

The deliverance psalms of Book II diagnose the dangers confronting the people of God. These threats include the sinful self (Ps 51), the evil bully (Ps 52), a corrupt culture (Ps 53), arrogant fools (Ps 54), and close friends who become betrayers (Ps 55). In worship we are challenged to face these many evils and turn to God for deliverance. The battle against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12) is unrelenting. The enemy is doggedly persistent (Ps 56). There is no place for shallow optimism and naivete. In prayer, the worshiper develops an understanding of evil and a deeper dependence upon God’s power to deliver.

The saving action of God often overshadows the psalmist’s lament (Ps 57), but the reality of evil continues to dominate his cry for divine judgment and justice (Ps 58). In spite of being under constant attack, he is confident in God’s deliverance (Ps 59). Paradoxically, the litany of dangers is climaxed by the ultimate crisis facing the people of God: the absence of God (Ps 60). Being God-forsaken is the worst disaster imaginable for the people of God. Therefore the psalmist looks to God alone for deliverance to overcome God’s rejection and to triumph over his enemies.

In Psalm 61 there is a shift of emphasis away from exposing evil and yearning for deliverance to expressing heart-felt devotion to God and anticipating joy in God’s deliverance. The pressing need for salvation remains, but the heart and character of the worshiper is brought into focus. In the sequence of “save me” psalms from Psalms 51-64, Psalm 62 describes devotion to God and confidence in the Lord’s deliverance.

Willed Passivity

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.
Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down –
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?
Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.*

Psalm 62:1-4

The superscription dedicates this David psalm to Jeduthun, one of three worship leaders during David and Solomon’s reign (1 Chron 16:41-42; 2 Chron 5:12; see Ps 39). The message of the psalm is clear, but the linguistic ambiguity of the Hebrew particle *'ak* presents a translation challenge. “It is an emphazier,” writes Kidner, “to underline a statement or to point a contrast;

its insistent repetition gives the psalm a tone of special earnestness.”¹ The word occurs six times in the psalm at the beginning of verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9. The NIV replicates the emphasis by placing the word first in each line that it appears and translating it as a positive declarative, “truly” (v. 1, 2, 6), “yes” (v.5), and “surely (v. 4, 9). The ESV translates the word restrictively as “only” or “alone” and embeds the word in the sentence:

“For God *alone* my soul waits in silence” (v. 1)
“He *only* is my rock and my salvation” (v. 2)
“They *only* plan to thrust him down from his high position” (v.4)
“For God *alone*, O my soul, wait in silence” (v. 5)
“He *only* is my rock and my salvation” (v. 6)
“Those of low estate are *but (only)* a breath” (v. 9)

In order to accent the psalmist’s emphasis and to remain true to the Hebrew original, it may be best to combine the declarative and restrictive sense of the word in our English translations.

“*Truly* my soul waits in silence for God *alone*” (v. 1)
“*Truly* he *only* is my rock and my salvation” (v. 2)
“*Surely* they *only* intend to topple me” (v. 4)
“*Yes*, my soul, find rest in God *alone*” (v. 5)
“*Truly* he *only* is my rock and my salvation” (v. 6)
“*Surely* the lowborn are *only* a breath” (v. 9)

Psalm 62:2 literally reads, “Yes, my soul is silence for God alone.” The implication being that the worshiper is waiting or trusting in the Lord silently.² This is in contrast with Psalm 61:1, “Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.” Needless to say, both approaches are valid and necessary, the former proceeding the latter, because “the words have all been said—or perhaps no words will come—and the issue rests with Him alone.”³ In any case, the psalmist has reached a place of quiet confidence in God. He declares God to be his sole source of salvation.

It is interesting to note that silence is a major theme in Psalm 39, the one other psalm dedicated to Jeduthun, but in the case of Psalm 39 silence indicates such a troubled soul that the psalmist is unable to trust himself to verbalize his grief. He is too upset to speak. But in Psalm 62, the heart as well as the voice are quieted and at peace. Silence in Psalm 62 is not an attribute of fear and confusion but of peace and confidence. Far from being intimidated, the psalmist is safe and secure in the presence of God. In the words of Psalm 131, “I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother” (Ps 131:2).

There are many situations in the gospel narratives where we can imagine Jesus praying Psalm 62. Instead of reacting negatively to those who were out to get him, Jesus manifested repeatedly a quiet confidence in the Father’s love and a total trust in the Father’s will. We picture him calm

¹ Kidner, Psalms, 221.

² Ross, Psalms, 367.

³ Kidner, Psalms, 221.

and unshakable in tense exchanges with the religious leaders and resolute in accomplishing salvation. Jesus transposes the psalmist's descriptive language for God, "my rock," "my salvation," and "my fortress," into his parables ("like a wise man who built his house on the rock" – Matt 6:24) and promises ("you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" – Matt 16:18). As with the psalmist, Jesus uses these Old Testament metaphors to stand for God who alone is our present and eternal security, salvation and refuge.

Quiet confidence in the face of persistent opposition and harassment demonstrates a devotion on the other side of desperation. This is the discipline of surrender that says "yes" to God and "no" to the anger and resentment that can so easily build in trying circumstances. Jesus is our model for willed passivity. His quiet dignity and unbending resolve shapes our praying imagination and impresses us to the core. More often than not the Christian looks silly to the world. Here we are, still believing in the Incarnate One when the world tells us to believe in ourselves; still trusting in the Savior when the world trusts in subjective feelings and secular science; still worshipping the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while the world worships money, sex, and power. Should we be surprised that the way of the cross looks indefensible to the world?

In his prayer David addresses those who persist in trying to bring him down. His quiet confidence in God alone endures in a culture of chronic hatred, on-going persecution, and constant opposition. He marvels that his attackers and abusers never give up. He likens his vulnerability to a broken down wall or a tottering fence just waiting to come down. His enemies fully intend to topple him and destroy him. They envy his position and seek to exploit his weakness. "Evil," writes Kidner, "being ruthlessly competitive, is attracted to weakness, to give a last push to whatever is leaning or tottering."⁴

Ironically, this besetting enemy, who is intent on destroying the worshiper, makes an outward show of support while doing everything in his power behind-the-scenes to ruin him. He blesses with his mouth and curses in his heart. Many in the church have experienced this tragic dynamic. Well-intentioned dragons may make a public show of piety but they have every intention of running good people out of *their* church. They sing hymns on Sunday and spend the rest of the week gossiping and plotting destruction. I knew a man who literally made life hell for a young pastor. He saw his service on the church's elder board as a mandate to get rid of the pastor. At every turn he was on the pastor's case, condemning his preaching, slandering his character, questioning his work ethic, and challenging his sincerity. He went to every board meeting with the intent to do battle against the pastor. Make no mistake the psalmist does not want us to be naive about the ways of the wicked and if we are worshipping in the spirit of Psalm 62 we will not be blind-sided.

In Christ Alone

*Yes, my soul, find rest (silence) in God (alone);
my hope comes from him.
Truly, he (alone) is my rock and my salvation;*

⁴ Kidner, 221.

*he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*
Psalm 62:5-8

Having described his enemies as “the most dangerous kind, emerging from the ranks of would-be supporters,” the psalmist declares once again his total dependence on God alone.⁵ His willed passivity has determined “to brood” on “the traitors and their plots” no longer and to drive out anxiety and fear with thoughts of God.⁶ Instead of dwelling on his own weakness and vulnerability he dwells on God who is his hope, his rock, his salvation, and his fortress. His fate does not lie in the hands of his assailants, but in the hands of God, who is his mighty rock and refuge. The psalmist declares boldly, “My salvation and my honor depend on God.” He prays against the fear and anxiety that is altogether natural and human in the face of such opposition by affirming his firm belief in the power of God to deliver him.

His prayerful spiritual direction extends beyond himself to others. He invites the people of God to affirm their trust in God alone and “to pour out [their] hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Ps 62:8). Quiet unshakable confidence in God begins with pouring out our heart to God, knowing that he hears us, he loves us, and that he alone has the power to save.

Jesus echoes the message of this psalm when he said, “Do not worry about your life” (Matthew 6:25). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus extends the prohibition against worry well beyond our enemies to the very essentials of physical life, like food and clothing. “Why do you worry about clothes?” Jesus asked. “See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.” Jesus’ point was basic: “So do not worry, saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:28-33). Jesus’ reference to pagans seeking these things, presumably as their top priority, follows the psalmist train of thought. Jesus’ contrasting picture between pagan consumption and trust in God tracks the theology of Psalm 62.

God has Spoken

*Surely the lowborn are but (only) a breath,
highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.
Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,*

⁵ Ross, Psalms, 370.

⁶ Kidner, Psalms, 222.

*do not set your heart on them.
One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:
'Power belongs to you, God,
and with you, Lord is unfailing love';
and, 'You reward everyone according to what they have done.'*
Psalm 62:9-12

The psalmist sums up in two verses a radical social critique that can be found throughout the Bible. Humanity on its own and estranged from God is nothing to fear and nothing to hope in. Goldingay's translation reads, "Yes, human beings are a breath; mortals are deceit. Going up on scales, they are less than a breath, altogether."⁷ The word for "breath" is the key word in Ecclesiastes for "vanity" or "futility."⁸ Eugene Peterson's paraphrase captures the emptiness of humanity apart from God: "Man as such is smoke, woman as such, a mirage. Put them together, they're nothing; two times nothing is nothing" (Ps 62:9, Message). The psalmist is not disparaging humanity made in the image of God; the psalmist is disparaging what human beings put their trust in. In our sin nature, we put our trust in material things. We put our trust in images of worldly success. In all our pomp and self-importance we create a facade that is nothing but a lie.⁹ The apostle James captures this verdict in a line that echoes the psalm, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

The psalmist extends his critique to how we earn our living. He implies that the temptation to become like his attackers threatens the faithful. Material gain at the expense of others is to be avoided at all costs. It is especially tempting when economic systems legitimize or legalize exploitation and oppression. Getting away with it is no excuse for the people of God. To be absorbed in acquiring riches, even through culturally acceptable means, "counts as no less perilous than a life of crime."¹⁰ The apostle Paul addressed this concern boldly and reassuringly, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides for us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not rule out responsible living. He did not say, "Take no thought." He said, "Do not worry." Nor did Jesus equate anxious thought with hard work. What he forbids is a "crippling anxiety that drives one to seek security by one's own efforts apart from the Father."¹¹ When we stop looking to our heavenly Father and start looking to ourselves, we are in trouble. Even the basic necessities of life were meant to become the raw material for trust in God. We can say all we want about our heart being right with God and our devotion being to him alone, but if we are constantly fretting about food or medicine or rent or car payments, our commitment is empty rhetoric. A refusal to worry and complain proves devotion on the other

⁷ Goldingay, Psalms, 250.

⁸ Ross, Psalms, 372.

⁹ Ross, Psalms, 372.

¹⁰ Kidner, Psalms, 223.

¹¹ Guelich, The Sermon on the Mount, 336.

side of desperation.¹²

The undeniable fact that God has spoken definitively, not once, but twice, explains why David uses the particle *'ak* six times in this psalm and why we have translated the word declaratively and restrictively. The psalmist insists on asserting every truth in this psalm emphatically and earnestly, not because he is dogmatic, but because God has spoken. Everything said in this psalm rests on the unambiguous revelation of God.

Three truths have been so clearly revealed and reiterated that there ought to be no doubt as to their reality in the mind of the faithful. The first is this: “Power belongs to God.” The second, “With you, Lord, is unfailing love.” The third, “You reward everyone according to what they have done.” Truly, all power, all mercy, all justice, belong to God alone. Upon these three interrelated truths the quiet confidence of the psalmist rests. The Psalm is rich in metaphors illustrating power (rock, fortress) and mercy (salvation, refuge), but this third truth on just rewards may require some further reflection.

Calvin was quick to say that this reward for what we have done is not tied to our merit but to God’s mercy. “It is with a very different design than to encourage any such opinion [works based righteousness], that the Spirit promises a reward to our works – it is to animate us in the ways of obedience, and not to inflame that impious self-confidence which cuts up salvation by the very roots.” Calvin emphasized that God’s judgment of our works is based first on our forgiveness in Christ and second upon “the divine condescension” that accepts our works “notwithstanding all their imperfections.”¹³

On several occasions Jesus’ teaching echoed the theology of Psalm 62. When he taught the cost of discipleship, he promised his disciples that he would bring about a definitive judgment. “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done” (Matthew 16:27). In the parable of the sheep and goats, the King distinguishes between those on his right, the sheep, and those on his left, the goats, by what they have done. To the sheep on his right he says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” And to the goats on his left he says, “Truly, I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” The King’s judgment is final. “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:40, 45-46).

Jesus and the psalmist are on the same page. The theology of reward and judgment distinguishes between works’ righteousness and the work of righteousness – between merit-based self-righteousness and mercy-based righteousness. This is consistent with the apostle Paul’s emphasis, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:8-10). The Reformers insisted that we are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. True faith in Christ is always accompanied by the works of Christ.

¹² Webster, *The Easy Yoke*, 178-179.

¹³ Calvin, *Psalms*, 432.