

Ben Libby

Sermon

August 9th, the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, AMEN. Our sermon text for this morning is Psalm 56:

***For the choir director. "A Dove on Distant Oaks." By David. A miktam. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.***

**1** Be merciful to me, O God, for a man pants as he pursues me. All day long an attacker presses against me. **2** Those who spy on me pant as they pursue me all day long. Yes, many are attacking me boldly. **3** On the day when I am afraid, I will trust in you. **4** In God I praise his word. In God I trust. I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? **5** All day long they hurt my cause. All their thoughts against me are evil. **6** They gather together. They hide. They try to trip me by grabbing my heels while they wait to take my life. **7** Because of their wickedness do not let them escape. In your anger bring down the peoples, O God. **8** You keep a record of my tossing and turning. Keep my tears in your bottle. Aren't they all listed in your book? **9** Then my enemies will turn back on the day when I call. This is how I will know that God is for me. **10** In God I praise a word. In the Lord I praise a word. **11** In God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? **12** My vows to you are binding, O God. I will complete my thank offerings to you, **13** because you have delivered my life from death. Have you not delivered my feet from stumbling so I can walk before God in the light of life?

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...Mercy, Grace, and Peace ARE YOURS from your God and Father and from your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed

If you stop and think about it, crying is really strange. I mean, think about it. When people get sad, their eyes expel salty water. What is that all about? But really, you don't need to be sad to cry. We cry for many different reasons. We cry when we are sad, we cry when we are happy, we cry when we are scared, or even in the case of infants we cry when we are hungry. We cry because we get *emotional*. There are many different complex emotions that cause us to cry, but crying is so fundamental to the human experience that it is our first instinct when we come into this world!

The author of our sermon text this morning was well acquainted with crying. David had lived a very interesting and complex life up to this point. After this, he would experience many more heartaches and many more tears. But King David realized something vital here in this psalm. It is something that is hard to always see, especially through tears. But it is when life

is hard that this truth is perhaps the most visible. What is this truth that David realized in this moment of terror? The LORD will deliver you! There are many problems that we will face in this world. There have been many times when we have shed tears in the past and no doubt there will be many more times in the future when we will shed tears again. But no matter what happens, we know that the LORD will deliver us! He will calm us from our many fears and He will wipe away our many tears! - MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN!!!-

Even before the psalm starts, we are already introduced to the author and his particular problem. The heading of this psalm reads: ***"A Dove on Distant***

***Oaks.” By David. A miktam. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.***

Psalms in the Bible often have certain tunes that would go along with them. We have no example of exactly what that would have sounded like, but at one time this was most likely used as a hymn of some sort. It has the name, “A Dove on Distant Oaks”. I can only imagine what that originally sounded like.

As far as what a “miktam” is, that is also not really known. It could also be some kind of musical term. Some translate this term as “a mystery poem”.

But the circumstance that is referenced here is something that is known to us. ***When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.*** There is only one such event that is recorded for us in Scripture. The occasion for this text is when David flees to Gath to escape the wrath of King Saul. This is recorded in 1 Samuel 21. Saul had grown jealous over his prodigy David. David had already been anointed King by Samuel, but Saul was not going to just let this happen. A perfect example of Saul’s growing suspicion and paranoia comes from when the two men came back from the land of the Philistines: **Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. 7 So the women sang as they danced, and said: “Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.” 8 Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” 9 So Saul eyed David from that day forward. (1Sa 18:6-9 NKJ)**

Saul tried to kill David several times. David could have struck back and would have several opportunities to do so after this, but he refused to kill the LORD’s anointed. But this left David in a precarious spot. The King of Israel was trying to kill him. So he fled to the safest place he could. It would be safe because it was so dangerous. He fled to Gath,

a city of the Philistines. But David had killed many Philistines, so he pretended to be a crazy person to escape retribution. David feigned madness just to survive.

It isn’t clear whether this act of pretending to be mad to escape the wrath of the Philistines was either right or wrong. But perhaps this Psalm is a referendum of sorts. Perhaps David realized after the fact that he should have just trusted in the LORD instead of acting crazy. There is no indication in scripture whether what David did was right or wrong there. But this Psalm really makes the point that when you trust in the LORD, there is nothing that man can do to us.

You can clearly see how distressed David is in this psalm. **Be merciful to me, O God, for a man pants as he pursues me. All day long an attacker presses against me. 2 Those who spy on me pant as they pursue me all day long.** To me, this description really paints a picture. David expresses his escape like someone running from blood-hounds. You can just picture some animals chasing you, constantly panting and constant running. **6 They gather together. They hide. They try to trip me by grabbing my heels while they wait to take my life.**

David had many things to be afraid of. He was a stranger living in a strange land. But he wasn’t simply a stranger. He was well known to the Philistines. He was a well known Philistine killer! His claim to fame was when he defeated their mighty champion, Goliath. But he was also a fugitive. The most powerful man in David’s own country, who was also his father-in-law, wanted him dead more than anything. He was obsessed with it. It is easy to see why he would have been afraid.

It is kind of hard to try and get into the headspace of David here. We most certainly haven’t had to face this kind of pressure before. Have you ever had your father-in-law try to pin you against a wall with a spear? David had. Have you ever had to literally run for your life? Have you ever had to pretend to be crazy to survive? Of course not!

But the feelings that David describes are very relatable. You don’t need to go through a crisis to know what fear is. We all get afraid. We are living in a

time of fear. Will we ever be able to go to a store again without wearing a mask? Will we ever be able to go to school again in person? Will there ever be a time when this pandemic won't be dominating the hearts and minds of our country? I would assume so, but who knows when that will be? There are so many things that cause us fear. Are we physically running for our lives? No, but that doesn't make the fear that we could lose our jobs any less real...

David crystalizes something here that is easy to forget and a hard lesson to remember. When we are afraid, we need to look to the LORD! **3 On the day when I am afraid, I will trust in you. 4 In God I praise his word. In God I trust. I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?**

I like this psalm because of the way it is structured. First, it makes the claim that the author is being chased and hunted down by his enemies. But then it goes on to conclude that we will trust in the LORD. But it also does a very human thing. After that bold declaration of trust in the LORD no matter what, the author can't get over just how evil the enemy truly is. "My enemy is pursuing me, but I will trust in the LORD...but still they are terrifying me and looking to get me!" Finally, it goes back to the same refrain over again. **10 In God I praise a word. In the Lord I praise a word. 11 In God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?**

At the end of the day, what can men do to us? Despite all that fear that David no doubt was feeling, he still knew he could trust in the LORD. And really, what can men do to us? What is the worst that man can throw at us?

There are many different tears that we can shed. Many different emotions that provoke many different kinds of tears. But perhaps there is no worse kind of tears than tears of terror. It's a terrible feeling, being afraid. Sometimes the fear is worse than the worst-case scenario. Why is that? We don't like not knowing what will happen. Yet, no matter what happens to us, whatever men do to us is **NOT** the worst case. It may seem like it, there are so many terrible things that man does to one another. But at the end of the day, suffering is pretty relative. We all

deserved to go to hell and spend eternity in hellfire. That is the worst-case scenario. It is like what Jesus concluded in our Gospel lesson a few weeks ago: **28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Mat 10:28 NKJ)**

With humans, just getting us to calm down is a challenge. We don't think rationally when we are afraid. David knew it. He pretended to be insane to escape whatever the Philistines would do to him. But that is why the LORD is the ultimate deliverer. He first calms our fears, then he will deliver us from that terror. As another psalm says, **Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (Psa 50:15 NKJ)**

Not only does the LORD calm our fears, He also wipes away our tears... **8 You keep a record of my tossing and turning. Keep my tears in your bottle. Aren't they all listed in your book? 9 Then my enemies will turn back on the day when I call. This is how I will know that God is for me.**

This picture that is described here is interesting. **Keep my tears in your bottle.** Tears are strange because they express any number of emotions, and then they are gone. They evaporate. Even if somehow we were able to keep our tears in a bottle, wouldn't they eventually go away anyway?

How big is your tear bottle? Let's say for sake of argument that you were able to collect all of your tears and put them in a bottle? How big of a container would that have to be? The Hebrew term for "bottle" here most commonly is the same concept of that of a wine-skin. Would your tears throughout your life fill up a wine-skin? A two liter? How big would it have to be?

I mentioned how hard it is to put yourself in the headspace of David here. Truly he had it rough at this time. But that is not really the person we are supposed to compare ourselves to anyway. We all shed tears, we all have bad things happen to us. It is all relative. Don't compare your sufferings to David. Rather compare your sufferings to David's greater Son, Jesus!

It is in the person of Christ where **What can man do to me?** really becomes significant... Do you think you have it bad? Yes, sometimes we suffer in this world, but we truly deserve it. We have all sinned and all have fallen short of the glory of God. Truly, we all deserve to suffer for the evil that we ourselves have caused. But that was not the case with Jesus! He always kept the Law of God perfectly. What happened to Him? True suffering! **Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.**

It was because of our evil that Jesus became acquainted with grief. He had to come down to this world to pay for the sins of the world. By His perfect life and innocent death, we are spared the fate that we deserve. Why would God listen to this desperate plea from David? Because of what the Son of David would accomplish on his behalf. And the same is true for us as well. Why would God calm our fears? Why would God wipe away our tears? Because of Jesus! That is why God is indeed merciful to us!

And make no mistake about it, Jesus was acquainted with grief. Jesus wept. He understood what it was to experience sadness here on this earth. This is an important parts about the nature of Jesus. He knows first hand what we are going through. **15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:15 NKJ)**

Jesus knew what it was like to be human. He can sympathize with us because He is one of us. Tears rolled down His cheeks just like they do you or me. But the difference is that Jesus truly knew suffering in a way that we never will. He suffered the pains of hell on the cross. He paid for your sins and for mine. He paid the price for every single tear on the cross. It is at the foot of the cross where every single tear is ultimately wiped away.

Every single toss and turn, every single struggle and tear that we go through is known to our God. And at every single turn, we find deliverance through Jesus.

That is why our tears are wiped away. He sees our distresses and delivers us out of them. Will we still experience pain? Of course, but only on this side of eternity. The fact of the matter is that no matter what happens to us, our salvation is secured. Yes, we will shed tears in this vale of tears. But that is only temporary. Our salvation is secure as is our future with Him in heaven. When John had a revelation of that glorious future, he heard a voice boom from heaven: **"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."** (Rev 21:4 NKJ)

What ended up happening to David after this? Well, of course, he was delivered from this perilous situation. He would be crowned King, just like the LORD had promised. The deliverance of the LORD always comes.

That is why we take heed today dear Christians. When was the last time you cried? When was the last time you tossed and turned as David described here? Perhaps even last night? We live in a perilous time, one with an unknown future. There are many different things that could happen to us to make our eyes water. But that deliverance will always come. Why? Because we have already been delivered from death! **you have delivered my life from death. Have you not delivered my feet from stumbling so I can walk before God in the light of life?**

No matter what happens to us in these uncertain times, our deliverance is certain. Yes, we may suffer here on this earth. Yes, we will no doubt shed many more tears before it is all said and done. But no matter what happens here, we will be with Him there in eternity. We have been delivered from the punishment our sins deserved. Jesus was acquainted with grief to accomplish this end. Whatever grief we suffer from here on out is nothing in the long run. Truly, man can do nothing to us, because the God-Man delivered us from hell! He calms our fears and He wipes away our tears! AMEN!!!