



“Lead Me to the Rock”

Psalm 61:1-8

June 21st, 2020

This morning we continue in a brief series in the book of Psalms called *Refuge and Strength*. We are looking at different Psalms in which God reveals Himself as the refuge of His people. Please join me in Psalm 61 for a message that I have titled *Lead Me to the Rock*, drawn from the language of what we are about to read.

Last week we read and studied a Psalm that was written earlier in David’s life. That was Psalm 57. This week we have a Psalm that was written quite a bit later but in both cases, the Psalm was written by a man in exile; a man driven away from his home. Last week we saw David later in life when King Saul was trying to kill him. This time David had been driven out by his own son, Absalom.

Understand that this Psalm was written in the midst of bitter conflict because of David’s failures as a father earlier in life. As a result, Absalom had a seed of bitterness that was planted in his heart and that seed of bitterness as is so often the case, turned into something absolutely poisonous. So Absalom took measures to humiliate and scorn his father and to drive him out of the kingdom, to take his throne and, if necessary, he was willing to take his father’s life.

How is that for a happy Father’s Day Bible story? Happy Father’s Day everybody! Guess what? The Bible is filled with stories like that. The earth is filled with stories like that. We are living in a fallen world where sin disrupts even the closest and what should be the most intimate of relationships.

I think this probably hits very close to home for many of us who are here. I hope and I pray that you experience peace in your home. I hope and pray that the relationships are harmonious in Christ. However, I think that the reality for so many of us is the pain of regret.

We understand how sometimes conflict can be crushing and it can bear down even on the relationships that occur within our homes. Some of you know what this is. Some of you know what it is to even be despised by the people that are closest to you. As you live with this weight, you wonder if there is a place of refuge; if there is a place for the healing of your heart.

I think David would beckon you to come to the rock that is higher than any of us. Let’s understand that this Psalm was written from a context of heartache and pain. This Psalm contains a call to come to the rock of refuge.

Let’s see how David called out to the Lord in the midst of the heaviness that he was experiencing at that time in his life. Psalm 61. This is the Word of the Lord for us:

**¹Hear my cry O God,
listen to my prayer;
²from the end of the earth I call to you**

**when my heart is faint.
Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I,
³for you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.
⁴Let me dwell in your tent forever!
Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! *Selah*
⁵For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.
⁶Prolong the life of the king;
may his years endure to all generations!
⁷May he be enthroned forever before God;
appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!
⁸So will I ever sing praises to your name,
as I perform my vows day after day.**

Once again, here is another one of the Psalms of David. It begins off as a desperate cry for help. Then it is morphed along the way into an expression of exalted praise and worship.

I want for us to begin where the Psalm does. Notice that David, he had a sense that he was crying out in Verse 2 from the ends of the earth. Brothers and sisters, once again, that is the language of exile and, once again, his son Absalom had driven him out and displaced him.

David was not willing to fight back against his own offspring. So David had been driven far away from everything familiar to him. The interesting thing is that he may very well have been only a couple dozen miles away from Jerusalem at this point in time. Yet, David was so far from all that was familiar and that brought him peace, so that he was crying out as though from the ends of the earth.

Imagine it is the worst time of your life. You must endure that period of time and are far away from your dinner table. You are far away from your favorite chair. You are far away from your bed and your blanket, and that ever so important pillow. You are driven out from all things familiar.

So from the end of the earth David cried. It may be the end of the earth, but it is not the end of prayer. You will face times in your life, even as follower of Christ, where you feel like you are at the end of your wits, the end of your rope, the end of all the strength you have.

But even in such times, you are not at the end of God's presence. You are not at the end of God's strength. You are not at the end of God's ability to hold you up and see you through the time of trial.

So with David, we must have the understanding of the presence of God. A theologian that I was listening to this week by the name of Doug Wilson likens the presence of God to this: pie dough! For some of you kids it might be like Play Dough.

What happens when you are making pie crusts and you are rolling out the dough? The more you roll out the dough, the thinner the dough becomes. That is not how the presence of God is. He is everywhere present. He is everywhere with all of His strength; all of His might; all of His care; all of His concern. So even when we feel as though we are at the end of the earth, God is there to meet us and to hold us up and to see us through.

So we join David in how he prayed during this Psalm. Once again, in this Psalm David was a broken man and he was a sinful man, but he was a sinful man casting himself upon the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, David provided for us the demonstration of a godly response to the overwhelming and depressing circumstances of life.

From this Psalm, I would like to share three aspects of this prayer for troubled times. First, I want for us to notice that it is:

1. A Faint-hearted Cry (Vv. 1-2)

Did you notice this in Verses 1 and 2? David said:

**¹Hear my cry O God,
listen to my prayer;
²from the end of the earth I call to you
when my heart is faint.**

When the internal part of me feels so very weak. As other translations have it, When my heart is overwhelmed. When my heart is worn out, burned out and exhausted. When the immaterial part of me just feels drained and downcast. David said that was the condition he was in as he cried to God. This is the faint-hearted cry of King David.

Somebody might say, Wait a minute Pastor Jeff, this is Father's Day. What is all this business about faint-heartedness? Shouldn't this be a time for us to rouse up like lion-heartedness? Well, maybe before this sermon you should have watched the movie Braveheart. That is more like it. William Wallace, that is the kind of men we need to be!

Yes, we need to be men who are empowered by God to walk encouraged but so often, God gives us courage in the midst of feelings of weakness and faint-heartedness. Talk about historical figures like William Wallace, but David of Israel was a man's man as you think about that stereotype.

When all the ranks in the armies of Israel were standing on the sidelines, refusing to go into the valley to face the giant, the teenaged David came with his slingshot. Trusting in the Lord, he hurled the stone from the sling, hitting the giant right between the eyes. Then David chopped off the head of a giant that was over nine-feet tall, and it was not a video game! David did not watch war movies. He lived them out! He was a warrior. And here we see such a man who was at a place of whimpering. He was saying to the Lord, My heart is faint. I am exhausted. I am drained. I am worn out.

Graduates and men and women, those of us who are seeking to walk in the ways of the Lord understand this, we are in fact living in a fallen world and this life tends to be filled with disappointments. On the one hand, there are so many unmet expectations. We go through life and we expected it to be like this and it turned out to be like that.

So often things don't go the way that we thought that they were going to go. And with disappointment after disappointment after disappointment, the heart can get heavy but even more, there is sin in this world. There is sin in us. There are conflicts, and there are hardships and they can wear the heart down.

In the midst of such times, the child of God needs to cry out to the Living God asking Him for the help that only He can provide, that He would help us even if in our weakness we have perseverance that He gives by His Spirit.

We need to go to the Lord and often. Often! The cries of the people of God will be faint-hearted cries. Praise God that His presence is always there. It is never thin like pie dough. Another illustration that came to my mind is like this: isn't it so often frustrating when the wi-fi or the cell phone signal is weak and you are trying to get a message to somebody and it can't get through.

It is never like that with God because He is present. One of my favorite images for prayer from David in the Psalms is how multiple times over, he said, The Lord inclines His ear to me. Child of God, don't think it strange when you offer to the Lord even a faint-hearted cry. We see that happening here with David.

Now as we continue, we see what David was crying out for. The faint-hearted cry gave way to the:

2. The Longing Request (Vv. 2-5)

Let's see what is written for us here as we continue into the rest of Verse 2 through to Verse 5:

²**...Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I,
³for you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.
⁴Let me dwell in your tent forever!
Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! *Selah*
⁵For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.**

We see David's longing request to be there in the presence of the Lord, finding refuge and finding the strength that he needed—not from himself, but from God.

As we prepare to dig into some of the imagery that David used, let's first notice that he issued forth this request to God based on a vow. He said, Let me dwell with you. Let me be close to you. Verse 5:

**⁵For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.**

You read through the life of David and the Psalms and you see that throughout his life, David made vows to God. However, I think there is one particular vow that he made to the Lord that I think is probably the prominent one in view of what we are reading here.

That vow is found back in Psalm 51. By that time in David's life, he had committed a serious, serious sin. We talked about it last week. It was the adultery that he committed with the wife of one of his most faithful warriors, Uriah the Hittite.

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and she became pregnant. David tried a coverup attempt and it did not work. Uriah was not having it, so David engaged in the plot that sent Uriah to the frontlines of the battle. David did that knowing that Uriah would die. This was sinful. It was transgression.

David was trying to go on with life as usual after doing that. Then finally the faithful prophet Nathan came and on behalf of God, he rung David's bell. He brought David's sin out into the open, and David finally gave way to the deep conviction that the Holy Spirit can bring.

David's heart was broken. David was contrite, then when he began confessing that sin, the healing began to occur in his life. There were consequences that David had to experience, but there was healing in God's grace.

Psalm 51 is David's great expression of confession, and there is a vow that is in the midst of it. Here are some words that might be familiar to some of you because we have sung these words so often. Psalm 51:10-15

**¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
¹¹Cast me not away from your presences,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud your righteousness.
¹⁵O LORD, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.**

So David was a man casting himself on the mercy and the grace of God. Out of thankfulness that God is such a God of mercy, David said, Based on your forgiving grace, I'm going to bear testimony. I am going to witness to people about what you have done for me, and I am going to sing praises to you for all of my days, as he continued on in the mercy of the Lord.

This was rooted in God's grace. Based on that experience of forgiveness, David said, Here is my vow. I am going to tell about what you have done for me and I am going to sing to you because you are good and you are merciful and you are forgiving.

I think that these were things that weighed heavily on David's heart through the latter portion of his life. I think that these are the vows that he was appealing to in Psalm 61. Going forth from there, David gave his longing requests, saying, Lord, in these troubles times and hardships, I want to be close to you and I want to take refuge in you.

So in Verses 2 through 4, we have four images of security in refuge that David spoke of. If you take a close consideration of it, what is amazing is that each one of those images is more intimate and personal in its nature.

It begins with David saying, Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. He was thinking about a high mountain formation, kind of craggy where there would be a lot of places for him to find security in the crevices. Lead me to this rock.

Then David told the Lord that he had been his strong tower. It was not a geographic location, now there was an actual structure that was built for security. Then he got even closer and more personal still because David asked God to take him to His tent. In ancient times, especially in that Eastern context, those tents were not the pub tents that you and I camp in.

Think about Abraham's tent and how it would have been a place of fellowship, where there were couches designed for people to be together. David was saying to the Lord, Bring me into your tent. Finally, David said, Bring me under your wing to the place that is so very close to your heart. In the mist of the troubled time that I experience in this world, Lord, I need to be close to you, as close as I can get.

(Pastor shows slides of progression of the security and refuge images David spoke about in this Psalm.) First, an image of the rock that is higher than I. Next, an image of a refuge. Imagine going up into that high place and, behold, there is a place of security there.

Next is a slide of the imagery of a tent, a meeting place that is designed for fellowship. Finally, getting into the imagery of being under the shelter of God's wings, a slide is shown of a duck sheltering her young under her wings.

So we have these images of refuge. This is the picture of the child of God in the middle of some of the harsh realities of this life, drawing close to the God of mercy and grace to find refuge, to find healing, and to find new strength—not to forever hide from the difficulties of this world, but to go out into the midst of them and representing the Living God, who has saved us by His grace.

This is David's longing and this his longing request. Something else to notice amid those images of refuge that David issued forth, there is a shift in tense. It says lead *me* to the rock that is higher than I. That is present. He was saying to get me there.

Then he said for *you* have been for me a tower of refuge. David was appealing to the past, maybe back to the previous time that he was so troubled by Saul—you have been for me a tower of refuge. So he said now in the future, bring me even closer still into your very tent under the shelter of your wing. I want to be closer to you into the future.

Looking forward to the future, what we finally see here in this Psalm is:

3. The Everlasting Praise (Vv. 6-8)

There is an expression of everlasting praise as we come to final verses. In Verses 6 through 8, David said:

**⁶Prolong the life of the king;
may his years endure to all generations!
⁷May he be enthroned forever before God;
appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!
⁸So will I ever sing praises to your name,
as I perform my vows day after day.**

Notice the elevated nature of those requests in the midst of these verses. David was praying for a king and he was praying that that king would have extended life through all the generations. He prayed that that king would have an eternal throne before God, an everlasting reign.

Just who was David praying for there? Is that David's prayer for himself? Is he saying, Lord, let me be the one who reigns with the heavenly reign for all eternity? Is that what David was saying here? I don't think that is what David was saying here.

Once again, David wrote this Psalm later in his life. This Psalm was written after he had received a prophetic word from that same faithful prophet, Nathan, where David was told that one of his offspring, one of his posterity, one from his blood line would reign forever for God; not only over Israel, but over all of the earth.

That is the Davidic Covenant foreshadowing King Jesus, the Eternal Messiah. Brothers and sisters, all throughout the Psalms you will notice that there are moments when David wrote and praised the Lord, doing so on a higher plain. You see him speaking of the King to come with prophetic vision, looking forward to the one who is going to reign forever and ever and ever.

Even Jesus pointed out that David had the sense of the coming Messiah, and David had worship in his heart for the coming Messiah. Do you remember in our study of the Gospel of Luke how everybody was calling Jesus the Son of David. Then Jesus asked them why did they called Him, the Son of Man, the Son of David, because David himself said the Lord said to my Lord, sit here until I make your enemies your footstool.

Peppered throughout the Psalms you will find moments where within the heart of King David, the illustrious king of Israel's history, his heart was caught up with worship and praise for the king to come. Here is David, and he was more than aware of his own failure.

In this passage David now had Absalom rising against him, and now it would seem in this Psalm that his heart was taken to the true King, the Eternal King whom David knew to be the Rock higher than him. He said, Let me just praise this King and somehow let Him be my strength.

I think that's what's going on here but, brothers and sisters, what I want you to know is that King Jesus, our Messiah, our Lord, our Sin Savior, the Lamb who was slain for our sins, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, He is pictured all throughout this Psalm.

I think that the Spirit of Jesus puts it into the heart of the child of Jesus to see Him here. Understand this, if in your times of trouble you call out to God and say, Lord, take me to the rock that is higher than me, the Lord is going to take you to Jesus.

If you cry out to the Lord, put me within the tower of refuge and strength, you are going to be found taking shelter in Jesus. If you cry out to the Lord I want fellowship with the Living God, intimate and personal and deep and loving, He is going to take you into Jesus, whose more than the tent. He is our Temple.

If you cry to the Lord, let me take refuge under the strength and the shadow of your wings, to be very close to Your own heart, He is going to take you to Jesus. Brothers and sisters, it's about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, our Savior, the Name that is above every name.

David did not know as much as we know about Jesus, but he knew somethings about the Messiah to come and he said, Lead me to that one. Now looking back, in the midst of the hard things we face in this life, we got to tell the Lord that we can't face things alone, not even for a second.

But praise God for what Jesus said, Apart from me, you can do nothing. But in that same promise, He is beckoning us to abide in Him, to remain connected to Him, and to bear fruit in Him through the things that we face.

Here is the thing: this morning we have peered into the home life, the close relationships of a flawed and fallen and godly man by the name of David, a man who sinned but was contrite in his sin. Here we have David coming close to the Lord and he had a family that was filled with pain and anger and conflict and regret. Serious, serious things.

Hearing the story of King David, you may realize that you have been in that environment. Some of you may even say, Yes, there has been pain in my household and I have been the source of that pain. I have been the one who has done abusive things. I have been the one who has done harmful things. It's me. I am the one. I have done it. Is there a place of refuge for somebody even such as me? Is there a place of cleansing and healing and newness for somebody such as me?

The answer to that question is yes, yes, yes, yes, a thousand times yes! His Name is Jesus. Guess what? News flash! Each and every single one of us has done things to harm others. We are all sinners. Each and every last one of us needs to take refuge in the Christ. Each one of us needs to take shelter from the wrath that is to come and to be poured out because of human sin.

And that refuge, that refuge for sinners such as us is named Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He calls us by His grace. By His Spirit He helps us to see our sin and need. He puts our eyes on the cross, that we see the price that was paid., and He calls us to a living faith and a new life following after Him.

We, like David, in Christ will be those singing praise—I will sing praise to Your Name forevermore as I perform my vows day after day. What is the vow? For us in Christ, what is the vow, because understand this, when a person comes to faith in Christ, it is not that they just come and say, Okay, I'll get my forgiveness and then I will just go and live however I want to live.

No! Jesus calls us to faith and here is what He asks of us, that He calls us to, reduced to two words: Follow Me. Follow Me as I change you; as I cleanse you; as I forgive you; as I make you new; as I regenerate you. You follow Me, understanding that My love for you is like nothing else in this world.

His love cost Him to die on a cross that we might be sheltered from the judgement that our sin deserves. It's a love that knows no match. It is the love of King Jesus for those who find their refuge in Him.

Come to Jesus. If you don't know Jesus, put your faith in Him. You are called to faith in the Christ. If you know Jesus, be renewed in that faith day by day. You walk in Him, knowing that you will face painful times in this life and those things are not abnormal.

Walk in Him. Take refuge in Him, knowing that He is going to give you refuge and strength to face the things that are on the path ahead. He does this in His grace and in His loving kindness and in His mercy and in His righteousness, and He calls you to follow Him.

Let's close in a word of prayer.