

"Gimme Shelter."

Last Monday NOAA¹ posted an alert for our area, which among other things said: *Plan for life-threatening wind.... damage accentuated by airborne projectiles. They said we should be prepared for: Life-threatening storm surge greater than 6 feet above the ground.* They added that after the storm *locations may be uninhabitable for an extended period.* The storm lived up to the warnings, just not for us. What happened in the Bahamas and the Carolinas is tragic and heartbreaking. In the aftermath of the storm, I started thinking of the old Rolling Stones song "*Gimme Shelter*" and remembered how the idea of shelter is used here in **Psalm 63**. This Psalm comes from the latter part of the life of David, so it fits well as we reflect on the storms of life and the story of David in the Scriptures.

We fear storms because of the destruction of property, the disruption of our lives, the danger for ourselves, and loved ones. Although **Psalm 63** doesn't mention a storm, its background is a Category 5 hurricane of devastation. Notice that this Psalm has an opening line before **verse 1** that says, *A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.*

Why was David in the desert? Well, there are two occasions in his life when he was in the desert of Judah. One was before he became king when Saul was chasing him. But this is taking place after David became king. We know that because David describes himself as king in **verse 11**. There was only one time when David had to flee to the desert *after* he became king. One of the reasons the Bible warns us not to take temptation and sin lightly is because of the consequences of sin. Even when we are forgiven damage occurs and consequences develop. Like some relatively small weather system that appears way off in the ocean, there were a series of consequences that developed and intensified after David's sin with Bathsheba. The baby they conceived died. Then years later, one of David's sons Amnon becomes obsessed with his own half-sister Tamar. He rapes her and then discards her. After that, David's son Absalom, Tamar's full brother, murdered Amnon. David's lust for Bathsheba as well as his murder of her husband was being reflected in his own children. David, having failed to step away from temptation, now failed to step up as a Father. There grew a bitterness in Absalom that leads to conspiracy and

rebellion. Just as David betrayed Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, some of his closest friends betrayed him and joined Absalom.

Psalm 63 is written as David has to run for his life and hide in the desert. Disruption, danger, destruction, He is experiencing all of it. But look at **verse 7**: *you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings, I will sing for joy.* The Psalm is saying there is a way to sing, to thrive, no matter what the circumstances. What makes it possible is the reality captured in that phrase: *because you are my help.*

Now, David is not only an important Biblical character but a historically significant, world-class artist, whose songs and poems have stood the test of time as few others have. His poetry flows out of his heart, but we can reflect on it and learn from it important lessons for life. So in this Psalm, as David pours out his heart, he teaches us what it looks like and how it can be that we, you and I find shelter in God.

First,

I. TO FIND OUR SHELTER IN GOD WE HAVE TO KEEP THE REALITY OF GOD IN THE FOREFRONT OF OUR HEARTS' VISION.

Verse 1-2, *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.* When David says, *I have seen you... and beheld your power and your glory* he's not describing a vision that was granted especially to him. The best way to understand what this means is to see it in light of a prayer found in another place in the Psalms: **Psalm 119:18** says: *Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.* What's that prayer really for. If our eyes are open and we're looking at the print on the paper, can't we see exactly what is said in the Scriptures? What does it mean when it says: *"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law?"* It means *"enable me to see spiritually,"* with what Paul calls *"the eyes of the heart."*

There were times last week when I stared so long and hard at thermal images of Dorian, a hurricane the size of Georgia – that big swirling, bright red, going to orange to yellow, to green and turquoise monster looking like it might be coming right at us that the storm all but filled my inner vision ruled my imagination. In the struggles and storms of life, it is so easy to lose your vision of the power and glory of God, and yet it is *that* vision that most equips us to overcome the fear and anxiety, the wear and tear of what troubles or threatens us. The eyes of our hearts

have to come alive to the power and glory of God. And to something else. Look at **verse 3-4**: *Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name, I will lift up my hands.* It is not just God's power and glory that occupies our inner vision – but his steadfast love.

How is this steadfast love of God better than life?

1.) The loving-kindness of God can meet the deeper thirst of the soul, and nothing else can. Just as the body is made for water. So your soul is made for the loving-kindness of God.

2.) The loving-kindness of God is constant, and life is not. Circumstances and people disappoint us, the storms of life can destroy us, but God's loving-kindness is unchanging and steadfast.

3.) The loving-kindness of God is eternal, and life is not. Our earthly life is short and vulnerable, but God's loving-kindness is eternal. When the loving-kindness of God is received through faith in Christ, it gives us life in God's loving-kindness for eternity.

Remember the words of Jesus to Mary when her brother Lazarus died, **John 11:26** tells us: *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

Believe. Keep the reality of God in the forefront of your inner vision.

II. THE GOAL OF THIS INWARD VISION OF GOD IS THAT WE CLING TO HIM.

We often hear the word "*cling*" used in a negative way. A mother worries that her seven-year-old is too clingy. She wants her to be a little more independent. What does the Bible mean when it talks about clinging to God? The first time this word is used in the Bible is in the creation story. After describing the creation of man and woman, **Genesis 2:24** says; *Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* So the picture is not that of an overly clingy child but rather that of a totally committed lover.

A good illustration of what it means to cling to God is right here in **Psalms 63** David here is a man who is in danger of losing everything on this earth. He has lost his family, at least in the sense that his own son

has rebelled against him. For the same reason, he has lost face. He has lost his power. He is in danger of losing his life. He has also been betrayed. His future is uncertain. He looks around him and sees a dry, weary land. And what he is saying is that he sees in the dry wasteland a picture of the circumstances of his life. But what does he do? In **verse 5**, he says, "*My soul will be satisfied with you as with rich and fat food.*"

Clinging to God is getting that perspective and then holding on to it. When the Bible compares life to the desert, it is not saying that life can never be good. It's saying that just as the desert does not nurture physical life. In the same way, this material world and human society alone cannot nurture the inner life of the heart, the soul, and the spirit. Ultimately only God can give you what the Scriptures call *streams in the desert* and *sweet honey from the rock*. Those are the kinds of pictures the Bible gives us. They are pictures of a source of strength in a place where you wouldn't normally expect to find it: sweet honey in the rock, streams *in* the desert. To cling to God means to cling to him for that! *If that sounds easy, it isn't.*

In the storms and struggles of life, we can be drawn into a single, near-sighted focus on the circumstances and all our strategies and schemes to counter them.

III. TO CLING TO GOD, WE HAVE TO REMEMBER HIM.

Look at **verse 5-6**: *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, ⁶ when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night.* He is saying: "*LORD when I lay my head down at the end of the day, I choose to turn my thoughts to you. When I wake up through the watches of the night, I think about you.*" What does it mean in a setting like this to remember God? It means to think about how the reality of *God* relates to you and your life. When David remembered God, he thought about the power of *God*, the love the faithfulness, the nearness of *God*, the sovereignty of God, and he surrendered to *God* and trusted in Him. He also thought about what *God* wanted him to do and how *God* wanted him to act. We have to think about God and what that actually means is that we have to think about how and why we are going to trust him and obey him.

This Psalm is like a prayer journal that reveals a heart of faith. If you compare this Psalm with the history of how David handled the

situation, you would see some very interesting things. The history is found in **2 Samuel 15**. David's son Absalom has launched this treacherous rebellion against him. David had to hurriedly flee from the city of Jerusalem into the desert with his family and some faithful followers. A couple of interesting things happen. As they are beginning to flee, David sees that the priests of God are coming with him and they are bringing the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant is that sacred chest that was a symbol of God's presence. Well the priests are fleeing with David, and they are bringing the ark as a symbol of God's presence, but David stops them and says take it back to the city of Jerusalem. David recognizes that having the ark doesn't guarantee God's protection, and it belongs in the city of Jerusalem as a symbol of God's presence in the nation. So what he tells this priest named Zadok is, *"Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."*² This is radical trust in God and surrender to the will of God. However, as you read on something interesting happens. David begins to see who is with him and he sends some of them back as spies. He tells them to pretend to be on Absalom's side do what they can to frustrate his plans and spy on him for David. That's what they do. So what you see happening is David prays, and he plans. He does not pray without planning, and he doesn't plan without praying. And it isn't long before he goes to war and wins back his throne and his kingdom.

Look back at **Psalms 63:6-7** what you see here and throughout **Psalms 63** is what was going on in *his heart and mind* during this time in his life. What it shows you is that the perspective in his heart that gave him peace through these problems came from his choice to turn to God, trust in God, and remember God all the time.

If there are good things you can do in your circumstances in life, do them, but when and while you do them keep remembering you are not alone or without help. Remember God. Remember God.

And the importance of cultivating thankfulness...

IV. AS WE REMEMBER GOD, WE GIVE THANKS TO HIM.

Verse 7 says *for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy*. The phrase, *in the shadow of your wings*, comes from the picture of a mother bird gathering her vulnerable young under her wings to protect them from danger. It's

shows up repeatedly in Scripture. Jesus used it. What the Psalm teaches us is that since God shelters us, we should give thanks to him. It's amazing that in this dark time in David's life, he falls back on the ultimate weapon in spiritual warfare – which is praise and thanksgiving. It's all through this Psalm! **Verse 3** *my lips will praise you.* **Verse 4** *I will bless you and lift up my hands.* **Verse 5**, *my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.*

Praise and thanksgiving is a discipline that not only gives God what he deserves but gets God more clearly into focus more deeply in your heart. In **1 Thessalonians 5:18** It says: *“Give thanks in all circumstances* for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Don't see that command as an unsympathetic demand that you stop being human or having emotions. See it as God handing you a weapon with which you can fight for your soul – a powerful weapon to counteract the, sometimes understandable but never helpful, poison of self-pity.

And notice, it says you are to give thanks *“in”* all circumstances, not *“for”* all circumstances. David didn't say, *“LORD, I thank you that my son has rebelled against you and me, and now he's trying to kill me.”* What he did say is *“LORD, I thank you that even when my heart is breaking, and I can't stop thinking about this and I do not understand... you are with me and take care of me and bring good out of evil and I thank you for your love which is better than life.”*

Thankfulness should never be devoid of feeling but it doesn't have to start with emotions, and even if, in some situation you face, you do not feel joyful or thankful but beat up and burnt out you can wield thankfulness like a weapon to fight off a worse darkness and maybe discover that gratitude not only lifts God up – it lifts you up. It is not an escape from reality. It is a courageous choice to believe, with good reason, in a higher reality.

*The last part of the Psalm is full of hope and promise. In **verse 8**, he says:” My soul clings to you, and your right hand upholds me.*

II. IF WE CLING TO GOD, WE WILL BE UPHELD BY HIM.

Everything that follows is an expression of this confidence that God will uphold those who cling to him. What is the significance of saying: *your right hand upholds me?* It means that God upholds you with his greatest power and his strongest, surest grip.

In **verse 9 and 10**, the Psalm says: *But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth;¹⁰ they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals.* This is not vengeance for vengeance sake. This is confidence: God's purposes will prevail. The last verse, **verse 11**, says; *But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.* What David is saying is he knows that in the end, he will rejoice in God. What's true for him is true for everyone who clings to God. It is all through the Bible. It is the crucial message of the book of **Revelation**. In the end, God's steadfast love will be fully revealed in spite of all of the severe storms of life. *Find shelter for your soul in that.*

CONCLUSION

There is a little phrase at the beginning of the Psalm that is absolutely crucial. The whole psalm begins with the words, *“O God, you are my God.”* The life that finds shelter in and help from God begins with faith in God. A choice, God-empowered but still a choice to turn to him and trust in him. Have you done that? Jesus came into this world to make that kind of relationship with God possible. None of us clings to God in perfect faith and obedience. We've all fallen far short of that. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world to cling to God perfectly for us. He proved, in a life of incredible strength that clinging to God is not weakness but the ultimate strength.

David was an imperfect king who suffered, not only, because of the sins of others but also for his own sins and failures. Jesus was and is the perfect king who suffered for us. The sufferings of Jesus were not imposed on him. He willingly endured them for our sake. He took his perfect life of faith and love to the cross and laid that life down as a sacrifice for our sins. His enemies thought they defeated him, but God upheld him with his strong right hand and raised him from the dead as our Lord and Savior. When we turn to him as Lord and trust in Him as Savior we are given eternal life, we receive forgiveness of sins, his Spirit indwells us, and we find shelter under the protective care of his steadfast love. He promises that as we cling to him he upholds us.

Amen

Prayer of Response.

Make this your prayer of response to God: O God, you are my God, Show me where my inner vision has been blinded, my thankfulness muted, and my hope in you subverted. Help me to see you as you are, to cling to you as water for my soul, to remember your steadfast love, to give to you my thankful praise, and to rely on you in all things. Thank you for Jesus who not only shows the way but saves my soul and gives me strength. Amen

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

² 2 Samuel 15:25-26