

Psalm 61 When My Heart Is Overwhelmed (Revised Version – 2nd preaching)

This morning, we have another Psalm of David. Whether written at the time, or looking back, the occasion is a heart that is overwhelmed with the trials of life. David was in exile. His son, Absalom, had led a revolution in the land and had taken Jerusalem. David was running for his life; his own son, trying to kill him. He left his home, his family, his people, the familiarity of the Holy City Jerusalem, the tabernacle, everything he knew was gone. And he considered this place to be the “*end of the earth*.” He was at the point of saying, “*I give up! My heart cannot take it anymore.*” The word in the Hebrew means “covered” or “involved.” His heart was overwhelmed with life.

At times, our hearts will be overwhelmed with the cares of this life. In v. 2 David says, “**WHEN my heart is faint . . .**” He doesn’t say, “**IF my heart is faint . . .**” In this sinful world, a faint (overwhelmed) heart is a part of life. But, for the Christian, it is the occasion for praise. Look at v. 8: “**So will I ever sing praises to your name . . .**” David begins this prayer with an overwhelmed heart. But, he ends with a heart of praise. Look at v. 8: “**So will I ever sing praises to your name . . .**” How can this be! How can we rejoice when our hearts are overwhelmed? I have 3 reasons this morning.

1. We rejoice because God hears and answers our prayers. Look at v. 1: “**Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer . . .**” And in v. 2: “**from the end of the earth I call to you . . .**” Then in v. 5: “**For you, O God, have heard my vows . . .**” David had nowhere to go, nowhere to turn. His own son had chased him out of his house and pursued him with an army of revolutionists. I would say he was overwhelmed. His heart was faint. But, he cried out to the God who hears.

Brothers and sisters, God hears and answers our prayers. In fact, God delights in hearing and answering the prayers of his people. In Jer. 33:3 God says, “**CALL to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.**” Ps. 145:18: “**The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.**” Isa 58:9: “**Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am . . .**” And listen to Is. 65:24: “**BEFORE THEY CALL, I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.**”

As God’s people, what a privilege! God hears and He answers! Deut. 4:7 says “**For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?**” Today, we are not the nation of Israel. But, we are nation, a nation of priests, a nation of those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, disciples of the nations, the body of Christ, called the church. Eph. 2:13: “**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**” Today, God hears our prayers because Jesus has broken down the wall of separation. God punished HIM in our place. He died. But, he rose again and sits at the right hand of God. And, now he Hears and answers.

2. We rejoice because God is near. We have a God who is never too far away when we cry unto Him. Look at v. 2: “**From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint.**” Think of what David was going through. He fled his family, his house, some of his wives and concubines, not knowing if he would ever live long enough to come back. But, more importantly, David left

Jerusalem, the holy city, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. We must never forget! God has always spoken to his people in particular ways and in particular PLACES. He met with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When they sinned and were eventually expelled, the biggest problem was the absence of presence of God. **THAT WAS THE PLACE!** God met with Abraham at a place near Bethel. And eventually, Jacob would build an altar at that place. In the desert, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, God met with the people in a special tent, namely the holy of holies where the priest entered once a year. Beginning from Solomon's time, God met with his people in the Temple. We **MUST** remember this with David and his leaving the city. **THAT WAS THE PLACE** God met with his people. This is why David could say in v. 2: **“from the end of the earth I call to you.”** David wasn't far outside Jerusalem. He had never seen the literal “end of the earth.” But, ANYWHERE away from God's presence was the “end of the earth.

But, in this Psalm, David still calls upon the Lord. In v. 4, thinking of God's presence, he says, **“Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! For you, O God, have heard my vows . . .”** In some way, he knew God was near to him. And he desired to go back to Jerusalem as king. Look at v. 6: **“Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations!”** And v. 7: **“May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him.”** But, even if he did not make it back, he still rejoiced because he knew God was near to him.

Now, let's think about this truth for a moment: the nearness of God. The theological word is imminence. God is imminent. When you sleep in the same bed with your spouse, he/she is **RIGHT** there beside you, imminently in the bed, not in another bed. In other words, with God, He does not leave any space in the universe without his presence. The furthest place you can think or imagine, God is there. The smallest atom, the electrons, neutron, protons, and matter even smaller in every part of the universe, is kept by the power of God. He is omnipresent; always present in all places at all times. Otherwise, He would not be God. He never sleeps nor slumbers. In this respect, God is near all people! This is what the Apostle Paul meant in his sermon to the Athenians (Acts 17) when he said, **“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything . . .”** And then a little later (v. 27) he says to them God made everyone, **“that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.”**

Now, I have a question. Is that what David means when he says God is near? Maybe indirectly. But, this is not what David is primarily thinking of when he calls upon the Lord while he is away from the city of Jerusalem. He was thinking about a **SPECIAL PRESENCE** that was **ONLY** for the people of God. Let me re-read Deut. 4:7: **“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?”** David was a part of God's chosen people, Israel. Concerning the blessings of God's people the Apostle Paul says in Rom. 9:4, **“They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.”** And through these promises David had a special relationship with God (by faith). God was **NEAR!**

But, all these promises of nearness were yet to come for David. Isaiah spoke of a special time when the nearness of God with his people would be fulfilled. Is. 7:14: **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”** Later, when the time was drawing near, an angel appeared to Mary saying, reminding her of Isaiah’s word saying: **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”** (Matt. 1:23). **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** Jesus told the people, **“If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father”** (John 14:9). And, **“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here”** (Matt. 12:6).

People, all over the world, are trying to get NEAR to God. (good works, religious attendance, morality, etc.) But, nearness comes through Christ. If you long for God’s nearness, you will find fulfillment in Christ. If you long for God’s presence, you will find it in Christ. If you want life that comes with the presence of God, you will find it in Christ. If you want ALL the benefits of nearness (joy, peace, contentment, and a million others) you will find them in Christ. ALL God’s Promises are YES in Christ, who is IMMANUEL, God with us! **“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?”**

3. We rejoice because He leads us. Now, this is a BIG truth because there are SO MANY implications. God’s leadership includes instruction, wisdom, encouragement, exhortation. It includes assurance, provision, protection, even suffering and hard times. And, a slew of other truths. And we rejoice because we have a God who leads us. But, the important question for us is not so much HOW, but WHERE does God lead us. Look at the 2nd part of v. 2. David says, **“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”** David knew that he needed almighty God to lead him to the rock on higher ground.

I just read a three-volume series on the war in the Pacific during WW II. And as the Americans worked their way through the Pacific Islands, they found that that the most difficult times of advancement came when the enemy held hills, or small mountains. The army that held the high ground was at an advantage. And In our text today, David, who was himself a man of war and a leader of armies gives us this picture. In these difficult times, with an overwhelmed heart, David appeals for God to lead him to a rock. What kind of rock? A rock higher than himself.

I think this picture is pretty simple. David could not go any lower. His problems could not be greater. The anxiety of his heart could not sink further. Like Jonah in the depths of the sea, he could not imagine a worse place. I believe his heart felt like someone had just wrung out every ounce of hope; OVERWHELMED! And at this point, he cries out for God to lead him. And he isn’t so concerned with the details of HOW? But, instead WHERE. So, where does he want God to lead him? To a rock! And notice it isn’t any old rock. Not “a” rock. But, a particular rock, “THE” rock of “higher ground.” And this rock isn’t so much of a place as it is a PERSON. David has his preference. He wants to return to Jerusalem. He wants to be king. He wants his beloved son, Absalom, to repent and love him and obey him. He wants the peace of God to reign in his family and in the kingdom (vv. 6-7). But, I believe his greatest desire was for GOD HIMSELF!

Look at vv. 3-4: “**For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. ⁴ Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings . . .**” GOD was his rock! He knew that whether he lived or died or ever made it back to Jerusalem as king, what mattered was that he find his place on the ROCK that was Higher than himself. Ps. 18:2: “**The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**” Psalm 94:22: “**But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.**” Ps. 27:5: “**For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.**”

I remember one story from Israel’s desert wanderings. They were thirsty and had no water. But Moses led them to a particular rock and he hit it with his staff and God made water flow from the rock and they were satisfied from their thirst. Many years later, writing to the church in Corinth, Paul uses this picture to speak of Christ. He retells the story saying, “**For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:1-4).**

You see, the ultimate fulfillment of this Psalm, this verse, is the ROCK, the Lord Jesus Christ. When your heart is overwhelmed, brother or sister, look to Christ the ROCK. When you are weary with sins (all of them this morning, this week), look to Christ. He has bore them in his body on the cross. And God has thrown them as far as the east is from the west. When the burdens of this life lie heavy upon your heart, look to Christ, who Himself knows how you feel. There is nothing you have gone through that He has not! Look to Christ! When your heart is overwhelmed, you can rejoice!

Today, these truths give us an occasion for rejoicing because they show our **absolute need for Him** at all times. I think this is the greatest thing that God impressed upon me when I first read this verse when we lived in Russia. When I read this verse, I was **overwhelmed**. And you know, God didn’t change my **circumstances**. He led me to the rock that is higher than me!

Brothers and Sisters: **Sickness** will continue, even to the point of leading us to utter despair. **Financial** concerns and material worries will continue. **Family struggles** will continue. The weight of failures and sin will be upon us. Unanswered questions about the future will always be. **GBC** will come and go. **But, I praise God that I am overwhelmed because it gives me an occasion to trust God, that He will lead me to the rock that is higher than me!** And, in so doing, it brings glory to Him and shows to the world that He is worthy. Today, there is nothing more important for you, than to look to Christ, the rock, the foundation of heaven and earth. So, this week when you are overwhelmed, rejoice! Remember:

God hears and answers our prayers. Why? Because we have a great high priest who offered HIMSELF as a sacrifice, a perfect sacrifice; the sinless in the place of the sinner. And God punished HIM. But, that’s not all. After the wrath of God was appeased through the Heavenly Lamb of God. He conquered death. He rose again. And now He sits at the right hand of God. That is why we pray in the name of Jesus. He hears our prayers. He answers our prayers.

God is near to us. Why? Because the Lord Jesus was born. He pitched his earthly tent among us. He lived close to us. He was one of us. Immanuel, God with us! And now, He has given us his Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. He is near.

God leads us. Where? To Christ. All his promises are found in Christ. All his wisdom, his instruction, his guidance, his protection, is found in Christ, **THE ROCK!**