

The God Who Laughs

Psalm 59

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I spent over 20 years working with students in some capacity. Over that time, I learned a lot of things. One of the things I learned was that when teenage boys get their first exposure to football it tends to make them overconfident. I have often had 14-year-old boys who have played a couple weeks of high school football tell me they could physically dominate me because they were football players. My response to that was usually just to laugh, because I remember being that age. And even though I'm quite a bit older than I was the last time I donned football pads, the knowledge and strength (and weight) advantage I have makes me feel pretty confident that no matter how big a game these boys talk, they are not really a threat to me. When they've turned 18 and have four years of football and the weight room under their belt, the calculus changes a bit though! That's when my age makes me a bit more cautious.

My point in sharing this is that just as a 14-year-old boy tends to overestimate his strength and power, so too do the people of this world. Many imagine themselves to be a threat to the Lord. But they are even less of a threat to the Lord than the 14-year-old boy is to me. The Lord's response, rightly, is simply to laugh at their foolishness. There is no concern on His part because He knows they have vastly overestimated their abilities.

That's the conclusion David arrives at and reminds himself of in Psalm 59, to which we will direct our attention this morning. In another desperate situation, David finds strength in the character of his God, knowing that no one can stand against the Lord.

Background

Psalm 59 is another psalm that gives us the back story, explaining why it was written.

For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time Saul sent soldiers to watch David's house in order to kill him. To be sung to the tune "Do Not Destroy!" (Psalm 59, NLT)

David wrote this psalm about the time Saul sent men to surround his house, hoping to kill him. We read this story in 1 Samuel 19. Saul sent soldiers to David's house at night and told them to kill David when he came out in the morning. David's wife, Michal (who was Saul's daughter), got wind of the plot and encouraged David to escape in the middle of the night. The next morning, she made the bed look like David was still in it and lied to the soldiers, telling them David was sick and couldn't come out. They went back to Saul to see what to do, and by the time they discovered the deception, David had been able to escape with a good head start.

So, this is the backdrop for the psalm. David knew he was in trouble, but his confidence was not in his schemes (though his wife was crafty and had come up with a good plan),

but in his Lord. The attitude David reveals in this psalm is something that should continue to guide us as we face similar trials today.

The Enemies

David begins by describing the enemies who are aligned against him.

¹ Rescue me from my enemies, O God. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me. ² Rescue me from these criminals; save me from these murderers. ³ They have set an ambush for me. Fierce enemies are out there waiting, Lord, though I have not sinned or offended them. ⁴ I have done nothing wrong, yet they prepare to attack me. Wake up! See what is happening and help me! ⁵ O Lord God of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, wake up and punish those hostile nations. Show no mercy to wicked traitors. ⁶ They come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. ⁷ Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords. "After all, who can hear us?" they sneer. (Psalm 59:1-7, NLT)

David starts by asking for the Lord's help. He asks the Lord to rescue him and protect him from those who intend to destroy them. Then he relays to the Lord the stakes he's facing. He describes these enemies in ways that may sound familiar to us.

First, he says they were lying in wait. In this particular case, there were literally people waiting outside his house for the moment when he would show his face, at which point they would kill him.

While we may not be able to literally say that about our own situations, there are times when people do lie in wait for us. Christians are increasingly under a microscope in our culture. People are eager to find ways to make us look bad or to attack us. While we should try to live in ways that preclude any charges from being able to stick, it is still frustrating when we know people are out to get us. Like David, our first best response to those lying in wait is to ask for the Lord's help.

Second, he describes them as vicious dogs. We tend to think of dogs as beloved members of the family, who sit under the table and climb into bed with us at night. That was not the way dogs were viewed in the ancient world (for the most part). Dogs in the ancient world were feral pack animals. They would roam the streets at night attacking anything that seemed like an easy target. They rummaged through garbage, ate decaying carcasses, and were generally considered unclean and a nuisance.

The closest analogy I think we would have today would be to describe these people as coyotes. On a night when you hear a pack of coyotes howling nearby, you don't leave small animals outside unattended, and you probably don't go for a walk without some sort of protection. That's how David described his enemies. These were people who didn't care about anything except for what would benefit them in the moment. Later, he will describe these dogs as never being satisfied, no matter what they find.

Again, this describes many of the enemies we face today as well. Opponents of Christianity will seize upon any opportunity to attack the gospel (and Christians), no matter what. Ironically, no matter what they consume, it is never enough. David again calls for God to silence them.

Third, he describes them as arrogant. He talks of the filth that comes from their mouths because they arrogantly ask, “Who can hear us?” There was no fear of God for these people. They believed they could live with impunity.

I am constantly amazed at how common profane speech is in our world today. The things people say in public today were things that would have once only been said under a person’s breath. The language of TV (and even of public discourse) has become increasingly profane and filthy. Why? Because people have no fear of God. They believe that no one has the right to tell them what to do, so they can do what they want without fear of reprisal.

Finally, he describes these people as unjust. David says they were attacking him even though he was innocent. We know David was not sinless. In fact, scripture reveals many of his character flaws and sins. But David was not making an absolute statement, as though he was innocent in the eyes of God, but that he had done nothing against his enemies to deserve the attacks they were leveling against him. That was true! David had not provoked Saul or his minions, they were attacking him for unjust reasons.

There may be times when you feel unjustly attacked. Before running to God and declaring your innocence though, I would encourage you to take a quick inventory of your life. When people have made charges against me that hurt and that I felt were unfair, I have usually tried to take a step back, and before responding, ask myself if any of what they are saying is true. Often, something they are saying is accurate, even if the way things are being characterized is unfair. In those situations, rather than declaring our innocence, we should own up to our fault and seek to correct it. If our enemies persist in attacking us unfairly, we can rest in the knowledge that God sees the truth. He knows our hearts, and He will ultimately vindicate us.

David calls on the Lord to intervene. He actually tells God to wake up! Of course, the Lord wasn’t asleep. He saw all that was happening. But David was being honest about how he felt. He felt like the Lord had delayed long enough, and he asked Him to respond now. We can be honest with the Lord in our prayers. We should be mindful of who we are talking to, but we are allowed to give voice to our frustrations, our fears, and our requests. The Lord is not fearful of us either. He knows what is in our hearts. He wants us to turn to Him for help, no matter the situation.

David’s Confidence

As is often the case in psalms where the writer is complaining about his circumstances, there is a place in the middle of it where we see a change of heart.

⁸ But Lord, you laugh at them. You scoff at all the hostile nations. ⁹ You are my strength; I wait for you to rescue me, for you, O God, are my fortress. ¹⁰ In his

unfailing love, my God will stand with me. He will let me look down in triumph on all my enemies. (Psalm 59:8-10, NLT)

David describes the Lord as laughing at these enemies. As all of Saul's men arrayed themselves against David, the Lord was not afraid—He laughs at their foolishness. Similarly, David says the Lord scoffs at the hostile nations. He is not threatened by those who want to rattle their sabers against the things of God. Those who set themselves up as His enemies do not strike any fear into Him. He is confident in His power and in the outcome.

David's conclusion then, is that if the Lord is laughing at his enemies, then he had nothing to fear. As long as David stood with the Lord, those who opposed him were no threat at all.

This is a good reminder for us. I hear many Christians speaking with fear about the things happening on the world stage, in our society, and in our government. Each election (and even outside election season anymore), there is an entire industry that thrives on telling us that the world is going to end if the election doesn't go our way.

I am not downplaying the issues we face. I see the things that are happening in our world, and they do concern me. I see where things are headed if nothing changes. I see the decay in our society and in our government. I see that there are all sorts of dangerous ideas being peddled in the culture at large. I am not blind to the things happening around us. But I am also not afraid, because there is an important factor most people don't consider: our Lord is on the throne and will not be mocked. He is not afraid; He laughs at those who imagine they can oppose Him. We should not take these things lightly or sitting down, but we also should not fear what human institutions can do, because the Lord laughs at every institution that stands against Him.

David's Request

David returns to his request of the Lord, but it's not quite what we'd expect.

¹¹ Don't kill them, for my people soon forget such lessons; stagger them with your power, and bring them to their knees, O Lord our shield. ¹² Because of the sinful things they say, because of the evil that is on their lips, let them be captured by their pride, their curses, and their lies. ¹³ Destroy them in your anger! Wipe them out completely! Then the whole world will know that God reigns in Israel. (Psalm 59:11-13, NLT)

We might have expected David to ask the Lord to wipe out his enemies. As a mighty warrior, David understood that you can silence those who want to dominate you by killing them. But David also understood there was a much bigger war being waged than just the people camped outside his home. He knew that people needed to see the power of the Lord and turn to Him!

This reminds us that sometimes the Lord may choose to delay acting for a time because He has a purpose to accomplish. Sometimes the Lord allows people to persist in their

delusions of power for a time, because when He topples them it will serve as an example to the world of just how misguided they were. David rightly asks the Lord to let them be captured by their pride, their curses, and their lies.

This should be our prayer for our world. We should not merely want to change the circumstances we see, we should want the world to see the power of our God! Sometimes the best way for that to happen is for the Lord to allow evil people to experience a measure of success before suddenly pulling the rug out from under them. This demonstrates the futility of any worldly tactics. Some will never see the truth of this, but we should. Just because the Lord has not yet toppled these evil people, it does not mean He is passive. He will be victorious. We should continue to stand with Him, because He is the source of our confidence.

David's Choice

David concludes by contrasting two approaches to life.

¹⁴ My enemies come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. ¹⁵ They scavenge for food but go to sleep unsatisfied. ¹⁶ But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress. ¹⁷ O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love. (Psalm 59:14-17, NLT)

David returns to the image of his enemies being like dogs. He says they prowl the streets looking for anything they can scavenge but still go to sleep unsatisfied. That is the condition of our world today. People are searching for meaning. We have more abundance, access to more information, to more of the world, and to almost anything a human being can desire than at any time in history, yet we also live at a time when people are more unhappy and dissatisfied with life than ever before. Many today find their lives hollow and pointless, despite trying to find meaning in myriad different ways.

Even those who claim to be trying to solve the world's problems are increasingly hopeless. No matter what laws get passed, or individuals get elected, or wars get won, these same people constantly see destruction on the horizon. There is no hope in any of these things. Strangely, our world seems to understand this, but they keep running after them anyway.

David holds out a different approach. He says that unlike his enemies, he will turn to the Lord and praise Him for His power. He will reflect on the greatness of his God. He will remember that his hope is not found in the things of this world, in his schemes, or in his power, but in his confidence that the Lord, who loves him, is in control and will not be mocked. If the Lord laughs at His enemies, there is no reason for us to cower in fear. David says he will choose to focus on the Lord, and will be able to praise Him, no matter the circumstances he faces.

Conclusion

Though most of us do not have a death squad waiting outside our doors, it often does feel like we are living in enemy territory. Sometimes the enemies are so numerous and so loud that it is difficult to see anything but them. But Psalm 59 holds out a different approach. Let's consider how we can face our enemies with confidence.

First, we should exercise our greatest weapon. For many Christians (myself included) prayer is often our last resort rather than our first. David understood something we often forget—God is the One who can change situations with a word. He is the One who is in control. He is not frightened or surprised by the turns of events in our world. The greatest weapon faithful believers have is prayer. If we feel we are being treated unjustly, we should ask the Lord to cause the truth to prevail. If we feel we are being attacked, we should ask the Lord to vanquish our enemies. If we feel like our world is going down a path toward destruction, we should ask God to turn us back. If we feel like our leaders are being led astray, we should ask God to put them back on track. The greatest weapon we have is prayer—but many of us fail to use it. God is the One who can change things, so before we go looking to the world, we should start by petitioning our Lord.

Second, we should examine ourselves. It is always tempting to view ourselves as innocent victims. Victim mentality is increasingly common in our world today. And that's because being a victim is easy. Victims bear no blame or responsibility. As tempting as it is to declare that everything that happens to us is unfair, we should take a hard look at our lives. I'm not saying that all the evil that happens to us is necessarily our fault, but I am saying that when people level charges against us, we should not simply dismiss them. Sometimes, when people attack Christians or the church, there is validity to what they are saying. We should address our failures when they happen, even if everything being said about us may not exactly be true or fair.

Finally, we should rest in the Lord. In the last several years, I have had many people tell me they believe we are living in the last days. They may be right. I see many of the same things they see. I don't know whether we are in the last days or not. Every generation since Christ has thought they were the last generation, so I'm cautious about saying that. But one of these generations is going to be right! I also don't know exactly how things will play out. But what I do know is this, no matter what happens the Lord is on the throne! No matter what schemes man cooks up, the Lord will be victorious! No matter how much people want to talk against God, claim they can defeat Him, or try to assert their dominance over Him, He simply laughs. When we face uncertain times, we should focus on what is certain: the character of our God, who laughs at all who oppose Him. I don't know when the end will come, but I do know this: the Lord will be victorious! If we stand with Him, we need not fear, no matter what happens.

David's faith did not make him passive. He still fled his home in the middle of the night. But his hope was also not anchored to his actions, but to the character of His God. May we have the same faith; an active faith anchored to the character of our God.

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