For thou hast delivered my soul from death..."
 - **Two possible interpretations:**
 - Eternal death
 - Physical death
- **Reason 3: You will preserve me in this life: 56:13** "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"
 - **Two possible interpretations:**
 - Eternal Preservation
 - Temporal Preservation

Interpreting Psalm 56: David chose to praise God despite his circumstances for two reasons.

- **Reason 1: He knew God's promises regarding the kingdom**
 - **To Saul: 1 Samuel 13:14** "Thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee..."
 - **To Saul: 1 Samuel 15:28-29** "The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent..."

- **To Samuel: 1 Samuel 16:1** "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons..."
- **To Samuel: 1 Samuel 16:12-13** "And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward..."
- **Reason 2: He knew God's promises regarding the Kingdom**
 - **Psalm 16:8-11** "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore..."
 - **Psalm 23:6** "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever..."
 - **Romans 4:6-8** "David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin..."

Application: Psalm 56 gives insight into how we must respond to God when our circumstances deteriorate into desperation. We must allow our fears to drive us to God.

- **Application 1: Because life is uncertain:**
 - Let your fear drive you to God not away from Him.
 - You cannot control your circumstances, so choose to rest in His providence.
 - Get into His word and reflect on how He has worked in history.
- **Application 2: Because His character is revealed:**
 - Rest in His mercy.
 - Remind yourself that He understands your struggles and has compassion on you when you are troubled.
 - Remind yourself that you can come confidently into His presence for wisdom and a daily supply of sustaining grace.
 - Remind yourself that He is wise, good, and purposed to use all things for good in your life.
- **Application 3: Because His promises are sure and stabilizing:**
 - Rest in His presence.
 - Remind yourself that He will never abandon you.

- Remind yourself that there is nothing that can separate you from His love in Christ.
- **Application 4: Because you alone can choose to trust:**
 - Stop making excuses.
 - Stop making qualifications.
 - Stop floundering under the impossible burdens you cannot carry.
 - Roll them on His shoulders and leave them there.