

HELP Series: The Summit Church
"Where are You God?"
Psalm 61
June 9-10, 2018

Introduction:

Summit Family, it's great to be with you this weekend! I'm really thankful to have the opportunity to continue in our new series "HELP" that we started last weekend. This series is a part of the 'Year of Prayer' emphasis that we've been engaged with. It's been really great to hear the stories of how God has answered prayers and grown many of you in your prayer lives. One of the tools we've created in order to help with that is the "Praying the Bible" podcast. Each episode guides you through a particular passage of Scripture giving you prayer prompts along the way. You can get more information on it at summitrdu.com/prayer...been really thankful for how God has been using this.

What I'm not thankful for is having to follow after Derrick DeLain who preached last weekend. He prophetically and passionately pointed us to Jesus when we ask ourselves the question "How Long O Lord?"...and not only that he sang the theme song of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air helping us to see that Will Smith is the true and greater Nicolas Cage. How exactly does one follow that?

Well, I assure you I'm not going to sing any theme songs, so why don't we just jump right in. I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 61. As you're turning there let me share that I was grief stricken to hear of the suicides of two cultural icons this week: fashion designer Kate Spade and celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain. As I read about their deaths I was taken aback by a statistic that revealed that since 1999 suicide rates are up 30% across the nation. The reasons behind why they took their lives we will perhaps never know, but it reminded me of just how desperate, lonely, and utterly helpless so many people feel.

I would imagine that perhaps for many of us there have been times in our lives where we've really felt as if we were in a dry and weary land and when we look at our circumstances all we can really do is cry out "Where are you God?"

God, where are you...my family's falling apart?
God where are you...I've lost my job and I don't know how to make my ends meet?
God where are you...my child is dying of cancer?
God where are you...my marriage is in shambles?
God where are you...I'm just so lonely?
God where are you...I'm stuck in habitual sin?
God where are you...in the midst of my suicidal thoughts?"

Some of you are asking that question right now and in the midst of deep suffering, pain, and hardship. These are honest questions and I believe the Bible speaks to them.

In Psalm 61 David finds himself in the midst of a traumatic experience of his own, so as we look at how David responds I pray that we would be both comforted and challenged.

Before we read the psalm together I think it's important for us to understand the context of David's prayer. Although not explicit, I believe the backdrop for this psalm can be found in 2 Samuel 13-15, so let me hit the highlights:

- David is reigning as king over Israel.
- He has many wives (which doesn't make it right) and subsequently many children.
- One of his sons Absalom has a beautiful sister by the name of Tamar
- Amnon, one of David's other sons from another wife, becomes infatuated with Tamar and sexually assaults her (and although David is grieved he does nothing)
- As one can imagine this infuriates Absalom (Tamar's brother) who eventually kills Amnon for the wicked sin committed against his sister.
- Absalom flees from David for years until David finally allows him back in Jerusalem. At that point however Absalom's heart has turned against his father.
- As a result of this Absalom begins turning the hearts of the people against David which results in David fleeing Jerusalem into the wilderness as Absalom seeks to destroy him.

David is at the end of himself and his heart is faint. It's in the midst of this pain that David pens Psalm 61.

¹ "Hear my cry, O God,

listen to my prayer;

² from the end of the earth I call to you

when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock

that is higher than I,

³ 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!

⁵ For you, O God, have heard my vows;

you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

⁶ Prolong the life of the king;

may his years endure to all generations!

⁷ May he be enthroned forever before God;

appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!

⁸ So will I ever sing praises to your name,

as I perform my vows day after day."

This is the Word of the Lord. Pray with me as we ask the Holy Spirit to work in our midst?

Prayer of Illumination

As we study this psalm I want to help us answer the question: "What do I do when I don't know where God is?" It's a question that we all need to be ready to answer and wrestle with. For some of us we're in that kind of season right now...for others of us we will be in that kind of season later (I Peter 4 - Do not be surprised by the fiery trial that comes upon you). But for all of us, there is someone in our lives that feels this way now, so we need to know the answer deep down in our bones.

Let me be clear, I don't want to try and give you a formula (although wouldn't that be nice...but it doesn't work like that), rather I want us to learn from David's posture as he prays to God during a tumultuous, heart wrenching season of his life. We're primarily going to focus on verses 1-5.

It begins with...

1. David's transparency before God (vs. 1-2a)

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

- i. Sit in David's pain!
 1. Daughter who had been violated by his own son.
 2. Son who was murdered at the hands of another son.
 3. That same son has turned the people against him and is seeking to kill him.
 4. For some of you David's pain isn't hard to imagine at all because right now you're experiencing something very similar. Abuse, murder, betrayal are not just ideas for you. They are pieces of your story.
- ii. Listen, Summit Church, there are times when the most appropriate response when we just don't know where God is, is to genuinely cry out to God (here it's a "loud, piercing cry")...to not hold back...to convey to Him the desperation we really feel.
 1. Illustration: Have you ever lost one of your kids in public? How many of you have lost a remote in your couch? Losing your kids doesn't feel like that but I wanted to get you involved.
 2. Losing Jackson in public. In that moment of fear and desperation, what do you do? You cry out their name...you don't whisper it...you don't passively call out. No, you start yelling at the top of your lungs. That's what truly desperate people do...they cry for help.
 3. One of my concerns is that some of you might see this as a sign of weakness. Let me encourage you with something...

- iii. When we lament and cry out like this we are actually doing the very thing that Jesus did:
 1. Jesus lamented over Lazarus' death when He saw the pain that death caused (John 11)
 2. Jesus cried out to God over the hard heartedness and rejection of Jerusalem in the days leading up to His crucifixion (Luke 19.)
 3. Hebrews 5:7 says, *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."*
 4. Listen, some of you need to hear today that **your tears are not a sign of weakness but of Christlikeness.**
 5. I realize that this goes against the very grain of our culture where we value **self determination over dependency** and **toughness over tears.** But that's where **real intimacy and real strength** begins...when we start being transparent and acknowledging the truth of where we really are.
- iv. Spurgeon: *"When my heart is overwhelmed:--when the huge waves of trouble wash over me, and I am completely submerged, not only as to my head, but also my heart. It is hard to pray when the very heart is drowning, yet gracious men plead best at such times. Tribulation brings us to God, and brings God to us. Faith's greatest triumphs are achieved in her heaviest trials."*
- v. So, in the midst of those heavy, heavy trials be transparent and cry out to God!
- vi. I want you to see not only David's transparency but his vulnerability...

2. David's Vulnerability with God (vs. 2b)

- a. *"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,"* (vs. 2b)
- b. It's not just that David is crying out, he's humbly coming before God and acknowledging his need. His heart is faint, he's at the end of the earth and he's begging God to *"lead me to the rock that is higher than I."*
- c. It's not hard to picture this at all...David fleeing Jerusalem into the rocky Judean wilderness...frantically begging for the down stretched hand of God to pull him up to safety.
 - i. Illustration: Lifeguarding story at YMCA w/ young boy who had jumped into the deep end and didn't know how to swim...on the bottom of the pool, extending his arms up, hoping for help. Total and absolute desperation.
 - ii. We had a little come to Jesus meeting right there on the edge of the pool.
 - iii. That's David's condition...he's begging God for help!
- d. The 'rock' is a metaphor for safety...protection...salvation...it's a metaphor for God.

- i. We all inherently look somewhere for a 'rock' that will protect us, keep us safe, give us significance. We know we need something immovable, unchanging, reliable. But what we naturally look to isn't anything like that.
- ii. I want you to be real honest for a moment and ask yourself "What is my rock?" Maybe it would be...
 - 1. Money, but in an instant, that can be taken away.
 - a. Counterfeit Gods - CFO of Freddie Mac who hung himself during the pinnacle of the financial crisis in 2008...but he wasn't alone...told of others who did the same when they lost everything leading to total despair.
 - 2. Is it family? But, honestly who can guarantee that family will turn out how we want.
 - a. We've all seen marriages and families crumble and seen the pain it causes people we love.
 - 3. Success, but what we've worked our whole lives for is suddenly taken and given to someone else.
 - 4. We need a ROCK, but what in this life can actually stand that kind of pressure?
 - a. Money, sex, power, fame, family...none will hold up under the pressure. They crumble and crack.
 - b. We like our counterfeit gods because we can control them. We like to be in control of our money, our family, our successes. But that kind of God is never strong enough to save us and will always let us down.
 - c. They weren't created to...only God can bear that weight...and David's humbly acknowledging his need for it.
- iii. David is asking for this both literally and figuratively. To be on a "high rock" is to be in a place of safety and strength. It's the ancient world equivalent of having a security system on your house. If you have the "high rock," you don't have to be vigilant and paranoid. You can rest in peace.
- e. But David **needs** God **to lead him there** because he can't get there on his own...it's higher than him. **He's humbly begging for help in which we see his vulnerability with God.**
 - i. That humility and vulnerability expresses itself in surrender (lead me)!
- f. **Vulnerability is the doorway to experiencing the sufficiency of Christ.**
 - i. You see, when we're truly vulnerable before God, openly and honestly confessing our need for Him, it's then, and only then, that we begin to truly experience His sufficiency.
 - ii. It's through vulnerability, and our admission of need, that we can truly begin to say that "His strength is made perfect in our weakness."

- iii. This is especially true when we don't 'feel' God's presence...when we don't 'feel' like God is doing anything (or things are perhaps getting worse).
- g. **Listen: Redemption, healing, and comfort come when your 'desperation' moves you to 'dependence' on God.**
- h. Pastor J.D. often reminds us that the key to an effective prayer life isn't discipline; it's dependence!
- i. Transparency, Vulnerability, then we see...

3. David's Confidence in God: (vs. 3)

- a. "...*for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against my enemy.*"
- b. What I want us to see is that David derives His confidence from remembering God's faithfulness to him.
- c. There is little doubt that when David says that God has been his refuge...has been his strong tower that he is reflecting back on all the ways God has worked in his life.
 - i. Faithfulness when he was a shepherd, when he was before Goliath, when Saul sought to kill him.
- d. I don't know about you but when the heat is really turned up in my life I'm prone to become focused on my pain and forget all that God's done.
- e. It's just so easy to forget:
 - i. Paul David Tripp: *"I'm so prone to forget God, forget his grace, forget my identity as his child, forget that he supplies all that I need, forget his unstoppable sovereign plan, and forget his eternal kingdom. When I forget God, I tend to put myself in his position and make my life all about me: my will, my feeling, my plan, my wants, and my needs."*
 - ii. And when we forget we naturally begin to seek refuge elsewhere. But as we've already seen, ultimately every other refuge fails us.
- f. So, it's good for our souls to stop and remember the mighty works of God in redemptive history.
 - i. His mighty works in creating and good and beautiful world for us to enjoy and experience Him creation
 - ii. His mighty works in establishing the nation of Israel through Abraham
 - iii. His mighty works in leading the people out of bondage from Egypt
 - iv. His mighty works in parting the Red Sea
 - v. His mighty works in taking Israel into the Promised Land
 - vi. His mighty works in judging Israel for her sin - yet never leaving or forsaking them and fulfilling His promises to them
 - vii. His mighty works in the virgin birth...when in the fullness of time God sent for His Son, born of woman, born under the law, that He might redeem those under the curse of the law, that we might receive adoption as sons/daughters and cry out to Him "Abba Father"

- viii. The mighty works of Jesus when He gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, made the lame walk, and raised the dead.
- ix. The mighty works of Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected forever defeating sin and death.
- x. The mighty works of Jesus when he ascended into Heaven and is seated with the Father making intercession for us.
- xi. His mighty works in establishing His church - His plan A for reaching the nations.
- g. It's good for my soul to remember what He's done in my life...
 - i. How he transformed my parents lives in 1971.
 - ii. How he saved me from my sin when I was 9 years old.
 - iii. How he comforted us when we found out our daughter had diabetes and our son had autism.
 - iv. His provision for our family when we moved here 5 years ago...those awful, heart wrenching moments when you drop your kids off to high school and middle school knowing they don't know a soul.
- h. Listen, when you don't know where God is, then turn around...look back all the way to the cross...and remember all He has done that will give you confidence for what He will do.
 - i. *"...for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against my enemy."*
 - j. Transparency, Vulnerability, Confidence...and then we see...

4. David's Hope (vs. 4-5)

- a. *"Let me dwell in your tent forever!"*
- b. The word 'dwell' (or abide) here means: 'to be a house guest'
- c. 'Tent' is a reference to where the ark of the covenant resided both while Israel wandered through the wilderness and the tent that was erected for the same purpose in Jerusalem before Solomon built the temple.
- d. But the imagery plays out further. He goes on to say, *"Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! For you have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name."*
 - i. Again, I believe David was thinking again here of the ark. On top of the ark (covering) was called the Mercy Seat and on top of the Mercy Seat were two cherubim who had outspread that covered the Mercy Seat. **(Show picture)**.
 - ii. Hang with me here and don't miss this. We read in Exodus 25:22 that the mercy seat is where God promised to meet with the people of Israel. This was made possible because one day a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the High Priest (and only him) would shed the innocent blood of a Lamb for the sins of Israel and sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat.
 - iii. David is saying, "It's right here, where you say you will meet with your people that I want to be a houseguest forever!"

- iv. Do you see what David wants? He wants to be with God. Far too often I fear that we desire God more for what he can do for us in essence treating Him like our butler. The blessing is not what the Father can do for you the blessing is the Father. That's what David wants.
- v. He knew that God was his only hope in this life and the life that is to come!
- vi. David knew and understood the surpassing worth of being with God.
- e. Since David understood that only the High Priest was allowed where the ark rested, David had hope in the coming Messiah who would be the true Lamb that would satisfy the wrath of God toward all who will call on His name through faith and repentance...forever allowing him to abide in his presence forever!

Don't miss this:

In Psalm 51, as David is confessing his sins before God, there is one thing that David asked God not to do, and that was to cast him away from his presence. It was the one thing that David couldn't bear.

And that's the one thing that God didn't do. You see, like David, there was a time in Jesus life when he too was forced outside the city by people who had turned against Him and were trying to kill Him. There outside the city, Jesus too cried out for deliverance, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" Silence.

Then God the Father poured out upon His Son every bit of the judgement we were deserving of and Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath. Jesus was abandoned by His Father...so you would never be. He was abandoned by His Father so that when you feel abandoned, you'll know that you aren't actually alone, that Jesus sits there with you, weeping with you, mourning with you, wrestling with you in prayer.

And he has gone ahead of you, showing you the end of the hard road of hope. You see, he went into death before us, but in His resurrection, we saw where that road really leads. So when we are in the midst of death and destruction, if we cling to him, our resurrection will be as sure as his.

Your circumstance may not change in this life...but you can be sure that the promise for every believer is resurrection and God ensures us that all things evil will be undone as He establishes a new heaven and a new earth...and we reign with Him forever.

That's why David could write in Psalm 23:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me...your rod and your staff they comfort me...surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

That's why David could write in Psalm 16:10-11,

"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

All of this so that through whatever storm you're facing He says to you, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Close with guided prayer time.

- Pray transparently - crying out to God
- Pray vulnerably - acknowledging your need for help
- Pray confidently - knowing that God's past grace gives us confidence for future grace
- Pray hopefully - knowing full well that nothing, absolutely nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus...for He was cast out of the presence of God so you would never have to be.