

The Promise

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- [0 : 0 0] The country is crying out for leadership. Health service is crying out for reform. Workers are crying out for wage increases.
- Protesters are crying out for change. Scots are crying out for winter sunshine. What are God's people crying out for?
- What are you? What are we crying out for this evening? I wonder if you had to pick one thing that you would want for God to do for you.
- One cry to end all crying. What would it be? Tonight we are looking at a psalm that shows us how a king cries out to God.
- Hear my cry, O God. Listen to my prayer. We're told in the heading of this psalm, it's the psalm of David. David was chosen by God to be his king, to rule over his people.
- [1 : 0 1] And importantly, he was the first in a long line of kings that leads ultimately to our king, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so tonight, as the church of the risen king, Jesus, we can take this prayer as our own, this cry, and see where it leads us as it puts the cry of our king in our hearts, in our mouths, as our prayer to God.
- Now, that is one of the most wonderful things about the psalms, isn't it? That God has given us these words to say back to him. Psalms put into words for us what we struggle to put into words for ourselves.
- And David makes it really easy for us to pray this psalm, these psalms. Lots of the psalms in the 50s, if you read them, have very specific contexts and conflicts that gave rise to the psalms.
- But now we're into a set of psalms that is light on context. 61, 62, 63, 64, David cries out, and he doesn't tell us specifically why that is, which makes it easy for us to put ourselves in his position and identify with God's king as we pray these words in our own prayers for our own circumstances.
- But we might be surprised at what we find ourselves praying for as we pray Psalm 61, because even though it's the cry of a king, we find that he is crying out for a king.
- [2 : 4 1] Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. May he be enthroned in God's presence forever. Appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.
- What do God's people cry out for? God's people cry out for God's king. But first we see in David that our cry is sometimes a far cry.
- A far cry. Now, I don't know if you've ever not been able to get hold of someone. It's quite rare, I suppose now. We get calls on our watches, on our wireless earbuds.
- But possibly that makes it even more stressful when we're not able to reach someone. The message doesn't go through. The call doesn't get answered. The email bounces back.
- And you kind of sit there in shock, thinking, what do I do now? How do I get hold of this person? There's no way of making contact. And that is how David feels at the start of this psalm.

- [3 : 50] Hear my cry, O God. Listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to ye. I call, though my heart grows faint. It is like he's hanging off the edge of the world, clinging on with his fingertips, shouting for help.
- But nobody seems to hear him. He's worn himself out with his calling. His heart grows faint. His voice is failing. But has God noticed?
- It's one of the hardest experiences as a Christian, isn't it? Feeling like our prayers are not getting through to God. When our hearts feel too weak.
- When God feels too distant. And it feels like we might as well be trying to send smoke signals from the moon. Our prayers don't always feel like incense burning before the throne of God, do they?
- That was probably true very literally for David. Back then there was a place you needed to go to be in God's special presence. Only one place where God promised to hear the prayers of his people.
- [5 : 02] And that was his tent. Later his temple. And in God's tent was his earthly throne. The Ark of the Covenant.
- And so to be in God's tent before the Ark of the Covenant was to be with God. To be before his throne. Now David had brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem in a huge procession and celebration when he became king.
- But that's clearly not where he is now. Because he feels that God is distant. He prays, verse 4, He feels far away from God in his throne.
- The wings there are probably a reference to the wings of the cherubim on the cover of the Ark. God was said to be enthroned on the wings of the cherubim.
- And that is where David longs to be before the throne of God above. And he doesn't want ever to have to leave again. But he's not there just now.
- [6 : 11] Because he feels he can't be heard. As if he's in a kind of spiritual Siberia or Sahara. And he cries out for the day when he can be back in God's presence.
- Where God promised he would hear his prayers. So what do we do when we feel like we are out of God's range of hearing? Well, notice what David is still doing.
- He's not sure he can be heard. But he's still praying. He hasn't stopped crying out. If he had stopped praying when he doubted if God could hear him, we wouldn't have the psalm.
- But he kept praying and wrote the words of his prayer. And what does he pray? He prays to be heard. He prays about how weak his prayers feel.
- He prays about how far away he feels. He prays about how he wants his prayers to be. But he doesn't stop praying. And sometimes our view of prayer is so small that we can struggle to know what to say to God.
- [7 : 19] When we run out of prayers, we're finding it difficult. As if they're only kind of certain prayers that God wants to hear. Otherwise, he's going to tune out. He's going to lose interest.
- We can fall into patterns in our personal prayer lives that become so repetitive or so constraining that they can hold us back from telling God what is really on our heart, what we're finding difficult.
- Having a way to pray isn't bad at all. It can be really helpful for our prayers to have a pattern, phrases, formulas, the psalms.
- The Lord Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer, doesn't he? The Lord's Prayer. But sometimes the familiarity and the phrases and the formulas and the patterns can take over our prayers in a way that makes it hard for us to say to God, I don't know what to pray or how to pray it.

My heart is worn out. My prayers feel like they're not getting through. And I take it that because David found himself praying that and God inspired these words of his that we can pray that to God.

[8 : 37] I take it that because Paul writes, we don't know what to pray as we ought, that finding it hard to pray is sometimes part of a normal part of being a Christian.

But David and Paul both remind us that we can still pray in those times because God has given us a freedom in prayer that allows us to tell him when we are feeling out of touch.

This psalm, Psalm 61, is a prayer for when prayer is difficult. This is a prayer for when we don't know how to pray. Isn't it wonderful that God gives us prayers like that in his word?

And he's given us his son and sent his spirit to uphold us and intercede for us so that even when we don't have the words to pray, we are held and helped by the triune God.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all at work when you come to pray to God so that you and I can cry out from the heart to him and know that we are being heard.

[9 : 42] It's a wonderful truth to cling to when we feel that God is far away. Because this isn't only a far cry in the sense that David feels like his voice has to travel a long way to get to God.

It's a far cry because his sense of being distant is really different from what he knows is true of God. So it's a far cry from his experience of God in the past.

See that in verses 2 and 3. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge. You have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.

I know it's not always been like this, he says. I know that this is not really who you are. And so it doesn't need to stay like this. He looks back at the safety and security that he's known with God in the past.

And even though he's lacking that security there and then, he prays that he would know that security once again. It's a prayer that's captured the cry of thousands of Christians through the ages.

[10 : 53] Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For long stretches of his life, David lived in rocky places in the wilderness.

He was being chased by Saul, the king before him. And you can picture, can't you, the security of climbing up high on the rocks, out of sight and out of reach of his enemies.

And so now David prays he would know that safety, that security, that higher rock again, but in a more real and a lasting way. Not only that he would have a rocky outcrop to hide in for the night, or even a strong fortress to guard him for a time, but that he would be able to take refuge in God forever.

See, that lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you, you have been my refuge. Some of you will know, maybe you've used Tim Keller's devotional book, My Rock, My Refuge.

And David knew that reality for himself. He knew God to be his rock, his refuge, his safe place. It's a wonderful prayer that we can take for our own, isn't it?

[12 : 14] When we feel weak, overwhelmed, distant, cold, vulnerable, lead me to the rock that is higher than I am. God, will you be my strength, my security, my hiding place, my rock, my refuge, as you have been in the past.

Samuel Rutherford was a man who was exiled to Aberdeen in the past. He wrote a letter to one of his friends, and at one point he wrote to his friend reminding him of this.

He said, it is not your rock that ebbs and flows. But your sea. It is not your rock that ebbs and flows, but your sea.

His point was our lives chop and change. We do too. Like the sea, we come and go. But whatever's going on around us and in us, God is the same.

He is the solid rock. And so we need to be clinging to him for our safety rather than trying to brave and navigate the rough, cold waters that we're living through.

[13 : 23] And you'd think that kind of clinging to God would come quite naturally to us in prayer. But often it takes a long time for the spiritual defenses to come down, for us really to feel vulnerable before God.

But that is what we are. And so we can and should pray for God to lead us to the rock that is higher, bigger, stronger, more than us.

If we were enough, we wouldn't need a higher rock to hide in, but we do need a place of safety. And God gives us himself. And so we can pray this prayer with David, not because we are feeling secure, but because we know that we need security and that God is the security we need.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Perhaps you have never turned to God for safety. Perhaps you don't have that experience of him in your past.

Perhaps you don't know him personally to be your rock. Well, take it from David and take it from every Christian here that that is who he is. He is the rock, the refuge of all who call on him in truth.

[14 : 44] Take it from David. If you've never prayed to God that you cannot be too far from him for him to hear you, cry out to him. He will save you.

But next we find that what David's crying out for isn't only a safe place, but a safe person. Because secondly, we see he's crying out for a forever king.

Now, I don't know if you know that the British monarch never sings the national anthem. Did you know that? You'll have seen it at the queen's funeral.

You'll see it again at the king's coronation that the king does not sing God save the king. Why is that? Well, because it's a prayer for God to give the king a long life and reign for our sake.

The country sings God save the king on behalf of the king. And so isn't it a bit odd for David to sing God save the king, so to speak?

[15 : 48] This is looking at verses 6, 7, and 8. Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. May he be enthroned in God's presence forever.

Appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him. Then I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day after day. Isn't that kind of strange?

David the king is saying, if the king lives forever, then I will sing your praises, God. And some writers say David is thinking about himself as king at this point.

That makes some sense, doesn't it? Because it's in keeping with this psalm. He wants to be in God's presence. The two things that might make us think he's thinking of more than just himself, though, are the fact that he speaks about the king, his years, protect him, rather than me, mine, my.

And the fact that he's praying the king would live and reign for how long? How long does he want the king to live? Many generations. Forever.

[17 : 01] Now, does David himself expect to be the king for that long? No. But does he know that there will be a king for that long? Well, yes.

Because God had promised David that after he was dead and buried, he would raise up a forever king over his forever kingdom. It says in 2 Samuel 7, verse 12, when your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.

So did David know he was going to die? Yeah, God had told him. But did he know that God was also going to raise up a king after him? He would reign forever and ever.

Yes, he did. And that seems to me helpful for understanding verses 6 and 7, because God had promised David, look, whatever you suffer, whatever you go through, whatever happens, however it ends for you, I will have my king on the throne.

God and his king would come out on top for eternity. And it is that confidence in verse 8 that gives David the courage to keep praising God, keep living for God in the day to day.

[18 : 21] And so the king is singing, God save the king. But he is praying that prayer mainly here because he's crying out for another, a greater, longer lasting, more permanent king than he knows he is.

And that message comes home to us today when we put the two halves of this psalm back together. Because the first half of this psalm told us real, firm security is found with God's king in God's presence.

And the second half reminds us that God has promised the king to sit on his throne in his presence forever. And here's David crying out for safety, for refuge in that king.

And we cry out today, don't we, to that same king for safety, for refuge, the king of the ages, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because, friends, where is Jesus now? Where is Jesus now? We lose so much peace and security when we forget the answer to this question.

[19 : 35] We know that Jesus is alive, but it's as if sometimes we speak as if he's kind of signed off after his resurrection. He disappeared out of sight and out of sight, out of mind.

Where did he go? Well, we're told he ascended into heaven. He went bodily into the glorious presence of God where he sat down on the throne at the right hand of the Father as the king of kings and Lord of lords to reign over all things forever.

If the king was in God's presence, said David, our hearts would be at rest. Our lives would be secure. We would be safe.

Well, brothers and sisters, there is the king in God's presence, sitting on his throne. You might feel miles from God today, but as long as King Jesus is there, we have a place before the throne of God.

Hebrews calls him the sure and steadfast anchor of our souls, a hope that has gone into the inner place through the curtain into God's immediate presence so that if our trust is in Christ, if we are one with him, then we are anchored in the presence of God.

[20 : 57] We are rooted in that rock because united with our king, we are right there with him. Listen to Paul in Ephesians chapter 2.

What has God done for us in Christ? Where are we? He writes, but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is grace that you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

where are ye? In the heavenly realms. In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

We love those verses about the freeness of God's grace to us, don't we? So much so that we forget to read on and see what God has actually done for us in his grace. that he raised us with Christ and has seated us with him in his presence in heavenly places so that he could shower us with his incomparable grace and kindness forever.

[22 : 17] And so for instance, God has answered David's prayer and seated his king before him for all eternity. what does that mean for you and me?

It means we have a source of infinite and unbreakable safety and security before the throne of God. We have a rock and a refuge to hide in from the chaos and the brokenness and darkness of our world.

from our sin, our sickness, our sadness. It means we have a hiding place from death.

If we are with Christ, then God is our refuge against every enemy. And so we are not far from him as far as we might feel from him because if we are in Christ, then we are with God.

And so, brothers and sisters, how do we respond while we cry out for our king? When we are feeling distant, isolated, cold, vulnerable, hear my cry, O God.

[23 : 31] Listen to my prayer for you have promised when I pray in Jesus' name you will hear me. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Lead me to my living and reigning Lord Jesus.

Friends, do not stop crying out for your king. Do not stop praying. God has given you the words when you run out of words to pray.

Because wherever you are, however you are feeling, Christ is in the presence of the Father. And so you have a place of safety before God's throne. Cry out then and finally, carry on.

this is verse where David says, then I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day after day. He's talking about going on in life, a life given over to praise and obedience.

And you wouldn't think this psalm would end with singing, would you? But it does. This is the thought of God's true king and God's living presence puts a song in David's heart so that now he can't stop singing.

[24 : 42] See that, I will ever sing in praise of your name so that even when we are crying out from the ends of the earth, even when our hearts, our voices are faint, God still gives us reason to sing.

There's a great hymn that I've quoted before but it just captures this so perfectly. What though my joys and comforts die, the Lord my Savior liveth.

What though the darkness gather round, songs in the night he giveth. No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that refuge clinging. Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

Perhaps you are struggling to praise God today. Let me invite you to reflect on that prayer in verses 6 and 7 what it means for you.

That Christ your King is seated in the presence of God for you. And you are in him. And then come to verse 8, then I will ever sing praise to your name.

[25 : 56] Because that song is the fruit that grows from the flowering and budding of that prayer to God. that Christ would be your King in his presence.

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing? And stay true to him. That's the other half of that verse, isn't it?

Keep your vows. Keep living for him. Be faithful. It's when we feel furthest from God, isn't it? We can be tempted to stray from his will, to distract ourselves with other things, to fill up the gap with things that are not him.

But friends, draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Keep walking in his ways, turn to him for his strength, because while you feel far from him, he has brought you near in Christ, to lavish his grace and kindness on you through all ages.

cry out to God for your King Jesus. Carry on singing praise, living by faith in him. And brothers and sisters, notice this psalm isn't just a prayer, is it?

[27 : 10] It says at the top that it's a song for singing, which means that what we've listened to today, what we've learned, isn't just for our private prayers. It is for our gathered worship as a church.

This is for us to build one another up in as we pray this prayer for one another, as we sing, as we will do in a minute, for one another, to point one another to this King, to uphold one another in prayer.

And so as we help each other by praying this prayer, by praising God together, we keep walking faithfully with him. And so let's help each other now as we pray together, and then as we sing, let's pray.

Let's pray.