

We Need God's Presence

Psalm 54

Studies in the Psalms #55

THE story of David continues to intertwine the Psalter, especially his struggle with Doeg in Psalms 52–53 and now as the heading to this Psalm states it: **when the Ziphites went and told Saul, “Is not David hiding among us?”** This is the story in 1 Samuel 23 when he was in the hill country of Ziph, hiding from Saul. Saul was trying to find and kill David. So the Ziphites ratted him out: **“Is not David hiding among us?”** What this worse was that the Ziphites were fellow members of the tribe of Judah! (Josh. 15:24, 44) David was betrayed by his own flesh and blood! In other words, David felt vulnerable; he felt helpless against his enemies. Isn't this how some of us feel who've come to know Jesus but are the only ones in our family who do? Isn't this who all of us feel as we are in the world but not of it? The help we need is found in the precious presence of our God.

A PLEA (vv. 1–3)

The Psalm opens with A PLEA. Listen to its urgency: **O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might** (v. 1). Look at the poetic parallelism here: the **name** of God is paralleled to the **might** of God. God's **name** in Scripture is the revelation of himself. When Moses asked for the Lord's name so he could tell his fellow slaves in Egypt, what did the Lord say?

I AM WHO I AM. He proclaimed who he is. So the **name** of God is the presence of God. And based on the parallel in verses, it's a powerful presence: his **name** or he himself, is **might**[y]. He asks to be **save**[d] or **vindicate**[d] (*din*), which means to be defended. Then he continues his urgent plea: **O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth** (v. 2).

Why is he so urgent in this plea? **For strangers have risen against me.** According to Isaiah 25 **strangers** are violent men. **Ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves.** Who does that sound like? Doeg and the fool of Psalm 53. Who does that sound like? Can you hear the pleas of Jesus here, surrounded by wicked me?

Notice what David is saying to us: the only way to find salvation and vindication from violent men who ignore God is to trust in the name or presence of God. Our opening Scripture from Exodus 33 tonight impresses this upon us, doesn't it? The Lord commands Moses to leave Sinai without the presence of the Lord. Everyone recognizes how disastrous this is! The Lord says, yes, it is, because if I were to go with you I'd consume you! So Moses goes into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord face to face as with a friend. He asks the Lord whom he will send, reminding him that these are *his*

people! The Lord responds with the precious promise: “My presence will go with you.” The Moses responds with why these were such comforting words:

If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?

We, too, need to plead for the presence of the Lord among us and with us.

A PROCLAMATION (vv. 4–5)

Some of us have to go to school or work tomorrow knowing we’re going to face a stranger and ruthless person. Is that you? Verses 4–5 tell us it’s not good enough just to plead for the presence of God but we must also make A PROCLAMATION about the presence of God in our lives: **behold, God is my helper.** ‘*ozzer* is a military term for an ally. **The LORD is the upholder of my life** (v. 4). With strangers and ruthless men all around him, to whom could David go? The Lord! **My helper; my life-upholder.** Can you hear the echo of Jesus down the corridor of time in his resurrection? This is our proclamation, too, because this is what the Lord’s presence does for us in him.

Because this is who the Lord is, David can say, **he will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them** (v. 5). We’ve seen this idea already in the Psalms. Turn back to Psalm 9. Look at verse 15: “The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid, their own

foot has been caught.” Of course, to say this is a confession of faith because we don’t see it with our eyes. But one day faith *will* turn to sight. To say this is a confession of hope because it’s something we long for. To say this is a confession of patience because what do we see every day? The opposite; the wicked prosper; injustice rules. God will hear; God will solve it all!

A PRAISE (vv. 6–7)

Then comes David’s words of PRAISE: **with a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good** (v. 6). One of the great examples of a **freewill offering** in Scripture is in Exodus 35, where, after coming out of Egypt the Lord commanded Moses to build a tabernacle. Then we read “all the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD” (v. 29). Note also that when he plead for the presence of God he focuses on the might of the name of the Lord; now he says the **name** of the Lord is **good**. The presence of the Lord is so mighty and so good that our hearts should overflow with abundant worship not only in words but in deeds as we use our time, our talent, and our treasure.

Then look at verse 7. Here's David's concluding reason for why he praised the Lord: **for he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.** What's interesting is that he's saying this while **strangers have risen against me** and **ruthless men seek my life** (v. 2). So how can he say this? David uses the perfect tense to speak of something so certain that rhetorically he can say it's already happened! This is how confident we can be that Jesus will glorify us in his presence. This is how confident we can be that Jesus will judge all our enemies. We can say it's already done!

And can't you feel the anguish of Jesus in his life and death here? But it's just the backdrop to his vindication when God the Father and God the Holy Spirit raised him up. The apostle Paul even speaks of his resurrection as his vindication in 1 Timothy 3:16.

Brothers and sisters, we need to plead for the presence of God in our lives and the life of our congregation against all our enemies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need to proclaim the presence of God is the reason we have victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need to praise God already that he will vindicate us and set all things right when Jesus returns.