Finding God When Circumstances Overwhelm

Third in the Jan. 2017 series “Finding God.”

# Scripture: Psalm 62:3-10

# Key thought: How is God is our rock and our salvation today?

# Intro:

Winston Churchill said, “Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it.” So it is that when we are fighting against adversity, we often have our greatest successes.

Another leader put it this way, “He knows not his own strength that has not met adversity. Heaven prepares good men with crosses.” (Ben Johnson)

Certainly King David had challenges in his life. He started out as the youngest brother. He fought Goliath, his most famous challenge. Then after he was promoted by Saul for his famous win, Saul became jealous of him and tried to kill him and David spent the next several years of his life fleeing from Saul’s armies. During that time, once while David was away, the place where his family was staying was attacked and his family and all the families of his men were taken captive. It was another low point where David turned to God for help. That story is in 1 Samuel 30.

When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. … David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.
1 Sam 30:3-6 NIV 2011

God strengthened David’s Spirit and showed him the way to rescue their loved ones. Later in his life, when Psalm 62 was written, David likely was fleeing again, this time from a rebellion led by his own son, Absalom. This was another of the darkest challenges of David’s entire life. It divided his family and his former staff.

But in all his crises, David experienced God as his rock and his salvation. That is his testimony! What a testimony! But what I want to know is, “How can we have that experience as well?”

Looking at Psalm 62, let me suggest three prime considerations for us if we would understand and experience God as our Rock and Salvation too.

# We can pour out our hearts to God

I’m thinking of verse 8 of the Psalm

Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge. Ps 62:8 NIV 2011

Part of the Psalmist’s idea of God as his refuge was that he could pour out his heart to God in prayer.

## We can take our burdens to God

I remember one time during my first pastorate when the pressure was mounting. My marriage was strained right then. An assistant pastor I had hired had failed morally. My first fund-raising campaign had failed miserably also. I needed someone to talk to so badly that I drove 40 miles and hired a Christian counselor just so I could unload all that pent-up anxiety and frustration for an hour. I needed that.

But I also needed to unload to God. One day during that time frame, toward the end of a very stressful week I clearly remember leaving the church and going up on the hillside to pray. I needed for God to come near. I imagined that God was listening. I remember feeling that God was so close that I almost felt that if I opened my eyes I would see someone there with me. I was pouring out my heart to God and God was being my rock and refuge that day in a way I had not experienced before. I was learning what David was talking about.

Prayer times can be sessions of unloading our anxieties to God. As Paul counseled us;

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Phil 4:6-7 NIV 2011

## He hears prayer to take it in hand

But by faith we understand that this praying thing is not just a psychological exercise in emotional release that makes us feel better. It may do that, but prayer is much more. Consider this experience of David as expressed in another Psalm.

But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; Ps 10:14 NRSV

I experienced the same in that difficult time. God helped JoAnne and I through our marital stress. The church recovered from its reverses and began to grow again, even eventually hiring another assistant pastor. God had seen our situation and undertook on our behalf.

It was Jesus keeping his promise;

 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
Matt 11:28-30 NIV 2011

# His unchanging character is trustworthy

The second consideration that will help us to understand how God can be our rock and refuge today is also the same as that which helped David. It is to understand and remind ourselves of the trustworthy character of God.

## Trust in God not wealth or people

Verses nine and ten of the Psalm point to two other places where people commonly put their trust.

Surely the lowborn are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath.

 Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. Ps 62:9-10 NIV 2011

Verse nine draws a contrast between trusting in people and trusting in God. David points out that both common people and people of status are false hopes as ultimate objects our trust. Either one can let us down so easily. But God is dependable, faithful, ever with us, reliable as a fortress.

Verse ten draws a contrast between trusting in God and trusting in our own monetary resources, whether gained illegitimately or not. If we get rich, David says we must not set our hearts on our riches. Compared to God, riches are no refuge at all. They have no power to save in the ways that God does.

## Trust in God because of his character

The great reason that we can trust in God is his reliable, dependable, unchanging character. I am pointing to the two sayings at the end of Psalm sixty-two.

### His great power (62:11)

First of all, there is his omnipotence. The psalmist says simply, “Power belongs to you, God.” We think of ourselves as powerful. Leaders in today’s world think of themselves as wielding great power. But they are not the source of power. We are not the source of power. It is God who has the power. The hearts of leaders are in his hands. The fate of nations is in his hands. Our lives are in his hands. The answers to our prayers come from his hands!

As Isaiah spoke on God’s behalf,

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.
 Isa 40:25-26

When the apostle John was given the book of Revelation, it included records of the praises of heaven. We as readers learn that the angels, elders and creatures there also ascribe glory to God for his power.

 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” Rev 7:11-12

### His unfailing love (62:12) and faithfulness (61:7)

This first saying at the end of Psalm sixty-two also includes a reference to God’s love. If we widen our search a little, two more characteristics of God that are celebrated by David often in Psalms are God’s love and faithfulness. The word for love that is used in both chapter 61 and chapter 62 and many other places in the Old Testament, is a special one that refers not just to an affection such as we think of when we use the English word ‘love,’ but to a commitment to care. This Bible idea is very much the kind of love that we think of when we think of a couple faithfully married for many years. They have a deep love for each other and are strongly committed to caring for each other and keeping their vows. This deep kind of covenant-keeping love is modeled after the love of God that is described in the Old Testament, a steadfast covenant-love that demonstrates repeatedly commitment to and care for the people of Israel. The nature of the kind of love that is being referred to is also the likely reason why the word faithfulness is often tied together with the word love as we find in Psalm 61:7 where David prays that God would. “Appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.”

### His just rewards (62:12)

A third characteristic that gives us confidence in God and helps us to have a sense of calmness as David did when circumstances tend to overwhelm us is that God is the one who when all is said and done, will make sure that justice is done. This characteristic is found in the second of the two sayings at the end of Psalm sixty-two.

“You reward everyone according to what they have done.” Ps 62:12

One of the reasons our anxiety is so high when circumstances become difficult is that we are afraid that we will get the short end of the deal. We are afraid that circumstances will treat us unjustly. And so they may! But God is watching. And the people of God can rely on him as the one who one day will right wrongs and bring about justice. David knew that. He recognized that some of what was happening in the rebellion of Absalom had been prophesied to him when he was told by Nathan that the time would come when he would reap what he had sown in regard to his secret affair with Bathsheba and his responsibility for the death of Uriah, her husband. But David also had a sense that the justice of God would not allow the treachery, arrogance and deceit of Absalom and his co-conspirators to finally win the day. And David was right. After a period of humiliation and defeat, God allowed David’s forces to be victorious over those of his rebellious son and David was restored to his throne.

When we feel that we are not getting a fair shake, we can put our trust in Gods. He knows exactly what is happening. Ultimately he will see that justice is done. He is the one who passes out the ultimate rewards.

# He saves us spiritually

The third consideration in thinking about God is our rock and our salvation is to focus on the word salvation. In the Old Testament, the word salvation had a strong connotation of deliverance from or through the current difficult physical, political, or relational circumstances. Assuming that Psalm 62 may have been written at the time when David was fleeing from Absalom, this physical kind of deliverance was very much in David’s mind as he wrote the Psalm. The kind of salvation he looked for was deliverance from an earthly enemy, in this Psalm, his rebelling son and his co-conspirators.

But in the New Testament, the word salvation is used almost exclusively to refer to our spiritual salvation from sin, selfishness and eternal condemnation. This spiritual salvation also has an eschatological dimension, the salvation that is yet to be revealed, that will reach its perfection when we are united with Christ in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-5). Being saved is a central theme of the NT. Jesus used the word often. In the NT as a whole, there are about 500 occurrences of forms of ‘save’ including the words Savior and salvation. So clearly Jesus intended that the idea of God as our Salvation be given new and very relevant meaning today, not just in David’s era.

The writer of Hebrews makes this point, basing his conclusion on the continuing heavenly intercession of the risen Christ for us.

Consequently he [Jesus] is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Heb. 7:25 NRSV

So let’s apply Psalm 62:6; "He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken," in the spiritual realm today. How is God our spiritual rock and salvation?

## He saves us from the guilt and penalty of sin

The Bible is clear that all have sinned and that penalty of sin is death. Most of us, in fact all of us except a few pathological folks, already have a sense of our own guilt. But the Bible does not tell us this to make us hopeless, but to guide us to salvation in Christ. As Paul summarized:

"Wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:23)."

## His delivers us through temptation

Another way that God saves us is by helping us to overcome temptation. Before we opened our hearts to Christ, it was as if we were under a spell, we so easily gave into temptation. In fact, according to Paul (Ephesians 2:2), that is way too close to the truth. But after we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the situation is totally different. Sin no longer has power over us. Paul recorded a great promise from God regarding our being delivered from temptation.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.
1 Cor. 10:13 NIV 2011

## He gives us victory over the enemy of our souls

Martin Luther sensed the spiritual dimension of our struggles when he wrote the great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” I’ll start quoting in the middle of the first verse and continue into the second verse.

“For still our ancient foe doth seek to work as woe;
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.
Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side, the man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth (God of hosts), his name, from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.”

In a parable Jesus spoke of his rescuing us from the peril posed to us by the enemy of our souls.

 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:9-10

I think this rescue from the enemy of our souls is one reason that David repeatedly used military analogies in his Psalms to describe the victories that God brings to our lives. It was not just about David’s past military experience, though that was certainly part of the reason that he used those terms. But it was also the David understood that our warfare in this world was such that we needed the supernatural power of God at work to combat the forces of evil that work against us.

The apostle Peter warned us that the devil is actively seeking to destroy us. He does this in many ways. Here’s a partial list.

* He seeks to distract us from our life with God, especially from services
* He seeks to divide us from good people who would influence us for God.
* He seeks to keep us too busy for service to God.
* He offers us temptations to disobey the laws of God.
* He encourages our lack of discipline, especially in prayer and Bible reading
* He encourages our carnal selfishness

We are not unaware of his schemes as Paul says (2 Cor. 2:11).

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

But the apostle Paul encourages us that God has given us strength and ability to overcome.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
 Eph 6:10-13

That’s the kind of salvation we have in Christ. That’s the way that Jesus is our rock and our salvation day by day.

# Conclusion

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