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Psalm 62

Second Message

Gary Vanderet

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A SONG OF SUFFICIENCY

SERIES: SONGS FOR TROUBLED HEARTS

When I was a little boy, the most popular toy in building was called Lincoln Logs which consisted of small wooden logs that could be used to construct a replica of Abe Lincoln's cabin. Our children have grown up with Legos. Maybe I am prejudiced, but Lincoln Logs were meant for kids. Legos require a Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering! Some of the projects pictured on the box look like they require a building permit.

In recent years, our home has experienced some tense moments regarding Legos. At six years of age, our oldest son Joel was a Lego expert who could see a picture of a lunar landing module and set off on his building project. Stephen, an adoring disciple of his older brother, would attempt his own version of the module at the same time. Unfortunately, the fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination of a three-year-old are not as developed as a six-year-old's. Stephen would be okay until he found a brick that would not fit. He would press with all of his might trying to get that one brick to lock with the others, but to no avail. He would continue to press until he destroyed his piece of art. At that point, he would look at his older brother's project, his face would turn red, and he would do one of two things: he would either throw his Legos into the air or take a swipe at his brother's project. Either response would be accompanied by an ear-piercing cry.

When he saw the promise of that beautiful lunar landing module in the picture and saw his brother's work of art, he wanted it too—right then. I have faced times of spiritual "Lego frustration" in my own life as well. When I see the picture in Scripture of what I am intended to be in Christ and how I am intended to reign in life, the pieces of my life do not seem to fit no matter how hard I press. I have come to realize that all the pieces are not supposed to fit, if I read my Bible correctly.

Look at David. When David was anointed by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16, the prophet whispered in his ear, "You will be the next king." Immediately after that, he defeated Goliath in a magnificent display of faith. But then do we find him upon the throne? No! He had to run into a wilderness, being chased by a mad king.

This was also true of our Lord Jesus. What happened after his baptism and the vocal assurance that he was God's beloved Son? The Spirit immediately took him into a wilderness. As he was preparing to be king over his people, he was led into an experience where he had to trust the Father while he hungered and thirsted for forty days. Then angels ministered to him and provided him with supernatural food.

The children of Israel experienced this same truth. After they were brought out of the Egyptian captivity and had victoriously come through the Red Sea, did they enter the promised land? No! They headed into the wilderness. In the wilderness, God does his best preparatory work on his people. There David poured his heart out to God in psalms.

In the next three messages, I want to look at three psalms that are often categorized as lament psalms. About 100 of the 150 psalms fall into three distinct forms or types. In fact, these three distinctions are identified for us in 1 Chronicles 16:4: "And he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, even to *lament* and to *thank* and *praise* the Lord God of Israel." In these three verbs, we find the three main types of Psalms: lament, thanksgiving and praise.

The term "lament," the Hebrew word *hazkir*, comes from the verb *zakar* which means "to remember." This is where we get the name Zechariah which means "God remembers." In the lament psalms, the king is facing a crisis, a situation in which he cannot cope, and he cries out to God to remember him. Often at the end of these psalms is a verse of declarative praise when the psalmist says, "God, if you will do this for me, I will offer a vow of thanksgiving."

In the thanksgiving psalms, the psalmist thanks God for answering him in the midst of the crisis. He develops that one sentence of acknowledgement into an entire psalm. The praise psalms simply declare the beauty and wonder of the character of God which the king learned through the crisis. Thus, there is a progression from specific to universal truth. First, the psalmist cries out to God from within a crisis. Then he learns that God answers his prayers and delivers him. As a result of this interaction, he learns about the attributes of God and writes a psalm in response.

David learned his theology in the midst of crisis, in the midst of life. He did not learn about God in a classroom. This is why I love the Psalms. As we read them, we will learn the same lessons for the circumstances of our own lives.

In the lament psalms, we need to remember that the one in crisis and the one petitioning God is the king who represents the righteous rule of God on earth. In fact, at his coronation, the king was given the title "son of God," signifying their important relationship. In 2 Samuel 7, God made David a promise that he would give him a son with an eternal kingdom. Psalm 2 begins with inviting the king to pray—a privilege of this sonship relationship. The Psalms are an expression of this one who in covenant with God is bringing about the righteous rule of God on earth and thus are a prayer book of the king.

When we look at the enemies of the psalmist, we are dealing with those who reject the rule of God on earth, those who resist the grace and rule of God in their lives. Often these enemies are not named so that each succeeding generation could fill in the identity of their foes. As we look at our own enemies in light of these lament Psalms, we need to remember we are talking about the kingdom of God. In Psalm 1, we saw the progressive revelation of truth in Scripture regarding the idea of blessing. The Old Testament concept referred to physical health, prosperity, and security. In the New Testament, being blessed refers to spiritual health, prosperity, and security. The same is true of the kingdom of God. In the New Testament, this refers to a spiritual kingdom—the rule of God in our hearts. Thus,

the enemies of the kingdom of God are anything and anyone who hinders the rule of Jesus Christ in our lives. The New Testament defines them as the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Most scholars believe the background for Psalm 62 is recorded in 2 Samuel 15–17. The consequences of David’s sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband are recorded in 2 Samuel 11–12. One of the consequences was that the sword would never depart from his house; there would always be conflict in his family until he died. In the setting of this psalm, David had just been informed that his defiant son Absalom had performed an effective *coup d’etat*, having stolen the hearts of the people away from his father, and had himself proclaimed king. When the size of the rebellion grew, it became obvious to David that he had to flee Jerusalem. With his servants and family, he fled into the wilderness where he had spent so much time earlier fleeing from Saul.

It is important to realize as we look at this psalm that David penned these words while the heat of conflict was still intense. He can understand the emotions we feel in the midst of our struggles, pressure, and defeat, for he knew those feelings himself. But he also knew a confidence and peace in the midst of that pressure that perhaps you have not experienced yet. This confidence is expressed in the words of Psalm 62. In this psalm, we will see not only David’s confidence, but also the choices necessary for experiencing it.

The psalm is divided into three paragraphs, each consisting of four verses. In the first paragraph, we discover the foundation of David’s expectations, where his hope lies. In the second paragraph, we see the firmness of that foundation. And in the final paragraph, we see the futility of all other foundations. Each of these paragraphs teaches us a choice—one that David made and one that we must make if we are going to experience his confidence in the midst of our pressure.

The first choice is given in the first four verses.

I. We Must Recognize that Only God is Sufficient to Meet Our Needs (62:1-4)

My soul waits in silence for God only;
 From Him is my salvation.
 He only is my rock and my salvation,
 My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.
 How long will you assail a man,
 That you may murder him, all of you,
 Like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence?
 They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high
 position;
 They delight in falsehood;
 They bless with their mouth,
 But inwardly they curse. (Ps 62:1-4 NASB)

David is obviously in an extremely vulnerable position. By means of a cleverly orchestrated campaign of deceit, strategically sowing subtle half-truths and timely lies, his son Absalom had undermined his administration. David describes himself as a leaning wall, a tottering fence. What a picture!

There is something about a wobbling wall that begs to be tipped over. It taunts with its weakness. I remember some heavy competition as a child as to who would be the one to finally push the wall over. David had already taken some severe punishment, and certain

individuals intended to exploit his vulnerable position to the fullest. Even his life was at stake.

Can you identify with his weakness? Are there tottering fences in your life, circumstances that cause you to be vulnerable and weak, discouraged or frightened? For some of you, the tottering fence is your marriage which is barely surviving. I talked with a mother this week who has lost all hope of being an effective or godly parent. This afternoon, I am going to visit a woman who is terminally ill with cancer and is trying to make sense of her life. Maybe you are facing an IRS audit, and you know you have used loopholes you should have avoided. We all have tottering fences, areas of our lives in which others could take advantage of our vulnerability. May I remind you that our adversary is a master strategist who will exploit our vulnerability to the fullest.

One significant word which occurs six times in this Psalm is rarely used elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is the Hebrew word translated “only” (or “truly” in some translations) in verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 9. Verse 1 literally reads, “Only as it looks toward God is my soul in silence.” David knew that God was his *only* source of salvation.

Notice how he reinforces this truth by ascribing all his help to God. In verse 2, he cries, “He is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold.” He repeats this again in verse 7 where he calls God, “The rock of my strength, my refuge.” In the ancient Near East, safety was synonymous with reaching and remaining upon some fortified height which was inaccessible to any enemy. David saw this as a picture of a believer’s security in God. God is a rock, a reliable source of strength. He is security, safety, and protection.

David concludes, “I shall not be greatly shaken.” This does not mean he would never face difficult circumstances. Obviously, he knew this was not true, but he also knew he would never be shaken to the point of being uprooted.

A common phrase in the lament psalms is: “How long.” David cries, “I am not experiencing the promise, Lord. Why are you allowing this to happen?” When the Israelite nation came out of the Egyptian captivity, they entered the wilderness before they went into the promised land. Why would God allow this? Moses tells them in Deuteronomy 8:2-3:

“And you shall remember all the ways which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.” (Deut 8:2-3)

God puts us in wilderness experiences in order to humble us. Times of pressure and pain have always been God’s tool for teaching his people that life is only found in dependence on him. The Israelites could not learn this in a classroom. David could not learn it in a classroom. Neither could Jesus; neither could we. It would be foolish to think that simply reading this Psalm will prevent us from facing difficult circumstances.

Even the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death

within ourselves.” We do not know the exact details of that experience in Paul’s life, but we know the results. His own strength had been drained, and he was in despair, ready to quit. Maybe this is how you feel. Why does God allow this? Why does he show us the picture of the lunar landing module and not let us get the pieces to fit?

Paul shares the secret he learned: “in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” This is the same truth David expresses. This is why the pressures and problems are in our lives. The God who loves us is, as Paul puts it, delivering us over to death in order that we might not depend on happy circumstances or in pleasant surroundings but on the Lord of life who lives within us.

David needed a wilderness experience in order to learn this truth, and so do we. Though perilously outnumbered by his enemies, the king refused to come to terms with them. Instead, he turned to the Lord who had elected him. David knew that to turn anywhere else for help would have been a sin, idolatry. It would have meant breaking covenant with his loving Lord. We need to recognize that only God is sufficient to meet our needs.

The second truth this psalm teaches us is found in verse 5-8.

II. We Must Continually Choose to Allow God to Meet Our Needs in His Time (62:5-8)

**My soul, wait in silence for God only,
For my hope is from Him.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
My stronghold; I shall not be shaken.
On God my salvation and my glory rest;
The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.
Trust in Him at all times, O people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us. (62:5-8)**

Verses 5-6 are almost identical to verses 1-2, but I want you to notice the major change. In the first verse, David simply states a fact: “My soul waits in silence for God only.” In verse 5, the same truth becomes an exhortation: “My soul, wait in silence for God only.” David knew that it takes more than simply recognizing that only God could meet his needs. He knew he had to make a choice to look to God to meet those needs. Thus, David exhorts himself to “wait on God.”

Our expectation and hope should be placed in God, but it is difficult for us to wait. Someone has said that the American’s prayer is, “Lord, give me patience, and I want it right now!” It is difficult to teach patience to a society that can get information in seconds from its computers and meals in an instant from their microwaves. In fact, I saw a commercial on television the other evening for a pain medication whose slogan was, “When you haven’t got time for the pain...” My friends, you better have time for the pain! If you think you do not, it will be there a long time.

What does it mean to “wait” on God? We are given two crucial elements in verse 8. One involves confident trust and the other prayer. First, we are to confidently expect God to meet our needs. David says, “Trust in Him at all times, O people.” We are to consciously expect God to meet our needs.

I want you to understand that trusting God does not mean that we do not take any action ourselves. If the historical setting for this Psalm is 2 Samuel 15-17, David took action. As he fled from Jeru-

salem with his servants and friends through the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, he met up with one of his faithful advisors Hushai. This man had already torn his robe, had dust on his head, and was ready to accompany David into the wilderness. However, David told him that he could be of more use acting as an advisor to Absalom in Jerusalem. There he could confuse and contradict the advice of his other men, causing the destruction of Absalom’s kingdom. That is exactly what happened. David never praises himself for his sharp mind in thinking up the plan, for he knew that unless God worked to cause Absalom to take Hushai’s advice the plan would have failed.

There is nothing wrong with “methods” as long as we realize that they are useless without God working behind them. Psalm 127 says that unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. You could work all day with your children, but unless God works in their lives you will fail. Without God behind the scenes, all our methods are in vain.

The Lord is the only one worthy of our confidence. David had believed God’s promise that he would be king. Knowing that he was God’s representative, he moved out against all who would oppose him with the same confidence we can have. Jesus said to his disciples, “Go into all the world, and lo, I am with you always.” We can rest even in unrestful circumstances. We can wait in silence. The term “wait in silence” does not refer to the absence of speech but to a soul at rest experiencing the absence of anger, revenge and turmoil. The Lord is worthy of our confidence.

Second, waiting involves prayer. David says, “Pour out your heart before Him.” Let me exhort you to reserve some time to spend with God. If this is not your regular practice, I urge you to consider it. You should have times for unburdening yourself and sharing with God your hurts, fears and struggles.

Let there be times of silence. Some of my most memorable times with the Lord have been wordless. I do not pray well sitting down, so I like to walk. I even have a path charted through the neighborhood near the church in Palo Alto. On that walk, I can meditate upon what I have been reading or what I have been saying. And I can listen for God’s reproofs or counsel. I am not listening for a voice, but simply trying to sense what God is saying to me about certain situations.

There ought to be times when we can wait in silence and confidently expect God to meet our needs. It is wonderful to take our Bible and a hymn book and spend time with God. God wants to meet our needs. We must look to him who will fulfill them in his time.

The final observation is found in the last four verses.

III. We Must Refuse to Look for Other Sources of Fulfillment (62:9-12)

**Men of low degree are only vanity, and men of rank are a lie;
In the balances they go up;
They are together lighter than breath.
Do not trust in oppression,
And do not vainly hope in robbery;
If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.
Once God has spoken;
Twice I have heard this:
That power belongs to God;**

**And lovingkindness is Thine, O Lord,
For Thou dost recompense a man according to his work. (62:9-12)**

Having given us the foundation of his expectations and the firmness of that foundation, David now shows us the futility of all other foundations. In verses 9-10, he attacks what we often seek first and trust the most. David picks the two assets we seek the most when our tottering fences cause us to be the weakest and most vulnerable.

The first one is *people*. The terms “men of low degree” and “men of rank” are a poetic way of saying all men. All men—rich or poor, distinguished or without any distinction—are merely a puff of wind, a vapor, lighter than breath. The word “breath” is the same word translated in the book of Ecclesiastes as “vanity.”

This is easily seen in those without wealth, fame or authority. No one puts their trust in a man of low degree when his honor is at stake. But David says the same is true of those who seem to have everything going for them. Their appearance is deceiving. It is a facade, a lie. When put on the scales, they too are lighter than breath. Who would want to pin their hopes on a breath of air?

The second item we often trust is *money* or material possessions. In fact, David notes that we put so much value on money that we will resort to violence to get it. I do not need to elaborate on how we pin our hopes on money. If you do not think people believe money will meet their needs, watch the check-stand where they sell lottery tickets!

David concludes in verses 11-12 by summarizing what he has learned about God through this crisis. He says first that “power belongs to God.” Power, the ability to help us no matter what our need, no matter what condition the fence is in, and no matter how vulnerable we are, belongs only to God—not to people or material possessions.

David reiterates this in the second thing he learned: “Lovingkindness belongs to the Lord.” This word *hesed* is perhaps the most important word in all of the Old Testament. The King James Version translates it thirteen ways because the word is so rich there is no English equivalent. However, the definition of this word is the essence of this Psalm. This is what God taught David in the wilderness. Bruce Waltke, a gifted Old Testament scholar defines *hesed* in this way:

It has three ideas. First of all, it means that two people have a relationship. They are bound together. Secondly, it means that one party in that relationship is in a desperate situation, where he cannot save himself but the other party can; and the third idea is that the stronger party, out of mercy, out of loyalty, out of love, saves that person.

This is the attribute of God available to those who have a relationship with him. He is committed to us. Like David, we all face situations in which we cannot cope for one reason or another. We often find ourselves in a wilderness where we need food and protection. There is only one person who is sufficient to meet our needs. Not only is he sufficient, he is committed out of his covenant loyalty which he displayed on the cross when his Son died for our sins.

He has promised to meet all our needs. The lunar landing module will be built in our lives. He promises to help us reign in life. But often he finds us looking to other sources for meeting those needs. He is the only one who is sufficient. We must continue to look to him daily to work in our lives in his time and refuse to look to other sources for fulfillment.

Let me close with the encouraging words of Samuel Rutherford who wrote in the seventeenth century:

If God had told me some time ago that he was about to make me as happy as I could be in this world, and then had told me that he should begin by crippling me in arm or limb, and removing me from all my usual sources of enjoyment, I should have thought it a very strange mode of accomplishing his purpose. And yet, how is his wisdom manifest even in this! For if you should see a man shut up in a closed room, idolizing a set of lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wished to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps, and then throw open the shutters to let in the light of heaven.

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