



“Our Merciful Most High God”

Psalm 57:1-11

June 14th, 2020

We are going to continue our brief series in the Psalms this morning, calling this series *Refuge and Strength*. This morning we are going to be in Psalm 57. Please join me there. The introduction of this Psalm indicates that it was written by David when he had fled from King Saul, and he was living in a cave. He was hiding out *in a cave* of all places.

I appreciate being out in the great outdoors as much as the next man. I enjoy excursions into the California mountains, in particular the Sierra Nevada's. They are wonderful with all the giant pine trees and the granite rocks and running streams. I enjoy being out there. I love camping.

My best camping experience so far was in tent trailer that we rented last summer for Zion National Park. I got to sleep on an actual mattress. That was cool, but I will take a tent. We will probably go tent camping this summer. However, I am not interested in going out into the realm of nature and sleeping in a cave with who knows what else inside that cave. No thanks! Give me a tent, not the cave.

But here in this Psalm the context is when David was fleeing from Saul and he was taking his hiding place in that cave. To make matters worse, Saul was obsessive about killing King David. Saul was not tracking David down to take him through a very, very objective time in the justice system, where he would go in through a court of law and be objectively tried.

Saul wanted to kill David and he had already made many attempts on his life. Saul had become insanely jealous of David's military successes under him and Saul's solution to that jealousy was to put David to death. That's what he was pursuing.

In addition to that, remember this was not just anybody. It was the king of Israel who was pursuing David. This is the one who had men working under him and for him, men who were perfectly capable and willing to carry out any of Saul's twisted desires. These men were chasing after David, and David was running for his life.

Personally, I don't know what that is like. There has been a time or two in life where I know that somebody did not like me. Maybe they wanted to make life difficult for me in many ways, but we are talking about a person bent on absolute destruction.

Have you ever had that happen to you? Somebody wanted you dead. That is serious. That was David's situation. What kind of prayer emerges from the heart of faith in circumstances like that? What kind of prayer is carried the by Holy Spirit when a child of God is under such circumstances?

That is what we have recorded for us in this Psalm. It is here for our instruction. It is from the Living Word of God to fill our hearts with faith for the hard things that we face in this life. So let's read what is written for us in Psalm 57:

**¹Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by.**

**²I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.**

**³He will send from heaven and save me;
he will put to shame him who tramples on me. *Selah*
God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!**

**⁴My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts—
The children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.**

**⁵Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!**

**⁶They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my way,
but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah***

**⁷My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast!
I will sing and make melody!**

**⁸Awake, my glory!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!**

**⁹I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.**

**¹⁰For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.**

**¹¹Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!**

Brothers and sisters, we have David's prayer of deliverance that morphs into something else along the way. Did you notice? David's prayer started with a cry, a plea for help and it ended up being an expression of praise and worship. It was transformed along the way.

This Psalm is included for us in Scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit, not only for us to see what happened in David's life, but to also take this in. The design of it is that we might respond in similar faith when life gets hard and painful and difficult in this world that we live in.

I wonder how many of you have noticed that there is suffering in this world. There is difficulty. Christians are not exempt from it. The hardships that we face, they come in a variety of ways. There are all kinds of hard things that we face in this world.

But what is focused on in this Psalm is the kind of suffering that we experience at the hands of other human beings. On the one hand, there is much glory in this world to be observed. At the same time, it is a fallen world filled with fallen people who do harm to each other. Did you notice that here in this text?

Notice how David described the human race. See the human beings in Verse 4. Let's take another look at what is written there. It is intense!

**⁴My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts—**

David used the language, talking about carnivorous beast with fangs that are fiery. It almost sounds demonic to me. Beasts that were on the prowl and they were aflame and furious. And what are they? There is a dash in that verse as:

**⁴...The children of man,
whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.**

This is a sobering view of human beings and the damage they can do to other human beings. For all the different ways that human beings are able to inflict harm upon human beings, what is focused on here is the capacity for speech. Did you notice how David focused on that?

As David described the essence of human evil and how it finds expression, he talked about how human beings inflict violence with words. It is very sobering. Not every human being is capable of doing harm to other human beings with their hands. However, just about any human being can do serious harm, inflict serious pain that goes deep inside another person based on what they say.

I remember when my mom was a preschool teacher's aide. She would come home with her feelings hurt because those little ones were so brutally honest about certain things. They would say certain things, though they were not trying to harm. What about the people who actually do seek to abuse with their speech? Sometimes rash words that do harm.

How about slanderous words? Later on in the New Testament, James the brother of Jesus talked about how the little tiny instrument of the tongue can set massive forest fires ablaze. A little tiny thing like the tongue, this capacity of speech, is spoken of as an instrument of mass destruction in the pages of Scripture.

We see here in this Psalm a couple of ways that this really affected David, how he was really taken down by it. On the one hand in Verse 3, David gave the sense that he felt trampled by Saul and his men. Trampled. Taken down.

The interesting thing is, yes, Saul was in hot pursuit after David. In the language of being trampled, you have the prey that is running away. You have the hunter that is seeking the prey and the idea of being trampled, it is that moment when the hunter captures the prey and goes tumbling in the dust.

However, David had not yet been caught by King Saul, yet he felt trampled because he had been slandered by Saul. David was trying to do his duty and then he was being maligned by the king of the land and he was feeling trampled by it.

Then later when you get into Verse 6, David said, My soul was bowed down. David said, The immaterial part of me was exhausted to the point that it could not lift itself up. This is the language of depression—spiritual depression, emotional depression.

It is amazing how words can undo a person so that on the inside they are tapped out. Throughout the Psalms you have this kind of language used of the downcast soul. There is a sense in this Psalm where all of this was inflicted upon David.

I am sure the fact that Saul wanted to kill him was a big part of David's depression, but what David gave expression to was that you have the human race with the capacity to do violence with the things that they say, and David was hurting.

All of this is expressed in this Psalm, but, brothers and sisters, understanding this, let's also understand this: this Psalm is not primarily about the pain that human beings cause each other. Rather, it is about the hope and renewal that the children of God experience in Him when they go to Him and abide in Him and when they seek shelter in Him in the midst of the pain in life.

That is what this Psalm ends up being, as we saw the transformation that happened as David was even writing it. That is what this Psalm is about. David had fled into a cave for refuge. I would imagine he was some of his men too.

I was picturing the context of this Psalm, thinking that perhaps they found this spot and some of his men said it was a good spot. The cave was deep and hidden. David said, It was fine, but my refuge is somewhere else. Yes, this is a deep cave but I have a more important and better refuge still. I am going to take refuge in my God. My soul takes refuge in God.

That is the emphatic place that David began this Psalm with. Then as he continued on just meditating on the character and attributes of God, the quality of who God is, David's heart and soul started getting lifted up. It is almost like you can sense the air being pumped back into the tire. This is here for the church of God, for the people of Christ, to take heart.

This is a rich Psalm and I want us to see three of the aspects of who God is that David was abiding in. I want for us to learn from David how we can take refuge in God and His character and who He is for us. Then, brothers and sisters, pay attention all the way to the end because there is a very important perspective that we are going to close with.

Let's learn how to take refuge in God from David as the people of God. How do we refuge in God? The first thing that we notice here in this Psalm is that we:

1. Take refuge in the tender mercies of God (V.1)

This is what is at the very beginning. David began by appealing to the mercy of the Lord. Verse 1:

**¹Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by.**

Be merciful to me, that was David's twofold appeal to the Lord. It is God's mercy. His tender and caring heart toward His people, especially in their suffering. God is deeply concerned for all that we face in this life. He is deeply concerned when we suffer at the hands of other people. God knows about it and He cares about it.

Listen to this church, He cares. He cares with a tender and merciful heart. Like David, we are to take refuge in that mercy and in that care and concern that He has for us. In this Psalm, the tender mercy of the Lord is pictured four times as taking refuge in the shadow of God's wings.

It is interesting to read through the different perspective among conservative bible commentators about what that means. There are two of them that I focused on, and one of them that I definitely lean toward.

Some people read this language of taking refuge in the shadow of God's wings and they go to the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. The covering on the top of that ark is called the *Mercy Seat*. Guarding the Ark of the Covenant were two sculptures of cherubim—mighty angelic figures.

Cherubim were not beings that look like they could also be in a Pampers ad, like some little chubby infant. No angel looks like that! Cherubim are awesome, fearsome, warrior beings. If you saw an angel, the word to you after seeing that angel would be, Fear not! That is what they always say, unless you were on the wrong side of God's mercy. If you are rebelling against Him, they could be instrument of judgement to those who are unrepentant.

However, what a figure of strength they are with their wings covering the Mercy Seat. So some people think that maybe that was what David had in mind in this Psalm. There are some brilliant men and women who think that.

That is not what I think. I went somewhere else here. When I was thinking about what it means when we take shelter in the shadow of His wings, my thoughts went to our Messiah. I went our Lord and Savior, Jesus, and the time in the Gospel of Luke when He used this language too.

Do you remember it? In Luke Chapter 13 and Verse 34, Jesus said:

³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

There you have the idea. It is a picture of a mother hen, concerned for her chicks and gathering them in to take shelter under her wings. (Pastor shows overhead of this.) Do you see the chicks hiding under the mother's wings. There is this place of tender care that those chicks find themselves in.

God invites His people to gather under the protection of His wings. My brothers and my sisters, it is a picture of His tender mercy and concern. As you experience hardship and painful things by people and circumstances, have this picture of the Living God who desires you to dwell in the shelter of His presence and His care and His love like a brood under the wings of the hen.

This is a picture of the tender mercy of the Lord. Continuing, as we think about taking refuge in God, we remember that not only is He a God of tender mercy but He is a God of mighty strength.

2. Take refuge in the mighty power of God (Vv. 2-6)

We take refuge in God's mighty power! Did you see this in Verse 2?

**²I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
³He will send from heaven and save me;
he will put to shame him who tramples on me. *Selah*
God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!**

In these verses we see David crying out to God and notice the way he cried out to Him. He said, I cry out to the Most High God. That is a title of the absolute supremacy of God, the One who is enthroned above all; the One who rules over all; the One who has strength beyond all. He is the Lord Most High.

David knew that God would practice according to His will divine intervention. It happened in past redemptive history. It was happening in David's day, and it would happen into the future as well, that God would get involved. That seems like such of an understatement to me in the affairs of His people.

There are two ways in which God gets involved. There is His visible hand of the miraculous. There is also His unseen hand of providence. There are times in history where we have seen God breaking in and dramatically and undeniable supernatural way. We read about the exodus where God sent plagues upon Egypt.

There are many examples of God intervening in stunning and miraculous ways, but most of the time, He intervenes in ways that might not be seen by every human eye when He turns circumstances and different things in life according to His will for His people, taking action for them.

Did you see David's confidence in that, even as Saul and his bands of lions were pursuing him? It says going into Verse 4:

**⁴My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts—
The children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.
⁵Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!
⁶They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my way,
but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah***

David had this sense of confidence that God had ability to turn the tables in the advantage of His child, David, at any time. David was so confident that God had the ability to do this, that he spoke of it as already happening. Maybe something of that was at work when Saul went into the cave to use the restroom! The Lord just led him right there by God's hand of providence. Remarkable!

David was taking refuge in God's mighty power, in God's ability to intervene. Do you believe that God has the ability to handle your enemies? Do you trust in Him to do so according to His will? We must trust in God.

Between the services, a question arose up in my mind. What do we do with the fact that there are Christian martyrs? We have an awesome and powerful God who does intervene, yet men of women of faith shed their blood and die for their faith. What do we do with that?

My answer to that is that God had an awesome and glorious and infinite and everlasting purpose even for their deaths. That somehow His will was at work even during that. Perhaps the blood of the martyrs was planting the seed of the church. Those ones who died in the faith for their faith, they went into a great cloud of witnesses in heaven, knowing that the eternal purposes of an awesome and wise God was at work.

So now we get to the deep faith where we say I will even die for my faith if it be God's design. Biblical teaching is that sometimes Christians do die, even under the will of God. We need to buck up under that and ask that the Lord's will be done. But even so and also, so often God turns events and sometimes we see it and sometimes we don't see it.

Either way, God is the Almighty Most High God and we take our refuge in His tender mercy and in His awesome strength as we look forward to an eternity that is going to be full of His glory and grace forevermore.

How do we take refuge in God? We take refuge in God's tender mercy. We take refuge in His mighty power. Third, we:

3. Take refuge in the loving faithfulness of God (Vv 3; 9-10)

Throughout this life and all that it holds, God is faithful to His people. This Psalm it highlights a number of God's attributes for us. But something that really stands out in this Psalm is the faithfulness of the Lord.

We see this twice toward the beginning of the Psalm, then again at the end of the Psalm. Both times it is coupled with God's love. So we have in Verse 3:

³...God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!

Then we see in Verse 10, David was in the midst of time where he was praising the Lord. How is it that he was praising the Lord even in times like that? Now he was talking to the Lord, saying:

**¹⁰For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.**

David was saying, God You are immensely faithful to me. Your faithfulness is to the clouds.

I love clouds! Clouds are so cool. I began thinking back about what I learned about clouds in geography class when I was a student at Long Beach City College. We studied about the different clouds that we see on this earth.

The first kind of cloud that I thought of are stratus clouds. They are the thick blanket of gray clouds that cover the earth on overcast days, the kind that we see a lot here in Southern California during May Gray and June Gloom.

Then there are cirrus clouds. These are white, wispy clouds way up high. There might be otherwise blue skies, with wisps way up so high that they are actually comprised of ice crystals.

Then there are cumulus clouds. Those are probably most people's favorite clouds. They are the thick, billowy, pillow-like, marshmallow-like clouds. I remember flying in an airplane as a five-year-old going to back to Pennsylvania with my family. We were flying over these cumulus clouds. And even as a little guy, I was so awestruck by them.

There are also cumulonimbus clouds. They are kind of like the cumulus clouds, but are the massive, mighty, storm clouds, filled with hail and electricity and thunder and lightning. They are white and dark and they are red. They are awesome and glorious and God's creation.

David was a man who reflected on these kinds of things. David was a man who liked being outdoors. That is the impression I get of him. He spent a lot of time outdoors. Remember that he was a shepherd early in his life.

I picture David in the daytime while the flock was feeding. He is laying back and he is looking up into the sky, seeing God's handywork—these kinds of clouds and they were awesome. Maybe at night David, keeping watch over his flock, he saw the stars filling the universe above him.

David took these things in and he understood the theological value of them. They teach us about the power of God, but here David said, This is your faithfulness, God. Your faithfulness is above the might and awesome clouds that fill the sky,

David was reflecting on the mighty and immense, loving, faithfulness of the Lord. In the midst of all that he was going through with King Saul, David said, Whatever comes, I know you are going to carry out Your purpose for me whatever it is. And whatever comes, I am in capable hands if I'm in Your hands. You are the one who can fight battles for me. I am safe in Your hands. You are a faithful, faithful God.

David took refuge in the faithfulness of the Lord. God has awesome, perfect, inscrutable purposes for each one of us. He is going to see them through. When we get to heaven we are going to see just what those designs were and how they worked, and it is going to be glorious. And we take refuge in Him.

It was at this point in the Psalm where David was reflecting on the tender mercy of the Lord. He was reflecting on the mighty power of the Lord and the loving faithfulness of the Lord and the Psalm starts to change in its character. It goes from crying out to God for mercy, then David began praising the Lord. He was resolved to praise the Lord.

It is like the river just began flowing from within David, this river of praise. We talked about it last week in the 46th Psalm. Even in the midst of the firestorm of rage in the nations, there is a stream that makes glad the city of God.

We would understand that to be the presence of the Lord by Spirit who just causes worship and praise to flow from the heart. That is what happens in this Psalm. Verse 7:

⁷My heart is steadfast, O God,

my heart is steadfast!
I will sing and make melody!
⁸Awake, my glory!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!
⁹I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
¹⁰For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
¹¹Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

David was praising the Lord. Something that stood out to me is that the praise in this portion of the Psalm is filled with exclamation points at the end of several sentences. It is like a conference of exclamation points, accompanying David in that cave. There was praise that was being lifted from within David.

It is amazing because, not only was this something that was happening as the Holy Spirit was prompting it from deep within David, but he used the language of resolution. He was resolved to go with what God was doing within him. He was not going to languish as a victim. He said, I am going to praise the Lord. My heart is steadfast. I'm going to continue in this. He said, I will. I will sing and make melody.

David was pulling this up from within him. Awake within me O glory. Awake glory. I will awake the dawn. I'm going to praise the Lord. He was resolved to praise God before the trial ended. He was going to praise God within the trial. He was going to praise God for the light that he saw at the mount of the cave, while he was still back in the deep searches of the cave.

David was going to praise the Lord! There is language here where David said, I will awake the dawn. We know that this kind of praise is something that the Holy Spirit moves and prompts. And we see that David was going to go with this.

David was there in the midst of a dark night of his soul, and he said, With Your Spirit's help, I am awake in the dawn. I'm going to see the light and I am going to give praise for who You are in Your tender mercy. In Your awesome strength, and in Your loving faithfulness, I am going to praise You.

David was taking refuge in the Lord. Then all these things were released in Him. David was a man just like us. He was a human being just like us. What God did in him, He can do in us as we take shelter in the wings of the Almighty. We will face hard things. We need to abide in the Lord.

We need to be those who are found in the presence of the Lord. He beckons us in. We must respond to His call. We must abide and take refuge in Him by consciously and deliberately thinking about who He has revealed Himself to be. His Word is powerful. It is living. It as

active and it produces results in the soul. In the midst of your hardships, I pray that you will take refuge and have this kind worship in your God.

Now a perspective as we conclude. This is something that we all need to take to heart. This is what I am calling the M. Night Shyamalan moment in this message. I wonder if you have heard of that movie producer. He makes these thriller movies, and they always end with some kind of stunning revelation or twist, where your jaw drops and you say what? That was happening the whole time?

There is a very important thing that we need to take to heart in view of what we have read here. David had a lot to say about his enemies, didn't he? David had a lot to say about how these children of men were like beasts, fired up, flaming in sin, with verbal assaults that came forth from their mouths. They were like beasts according to David.

Here is a question for you: how would the family of Uriah the Hittite describe David a little bit later on? Remember Uriah the Hittite? Do you remember how David sent his armies out to battle. David stayed behind and saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite bathing and instead of averting his eyes, he engaged in lust. That lust turned physical. He brought her in. David committed sin with her. She became pregnant.

What did David do? He carried out a coverup attempt, bringing Uriah back and tried to get him drunk so he would then sleep with his wife. Then the child would appear to be Uriah's. Uriah would not go for that. So David sent him back to the battle, placing him on the front line intending Uriah's death, so that in a more legal way, he could take Bathsheba as his wife.

Knowing what David did, how would the family members of Uriah describe David? Might they describe David like a beast, sinful, somebody who worked violence against them? Is that how they might describe him? I think so.

Brothers and sisters, this is a sobering moment as we remember that there is one hero in the pages of Scripture. One hero and one hero alone! And that hero is not David. That hero is another that was born in Bethlehem like David. That is the one who would later be called the Son of David.

That hero is Christ Jesus. David was a sinner just like us, capable of doing abusive things with his speech too. But Christ is the hero! Now let's get even more into the shock therapy in this M. Night Shyamalan for a moment when we read what is here in Verse 4,

**⁴My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts—
The children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.**

That is not just David. That is you fallen in sin. That's you and the damage that you too have done to other people in the way that you have treated them and in the way that you have spoken to them.

Somewhere in this world there is somebody whose soul was bowed down as a result of the things that you did and said. This is the truth. This is the tough medicine that we need to take in. We are fallen sinners.

This human race, though created in God's image and while there is a glory to it that has to be recognized, we are all fallen and we are in this parade of sin and rebellion against the Lord. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord for His mercy.

David said more than he knew when he said, You send forth your steadfast love and faithfulness. The Messiah, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, put Himself in a human body and He entered into the parade of sin. He entered into the rebellious humanity.

Jesus entered in as the only sinless one; the perfect one; the pure and holy one. He entered into this world of violence and He lived a life of perfect peace for those who were in the parade of sin. He lived the perfect life, full of love and grace and truth and righteousness.

Then Jesus went to the cross. There the people in the parade of sin, they nailed Him to that cross but all along, this was part of the foreordained wisdom of God who would send His Son into the world to be the sacrifice for our sin, the Lamb of God. There on the cross, He paid the price.

God is a just god. He has holy indignation and wrath toward all sin, and Jesus died on that cross to take the wrath that our sin deserves. Jesus was then put in the grave, and He rose on the third day with new life. He sends forth His Spirit into the parade of sin to bring sinners like us to living faith in Christ.

The Spirit comes and convicts us and helps us to understand that we are sinners. We have blood on our hands. We have blood on our lips. We have done harm to other people. We have sinned in so many ways. It is a staggering moment when a person understands that they are not the righteous one in the midst of a world of fallen sinners—that they are a sinner too.

The Holy Spirit awakens us to this. Then the eye that is turned to Jesus and repents and agrees, knowing sin is wrong, they are covered in His righteousness. They are cleansed by His grace. They are given the Holy Spirit. And from the inside out, they start to become new.

This work of renewal operates so that we become agents of God's peace in the midst of a world fallen in sin. We go forth as agents of the Kingdom seeking to point people to where they can find forgiveness and newness of life in everlasting life.

This same Jesus in this world of sin, He changes us so much that His Spirit will prompt us even to love our enemies. This is the radical teaching of Jesus and this is something that He produces inside of us.

This is His great work of salvation and this is His work of tender mercy upon sinners. This is the work of His awesome power to make sinners new. This is His work of loving faithfulness and we take shelter in Jesus. We shelter in Him. We take refuge in Him.

If you have never come and put your faith in Christ as one who needs forgiveness and new life, put your trust in Him. And as a follower of Christ, then know that throughout this world, you will face hard things. However, He is right there with you. He loves and cares for you with measureless love. He is going to see you through until He brings you home safely into His Everlasting Kingdom, a kingdom that is going to be such a contrast to the painful things that happen in this life.

God is good. He is our refuge and He is our strength. Let's close in a word of prayer.