

Psalm 61 - A Prayer for Orientation in a Crooked World

To Read:

II Samuel 7:1-17

Romans 8:18-39

I. Introduction

A. This morning we were supposed to be in Leviticus 19, which in many ways is the center of Leviticus and the Old Testament - in fact, Leviticus 19 is the most cited portion of the Old Testament in the New Testament

1. Not that any part of the Bible isn't infinitely important, but there are some ways in which Leviticus 19 is an incredibly important chapter in the Bible and it deserves to be well-studied and expounded well
2. As many of you know, many things have drawn my attention this week and by Saturday I felt that I was not going to be able to give Leviticus 19 the treatment it was due by this morning
3. So, instead of slapping a hasty sermon together on Leviticus 19, I thought I would instead give myself another week to study and prepare and instead this morning I am going to do a shorter sermon on a Psalm

B. So this morning, I'm going to do a short meditation on Psalm 61

1. Psalm 61 is one of David's psalms, and like many of his psalms it is technically a lament - a cry to God in the midst of trouble and grief
2. But there are two things about Psalm 61 that makes it different from many laments
 - a. First, it is a general lament - there are no mention of any circumstances that brought about the lament, David's heart is merely faint within him, which makes this lament immediately applicable to us in our troubles
 - b. And second, David doesn't focus on his grief or his trouble, instead in the midst of grief and trouble he looks to something else
3. So, I've titled Psalm 61: A prayer for orientation in the midst of a crooked world
 - a. David is experiencing trouble, hardship, grief, worry, fear in a world that is not completely under his control
 - b. But instead of giving into fear and grief, David calls on God to lead him to something else, so the Psalm ends on a very different note from where it started

C. Let's read Psalm 61 together this morning

D. Proposition: When our souls are troubled, we need to take our eyes off ourselves and focus instead on our King and His final victory

1. David's Prayer
2. Christ's Prayer
3. Our Prayer

II. David's Prayer

A. As I just mentioned a moment ago, this Psalm is a lament, but no circumstances for the lament are given

1. So this morning, I just want to focus on one thing - in the midst of trouble, what did David seek from God
2. And this Psalm records four pleas from David to God, and I want to look at these four pleas
3. And as we look at these four pleas, we will see that David calls on God to progressively remove his eyes from himself and to something much greater
4. In the midst of his troubles, David wants to forget himself and find his king - in the light of the glory of his king, his troubles are not ultimate

B. First Cry: O God, listen to my prayer when my heart is faint

1. Psalm 61:1-2 - *Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint.*
2. At the start of this Psalm, David is honest with God - his heart is faint, he is burdened by the troubles and travails of this world, he is unsure whether he can go on, he is unsure if God cares, if God knows
3. In fact, he describes himself as being at the ends of the earth, far away from the temple of God, far away from God's covenant presence
4. But when David feels that way, he doesn't let his feelings win - when he feels that way, he reminds himself of what is true - there is nowhere he can go to escape God's presence, neither death nor life, nor anything in creation can separate him from God's love
5. Now those aren't necessarily things that David says here in this Psalm, but you can sense him preaching that to himself in these first verses - God I feel so far away, but I still cry out to you
6. When I feel far off, when I feel hopeless, when my heart is faint, when I'm not sure that you hear, I'll cry out, "Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer!"
7. David doesn't have anything left, but instead of giving into despair, he cries out to God, "O God, please listen"
8. David acknowledges that he has nothing, and in faith, he turns to God

C. Second Cry: O God, lead me to the rock that is higher than I

1. Psalm 61:2-3 - *Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.*
2. After David's simply cry for God to listen, David starts a second request - and this request isn't to change his situation but to change his heart; David doesn't call on God to relieve his trouble but to remind him of his foundation
3. So he says, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," and in this prayer David acknowledges several things
4. First, he acknowledges that he is not ultimately important - there is a rock that is higher than he - his troubles may seem important, overwhelming, earth-shattering to him, but he is merely a small player in a cosmic drama - there is a storyline that is much greater than David the man, the purposes of God are over all
5. Second, he acknowledges that he is not ultimately powerful - God has been his refuge and tower - David's situation is not in his control, and his safety isn't his responsibility; God is the one who controls all and if David is to be preserved it will be God's actions not David's
6. When David is at the end of his strength, he asks God to remind him of these truths - to lead him to the rock, to drive him to find peace and protection in the arms of His God and Savior and not to rest in his own strength
7. If David would rest in his own strength, he would despair, so God lead me to that which is greater - let me not seek salvation in myself but find salvation in you; let me not find rest in my own plans, but rejoice in yours
8. In the midst of his situation, David takes his eyes off himself and looks at God his Savior - You are my only hope of salvation, You are my only way out of this mess

D. Third Cry: O God, let me dwell in your tent forever

1. Psalm 61:4-5 - *Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! Selah For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.*
2. In his trouble, David turns and looks to God for salvation, but he doesn't stop there - looking toward God in the midst of trouble isn't enough, David needs to keep looking farther
3. So he cries out again, "Let me dwell in your tent forever!" and now David is not only looking to God from the midst of his troubles, he is looking to God past his troubles
4. If God is ultimately important, and God is ultimately powerful, then the future is absolutely secure
5. So David cries out to God to remind him that salvation is sure forever - God has promised a heritage to those who fear his name, and God's plans and purposes will never fail

6. So David calls on God to keep His final promise - let me dwell in your tents forever - a promise that is sure to come true
7. David's troubles may seem overwhelming now, but assuredly they will pass because God will ultimately win and give David a spot in His tent
8. In the midst of his situation, David takes his eyes off his troubles and looks at God his Salvation - Your promise is sure, and your promise is known, what can man do to me?

E. Fourth Cry: O God, prolong the life of the king

1. Psalm 61:6-7 - Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!
2. Before David ends his prayer, he makes one more cry, but this cry is different than the last two
 - a. The last two cries both had to do with David's trouble in some way - God is the one who will save me out of trouble and God's salvation is sure so this trouble cannot last
 - b. But this cry isn't focused on David and his trouble at all, or at least isn't ultimately focused on David
 - c. Instead, this cry looks past David completely and calls on God to do more than work in David's current situation
3. So David calls on God to prolong the life of the king
 - a. Now, in one way, this is still a prayer for David - we aren't sure when David wrote this, but we know that he was either promised by God to be king or was currently the king
 - b. So David's cry for God to prolong the life of the king was a cry for God to save him
 - c. But the end of this cry can't rest in David, for two reasons: first David writes in the third person here, David doesn't consider himself this king, and David doesn't fit the characteristics of this king, the eternal king enthroned in the presence of God
4. So David is calling on God to raise up His ultimate king and give God's final king the victory
 - a. David is now looking completely past his situation, his prayer no longer has to do with his trouble
 - b. Instead, his prayer has been drawn up into the glories of salvation
 - c. God, I'm not ultimate and your salvation is sure, so God send your king, make him victorious, make his reign prosperous, shower him with steadfast love and faithfulness!
 - d. David is no longer praying about his concerns, he's praying about God's concerns - through prayer, David has reoriented his perspective - these troubles may come and go, but my ultimate hope is in God's promised king
5. That is the glory of this Psalm, David starts with his heart faint and through prayer is drawn completely out of his troubles and into God's final victory and the reign of God's king
 - a. As far as we know, nothing has changed for David, but that's not what's ultimately important
 - b. God's king reigning is ultimately important, and David can pray for that and rejoice in that even in the midst of trouble
6. In the midst of his situation, David takes his eyes off his troubles and looks at God his King - the ultimate reign of your chosen king is the ultimate good and that is what my hope rests in

F. Conclusion: I will sing praises

1. Psalm 61:8 - *So will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day.*
2. So David, having been completely drawn out of his trouble to pray for the final victory of God's king, can finish with praise - these troubles can't stop me from praising God, nor can my feelings of desperation and despair
3. God is the Savior, His Salvation is sure, and He will send His King - it doesn't matter what's going on in my life, those things are true and I can rejoice and sing praises to my God
4. David's solution to his trouble isn't to change his situation or his circumstances, the solution to David's trouble is to take his eyes off himself and to look to his ultimate king and sing his praises

III. Christ's Prayer

A. For our second point, I want to look past David and see how this Psalm finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ

1. Jesus Himself said that all Scripture was pointing to Him and this Psalm is no exception
2. So how is Jesus the ultimate point of this Psalm and how is He the ultimate answer to its prayer?
3. There are many ways we could look at this Psalm, but I just want to briefly consider two this morning:

B. First, Jesus is the ultimate supplicant in this prayer

1. Psalm 61 is a prayer of David in the midst of distress, when his heart was faint within him
2. But I think Psalm 61 is recorded as Scripture not merely because it is a beautiful prayer, but because ultimately David's words were reflecting someone greater, these words, or at least the attitudes behind them, would be expressed by someone else
3. Christ is the ultimate supplicant in this prayer, and we see Him express this same sense of despair paired with an ultimate view toward God's purpose in Matthew 26:38-39 - *Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*
4. Jesus, facing the cross and the wrath of God was in deep despair, beyond His strength as a man, so He cries out to God to listen, but ultimately takes His eyes off Himself and looks towards His Father's plan and purpose and final salvation - not My will, but Yours be done
5. So the Author of Hebrews can describe Jesus in this way, Hebrews 5:7 - *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.*
6. In the midst of despair, Jesus cries out to God, but not ultimately for His immediate salvation, instead He looked to God's ultimate victory - and He was heard because of His reverence
7. And like David had, in a much lesser sense, millennia before, Jesus endured the trial and despised it's shame because He was looking forward to the final victory, Hebrews 12:2 - *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*
8. Jesus is the ultimate, the perfect speaker of this prayer, which is a great comfort to us - truly, He knows our sorrows, our griefs He bore, our troubles He carried and He cried out to God and God preserved Him even through the midst of death

C. Second, Jesus is the ultimate king in this prayer

1. I said a moment ago that David couldn't ultimately be praying for himself in the last verses of this Psalm partially because David wasn't the king who was enthroned before God forever
2. But there would come One from David's line who would fit that bill, so we come to Luke 1:30-33 - *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*
3. David's prayer anticipated the Son that David had been promised, and Jesus was that Son - David could endure through the midst of trial because God would keep His promise and raise Jesus up to be king
4. David's prayer in the midst of His trouble was ultimately a prayer that Jesus would be king - David probably had a very dim, very obstructed view of that truth, but it was the ultimate end; David's hope was the God would show His love to Jesus and establish Jesus' throne forever

IV. Our Prayer

A. For our last point this morning, I want to consider how we should respond to this Psalm

1. And applying this Psalm is easy, we ought to approach trouble with the same attitude of David
2. We need to take our eyes off ourselves and look to God our Savior, God our Salvation, and God our King
3. So, let's briefly meditate on how we can pray like David in this Psalm

B. In the midst of trouble, we should go to God in prayer

1. I don't know about you, but I find a tendency in me when I face something stressful or overwhelming or fearful, my first thought, sadly, isn't always to go to God in prayer - sometimes I forget, sometimes I feel overwhelmed, sometimes I feel wildly unworthy to bring my troubles before a holy God
2. But like David, when we feel far off, unable to be heard, even unable to pray, we can just cry out to God and we must - cry out, God please listen! God please hear! God please know!
3. God loves to listen to His redeemed children, He loves to answer their prayers, so even when we feel like we can't pray, we cry out to God, God please hear!

C. In the midst of trouble, we should look to Christ for salvation

1. I think one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the midst of troubles is to look to ourselves for an answer - or at least I find that strong tendency in myself - how am I going to fix this situation? And I feel helpless because I can't
2. So, like David, we need to cry out to God to take our eyes off of ourselves and look at our Savior - lead me to the Rock that is higher than I
3. And we have a better view of what that rock is than David ever did, that rock is the rock of our salvation, the author and perfecter of our faith, our surety standing before the throne of God, Jesus Himself
4. So, in the midst of trouble, we cry, "God turn my eyes to see Jesus as my Savior. Let me rest in what He has won for me. Let me trust in His finished work and in His continued work in me! And let me set aside all trust in myself."
5. We have a Savior, and it's not us - O God, lead us to the Rock that is higher than we

D. In the midst of trouble, we should remind ourselves that our salvation is sure

1. In the midst of trouble, sometimes it can seem like this is the end of the world, or at least we forget that this too will pass - we end up troubled in spirit because it seems like this is the final word
2. But for those in Christ that will never be the case - the final word is glorification and eternal rest with Jesus - we are troubled because we've traded God's eternal, perfect sight for our limited, faulty sight
3. So, like David, we need to call out to God to keep His promise of salvation and to remind us of that promise - Let me dwell in your tent forever!
4. Whatever might happen now, and God I'm not sure what's going to happen now, but past this light and momentary affliction, keep your promise and let me dwell with you forever
5. Our salvation is sure - our prosperity, peace, and safety are not promised in this world, but they are promised forever, so we have no need to be worried, our salvation is sure in Christ

E. In the midst of trouble, we should rejoice that Christ is the king

1. So, like David, we need to remind ourselves that we aren't ultimate and our salvation is not ultimately what happens in this situation, our salvation rests in the eternal victory of God's king - so in the midst of trouble, we should turn our eyes from our troubles to the victory that Christ has won and rejoice in that
2. We can pray in the midst of any situation - God I don't know how this will work for my good and Christ's glory, but I know that you will exalt your King, and I pray wholeheartedly that you would do that, whether through my life or my death, my victory or my defeat, O God, give Jesus the victory!
3. If Jesus is King then everything will work out - we don't need to trust in ourselves and we don't need to worry about our situation, we can just rejoice in His kingship

F. So, in the midst of trouble, we should sing praises

1. If Christ is Savior, Christ is Faithful, and Christ is King, we should be able to sing praises in the midst of any situation, in fact, that's the answer to all of our situations: sing praises; it might not change the immediate situation, but it is God's desire from you in the midst of that situation: sing praise
2. So I want to finish with a story of men who trusted God like this, Acts 16:19-25 - *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them...*
3. Now, we know how this story ends, but Paul and Silas didn't, for all they knew, they might be there a while, but they took their eyes off themselves, looked to God and sang praises - Jesus was still King, Salvation was still sure, and God could still save them, what would stop them from singing?