

His Glory above the Heavens and the Earth

Psalm 57

In the last message from Psalm 3, we began with the question, “What will you do when trouble comes? Psalm 57 is chock full of troubles; it shows us how to trust God when our troubles are grieving us. You can transcend your troubles by learning to trust God with prayer and praise.

This note begins the psalm, **“To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.”**

Context: The setting for this psalm is described in 1 Samuel 23:25-24:6. David and his men had been in Maon (about 14 miles due west of En-Gedi). King Saul pursued them there. According to 1 Samuel 23:26, King Saul and his men went around one side of the mountain while David and his men fled around the other side. Then, just as King Saul and his men were closing in on David, a messenger arrived to tell Saul that the Philistines were attacking. As David and his men escaped, they called the place “Sela-hammahlekoth” (meaning “the Rock of Escape.”) While Saul was distracted, David and his men made their way across the wasteland of Jeshimon to En-Gedi on the shore of what we now call the Dead Sea. En-Gedi is one of the only oases in that barren region. The name “En-Gedi” means “fount of the goat;” one of four small springs that create this small oasis. It is one of the only sources of water in the area. En-Gedi is about 21 miles southeast of David’s boyhood home in Bethlehem. Like much of the Dead Sea coast, it is riddled with caves made of limestone, gypsum and salt. Rainwater is still forming more caves in the area.

As David mused on the events of 1 Samuel 23 and 24, he wrote the poetry of Psalm 57 to be sung to the tune “Al-tachith” (meaning “do not destroy”). The meaning of the word “Michtam” has been lost. However, some have guessed that it is the adjective for “golden”ⁱ – identifying this as “a golden psalm”ⁱⁱ. The phrase, **“Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Thy glory be above all the earth”** occurs in verses 5 and 11 and serves as a chorus for this psalm. This psalm divides naturally into two sections: prayer to God (vs. 1-6) and praise to God (vs. 7-11). Here is what we will see: you can transcend your troubles by learning to trust God with prayer and praise.

Crying Out to God in Your Calamities, 1-6

What were David’s “calamities?” In verse 1, David referred to His calamities. This word can refer to the destruction of an engulfing ruin. T.K. Cheyne translates the phrase in verse 1 as “storms of ruin.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What was David referring to? The word translated “calamities” is used of Job’s problems in Job 6:2 and 30:13. Proverbs 19:13 uses the same word: **“A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.”** Later, David would suffer the “family calamity” (from Absalom), as we studied in Psalm 3. But in Psalm 57, it is a “kingly calamity.” David was being pursued by the king of his country. How did David describe these calamities in Psalm 57?

- Though they were deeply trying, these troubles were temporary, vs. 1. (This is about the only positive thing you could say about these calamities!)
- They came from people who wanted to reproach (shame) him and destroy him, v.3

- He said, “my soul was in the midst of lions,” (which was probably literally true at En-Gedi) to illustrate the dangers from armed men who were filled with fiery anger, v.4
- Men had prepared traps to catch him, v. 6
- All these events caused him to be very discouraged, v. 6

Can you see your reflection in the mirror of this psalm? Have you faced “career calamities?” Or how about problems at the hands of your peers? Have you known “family calamities” where the actions or attitudes of a parent, a brother, or a sister or a child caused you grief? Have you ever tried to meet with someone who was intent on insulting you and causing you shame? Maybe you have faced “competitor calamities” in your business. Do you know what it’s like to face the fiery fury of angry men who wish they could destroy you or your career? Have you had to tiptoe around the traps that people have set for you? Do you know what it is like to face such serious discouragement that you lived on the verge of depression? This psalm can help you can transcend your troubles by learning to trust God with prayer and praise.

○ **Calling out from a committed heart. 1**

Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: For my soul trusteth in thee:

Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until *these* calamities be overpast.

Rather than muddle around in his miseries, David cried out for God’s mercies. You and I must do the same. David used the same word twice in verse 1. The same Hebrew word root word is translated as “trusts” and “refuge.” His prayer of commitment to God was this: “My soul trusts in Thee!” And, poetically expressed, “In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge.” For how long? “Until these calamities are over and past.”

○ **Crying out to God Most High who fulfills all things. 2-3**

² I will cry unto God Most High; Unto God that performeth *all things* for me. ³ He shall send from heaven, and save me *from* the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.

The name, “God Most High” translates the Hebrew name “El Elyon.^{iv}” In Genesis 14:18-22, He is identified as the One who possesses Heaven and Earth. While he was grieving over his problems, David cried out to the God who performs (or “fulfills”) all His will. The words “all things” do not appear in the original. But David asserted that God would “fulfill me” or “fulfill all for me.” As David latched on to the Lord’s promises, he knew that El Elyon would do a matchless work.

When God the Father sent His Son to this world, He fulfilled this phrase, “**God shall send forth His mercy and truth.**” There in the Second Person of the Godhead – the God who became flesh, we see His mercy and His truth. Our Lord came to tell us the truth about our condition. We are sinful people, lost in sin. We have to learn this truth before we will call out for God’s mercies. But when we are willing to admit that we are sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), then we can see His matchless mercies. “The wages of sin is death, but the Gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ

our Lord!" (Romans 6:23). When you turn to Jesus, you will see the mercy and truth expressed in John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Behold His glory and you will see that He fulfills all things. He will give you the most fulfilling, adventurous life you have ever known! When you fully embrace the mercy and truth of our Savior, you will be ready to join in the chorus of exaltation in verse 10.

○ Transcending Your Troubles, 5-7

The poetry of Psalm 57 reads like a textbook for transcending your troubles. Look at verse 5 in the context of verses 4 and 6. Rather than focus on the furious opposition around him, David turned his eyes to the heavens. As he thought about the Lord, he turned his problems into prayer prompters.

⁴ My soul is among lions: And I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, Whose teeth are spears and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword.

⁵ Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let thy glory be above all the earth.

⁶ They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down: They have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.

Only God's children have the ability to transcend troubles in this way. We can rise above the serious problems that bother us greatly.

It is likely that the lions at En-Gedi were real. They needed water and they needed food. No doubt they were lurking in the same caves in which David was hiding. But he rose above those problems; we can rise above such problems with prayer and praise to God. We can do so with the grand chorus of this psalm:

⁵ Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let thy glory be above all the earth.

Here is what we know from Habakkuk 2:14: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea!" So in the midst of his miseries, David cried out, "Be exalted, O God!" David did not view himself as the center of his universe. He knew that everything revolves around God. The psalmist earnestly desired that God's glory – His unique excellence – would be seen above all the earth. This was David's heartfelt habit for transcending his trials. As believers, we must meditate on psalms such as these to learn how to guide our hearts when we are grieving.

Our hymns help us to do this. In 1898, Johnson Oatman, Jr. wrote the words, "I want to live above the world, though Satan's darts at me are hurled; For faith has caught the joyful sound, the song of saints on higher ground."^v Learn to love the Lord and "live above the world."

Praising God out of the Depths of Your Problems, 7-11

⁷ My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

⁸ Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early^{vi}.

⁹ I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.

¹⁰ For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, And thy truth unto the clouds.

¹¹ Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: Let thy glory be above all the earth.

❖ Fix your heart on God and firm it up with hymns of praise to Him. 7

❖ Rouse your whole being, and all of your talents to praise the Lord. 8

Have you discovered the glory of what it means to be a human being? In recent messages from Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2, we noted that God created mankind, crowned with glory and honor. Here David, the redeemed saint of God, roused himself with the words, “**Awake up, my glory!**”^{vii} Have you recently roused your royal inclinations? Have you come out of spiritual slumber to awaken your whole being – your glory – to praise God? Tune your heart to sing His praises. Tune your talents to do the same. Rise before the sun to praise Him as you watch the glorious outshining of a brand new day.

On one occasion, a Christian named Frederick Nolan was fleeing from his persecutors in North Africa. After hours of running, he fell exhausted into a cave. He assumed that he would be found, but he simply could not run any more. As he waited to die at the hands of his persecutors, he noticed a spider spinning a web across the mouth of the cave. When his pursuers came to that cave, they saw the web and were certain that Nolan had not entered there. By this means of God’s providence, he was spared. He later wrote about the incident, “Where God is, a spider’s web is like a wall. Where God is not, a wall is like a spider’s web.”^{viii}

❖ Praise God to others and use your words to exalt Him among all people. 9

❖ Praise Him for His mercy and truth – which is higher and greater than the heavens above. 10

Others may live in foolish fantasies; we have the joy of knowing the true message of God’s mercies.

❖ Join the chorus of the ages with the words: “**Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: Let thy glory be above all the earth.**” 11

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ⁱ From the preposition “min” meaning “from” combined with “ketem” meaning “gold” (as it does in Psalm 45:9).

ⁱⁱ See Psalms 16, 56, 58, 59, and 60.

ⁱⁱⁱ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 217.

^{iv} *El Elyon* (“God Most High”) was the name of God known to Melchizedek who was king-priest of Salem. . . Melchizedek identified *Elyon* as “Creator of heaven and earth” . . . The identity of *El Elyon* as *Yahweh* was presupposed in Melchizedek’s blessing (vv. 14:19–20) but was clarified by Abraham when speaking to the king of Sodom (v. 14:22) . . . For Abraham the significance of the name *El Elyon* was the sovereign lordship of his God over creation and also the nations, as shown by the defeated kings of the east.” K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 64.

^v The second stanza of the hymn, “Higher Ground” https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Higher_Ground/

^{vi} In verse 8, the word (שֹׁהַר) pronounced “shaker” meaning “dawn” or “the light of dawn”) clearly appears in the Hebrew text. His intense, poetic meaning is “I will awaken the dawn (as I have awakened my glory – my whole being – and my musical instruments) to praise God.”

^{vii} *My honor*, poetic of the seat of honor in the inner man, the noblest part of man || 57:9. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 459.

^{viii} Mark Rooker, *Holman Commentary on Ezekiel*, page 1. (Accessed on Google books.)