

Psalms of David

Psalms 61 & 62, God is my Rock

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The New King James Version of the Scriptures is used unless otherwise stated.]*

Psalms 61 and 62 form a beautiful pair which teaches us about God being our Rock. David probably wrote these psalms when he was in the wilderness, escaping from the treachery and murderous intentions of his own son, Absalom. There is a strong connection between them, and a sense of progress as we move from one to the other. Thus, in Psalm 61, David cries out to God, asking God to lead him to the “rock that is higher than I”, as David expresses it in verse 2. In Psalm 62, by contrast, David knows that God is his rock, and he rejoices in that fact, just as he says in verse 6: “He only is my rock and my salvation.” Both Psalms are addressed in the title to the Chief Musician, which would mean that they would be used in public service, and this in turn suggests that, although the Psalms came from David’s own experience of difficulty and severe trial, the help that David found is applicable and helpful to all, and consequently it was important to make sure that all could know about it.

What we’ll do today is to briefly go through both Psalms in turn, noting some key encouragements on our way, and then we’ll finish up by considering the message of the two Psalms as a whole. Let’s start with Psalm 61. There are four main points which struck me when I read and studied this Psalm, and they were these:

1. God is our Rock
2. He is our dependable refuge.
3. How to get to that Rock.
4. What it looks like to trust in Him.

See if you can keep these in mind as we go through this Psalm.

David starts off in verse 1 with,

Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer.

David is straight away dealing with a God who hears and acts. Just a short bit further on in the Bible, in Psalm 65 verse 2, we have a beautiful description of God:

O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come.

It is so good that we have a living God who hears prayer. Living as we now do in New Testament truth, we have the immense privilege of speaking to God as our Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ. God hears prayer and takes note of it. Faithful believers all through the pages of the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, knew this.

Take Daniel, for example. In chapter 9 of his book, we read that Daniel prayed to God, after having understood from the book of the prophet Jeremiah that the captivity of Israel would last seventy years. In verse 19 of Daniel chapter 9, he prays,

O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for
Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by
Your name.”

Daniel was counting on God, not only to hear his prayer but to answer it, and so he prays,

O Lord, listen and act!

We can always speak to God in prayer. How and when God answers our prayers is a big topic, and it is not the subject of today’s talk, but we can be sure that no prayer is ever wasted. We can know that, because the Lord Jesus Himself encourages us to pray, as we read in Luke chapter 18 verse 1,

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and
not lose heart.

David needed to pray because his circumstances overwhelmed him. He says in Psalm 61 verse 2,

From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is
overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

From this expression, various commentators have suggested that David was in the wilderness, probably fleeing from Absalom. This makes sense because David cried ‘from the end of the earth’, suggesting that he had left his capital Jerusalem. Since he refers to himself as King in verse 6, the circumstance was probably Absalom’s rebellion, when David was the King, as opposed to Saul’s persecution of earlier years, when David was not yet King. One of the commentators that I read helpfully pointed out that David never arrogated the title of King for himself while Saul was still alive.

“My heart is overwhelmed”, said David. Probably many of us have felt overwhelmed at some point or other in our lives. David likely felt as if he was drowning in the stress of his circumstances, and was simply not able to cope, or to see the way forward. It must have been a horrible feeling for him. There was just too much to deal with. But this was where David’s faith shone out. He cried out to God, and although he couldn’t see the way out, even in fact the way to reach God’s deliverance, he knew that God knew the way, and so he asks God to lead him: “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

A rock gives us a picture of a strong, stable defence – a place of true refuge. In Proverbs chapter 30 verse 26 we read,

The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the
crag.

The rock badgers may not be strong beasts that can easily defend themselves, but they have a safe home in the rocky crags. Similarly, David knew that he was in a weak position, but he knew that God was a strong, dependable refuge, and he wanted to get to that place of safety.

This leads on to a practical question for us today: how do we get to that Rock that is higher than us? Well, as David says, we need God to lead us, and God does so, mainly by the Holy Spirit through the word of God. As we consider what the Bible has to say, and as we think about our

past experiences with the Lord, we remember how He has delivered us, how He hears us now and knows about our current situation, and what He has promised for us in His word. This is the path to the rock that David followed, so let's travel along it with him.

In verse 3 he says,

For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.

David knew how frequently God had delivered him over the years.

This was not unique to David; the apostle Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 8 – 11:

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

This is quite strong stuff! Here was Paul, just like David, trusting in God when circumstances were so much against him.

I don't know about you, but I find it can be easy for me to slip into thinking about what apparently hasn't gone right in my life. Now of course, I have made mistakes, and some of these mistakes have consequences, but thinking only about what went wrong is not a faith-filled way of looking at things! I need to remember the lines of that old hymn, 'Count your blessings, name then one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done!' (Johnson Oatman Jnr 1856-1922). This is very true! An alternative trip down memory lane, thinking instead about all the ways that God has come in for me, puts me well on the way to the Rock that is higher than I.

David was counting his blessings, so to speak. He knew that God had been a shelter for him. Likewise, he knew that God heard him and cared about him. In verse 5 of Psalm 61 he says,

For You, O God, have heard my vows; You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name.

This is a great thing to hold onto: God does know, and God does hear. In Malachi chapter 3 verses 16 – 17, God draws back the curtain, and shows us how He acts:

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. They shall be Mine, says the LORD of hosts, On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.

The Lord listened and heard those who spoke to one another about Him, and He shows a real care and delight in them, planning to make them as His own treasure. God knows when we turn to Him, and it gives Him real joy.

When we get to verses 6 and 7 in Psalm 61, the language changes from first person narration to third person narration. Up till these verses, David wrote I, me and my, but now we read,

You will prolong the king's life, his years as many generations. He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!

Probably David was thinking about the tremendous promise that God had made to him as recorded in the second book of Samuel, chapter 7, where God promised to build David a lasting house. And that is a good point for us today, that one way to get to the rock is to consider the wonderful, faithful promises that God has made for us in His word. In many ways the promise that David was considering looks beyond David and his immediate descendants onto the One that the hymn writer James Montgomery called 'Great David's greater Son' in his hymn Hail to the Lord's Anointed. Great David's greater Son is of course the Lord Jesus Himself, and as we will see later, He is the Rock.

So, in summary, we have seen David asking to be led to the high rock, and then he was led that way, by remembering what God had done for him in the past, by knowing and believing that God was hearing him right now, and by trusting in the promises of God given in His word. That is the same way that we can travel when we feel overcome by difficulties. So, we've looked at three of the four points I mentioned earlier, which were (1) that God is our Rock; (2) He is our dependable refuge, and (3) how we get to that Rock. The fourth point, what it looks like to trust in Him, is seen in verse 8 of our psalm:

So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform my vows.

Praise is the appropriate response when we make God our refuge. In Psalm 50 verse 23, God says,

Whoever offers praise glorifies Me.

Let's now look at the next Psalm, number 62. In Psalm 61, David cried out to the Lord, and asked to be led to the high rock, but here in Psalm 62, David has reached the rock, and he is rejoicing and trusting in that fact. In verses 1 and 2, he writes,

Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.

The deliverance has not yet arrived. If I am correct that these Psalms were written during Absalom's rebellion, then presumably Absalom and his army had not yet been defeated. But David did not need to keep crying out to God, because he now knew that his salvation would come from God, and that God was his defense, and that he would not be greatly moved. He was 100% confident that God would sort out his situation.

So, David was able to consider the situation and see behind the motives of faithless men and women. There were evidently people who were trying to deceive David, flattering with their words but with malicious intention, as we see in verse 4:

They only consult to cast him down from his high position; they delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly.

We sometimes need to be discerning – Paul, for example, asked for prayer for him in his second letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 3 verse 2:

That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

The Lord Jesus Himself said in Matthew chapter 10 verse 16,

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

But even in this discouraging situation, where David felt that there were some people that he simply couldn't trust, this only made him more sure that he really could trust God. So, in verses 5 and 6 he repeats what he said in verses 1 and 2, but with a slight difference:

My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.

In verse 2, David had said that he would not be greatly moved, but here in verse 6 he goes further,

I shall not be moved.

Let the flatterers and the deceivers plan their evil tricks as they may, God would see to it that David would be guarded. And so, David continues in triumph in verse 7,

In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

Now at this stage we need to pause and to take the long view. In this world, and in this life, it may not always seem as if God has come through, or that all of our troubles have been overcome. People do get ill and do not always recover. Some people may deceive us, and we may not necessarily get justice. Accidents and tragedies do occur. Or we may simply have to cope with a problem, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, that doesn't go away. But like David in these Psalms, we can be sure that our enemies, like his, will not prevail. Who are our enemies? They are not other people, as they were in David's day. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6 and verse 12, we read,

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

These are our enemies. They may well use other people to harass and discourage us, but these dark forces stand behind. They want to discourage us, condemn us, remind us of our past failures, alienate us from God and from our brothers and sisters in Christ, and whisper to us that God does not love us and does not care about us, otherwise why wouldn't He get us out of this or that situation? In short, they want to destroy the freedom and joy that we have in knowing the forgiveness, salvation and joy that the Lord Jesus gives us. It's when we feel overcome by these things that we need to be led to the rock that is higher than us, and to know and trust in the love that God has for us. Whatever condemnation the enemies may throw at us, if we have repented and trusted in the Lord Jesus, we know that,

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

As we read in Romans chapter 8 verse 1.

In verse 9 of Psalm 62, David realises that men and women, whatever their status, are ultimately of no help compared to God.

Surely men of low degree are a vapour, men of high degree are a lie; if they are weighed on the scales, they are altogether lighter than vapour.

Obviously, this doesn't mean that nobody is ever of any help! As Christians, we would want to be channels of God's blessing to others, and we would want to gratefully acknowledge the help that others have given to us. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that. But what David is teaching is that humanity in general, operating without reference to God, is no substitute for God. We need to trust in Him.

This is what David was doing. The help hadn't arrived yet – that's why he reminds himself in verse 5,

My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.

David was going to wait for God's deliverance. In the meantime, he wasn't going to put his trust and expectation in men of low estate (ESV), or in men of high estate (ESV). If he had done that, he would have been sure to be disappointed in the long run.

Verse 10 is interesting:

Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

It goes without saying that as Christians, we should not be involved in oppression or robbery! But even when wealth is honestly gained, David cautions us not to set our heart on it. Paul says the same thing in his first letter to Timothy, chapter 6 verse 17:

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Riches, as we well know from financial and economic crashes, are uncertain. We can't be 100% sure that what we have invested in will do well. Of course, it is wise to make sensible plans for the future, but ultimately, God is the One we trust, not our savings. In Psalms 61 and 62, David has been outlining how God is our dependable Rock in times of trouble and discouragement, and how we can trust in Him. But here in verse 10, it's as if David is saying, even when things are actually going well for us, still we should trust in God, and not in our circumstances. That can actually be a tough lesson to learn.

David ends Psalm 62 in verses 11-12 with a reminder of God's attributes and faithfulness:

God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God. Also to You, O LORD, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work.

It's an interesting turn of phrase, isn't it? "God has spoken once, twice I have heard this." Derek Kidner,¹ in his commentary on the Psalms, suggests that this might be an emphatic way of expressing that God repeated this truth to David. It's obviously something that God, through David, definitely wants us to know. In Job chapter 33 verse 14, Elihu said,

For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it.

In our case, let's aim to perceive it! What was it that God had spoken once, and that David had heard twice? It was this:

That power belongs to God. Also to You, O LORD, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work.

Basically, God is both powerful and full of steadfast love. These are the two crucial attributes that make Him our dependable Rock. We need someone with sufficient power to act, to deliver us from our enemies and from our situations. We also need someone who is merciful towards us, who loves us and acts on the basis of his goodness, and not on the basis of what we deserve. These wonderful attributes meet in God, and only in God.

So, what have we gained from these two psalms? We've seen that God is our Rock; He is the Rock that is higher than us. When we are overwhelmed, we need to find that Rock, but it's usually then, right in the middle of difficult circumstances, that we may wonder how to find it. Well, God leads us, as we remember what He has done for us in the past, how He listens to us now, and what He has promised for us in His word. That leads us to consider, like David did, that we "will not be greatly moved." We can wait in expectation, and not put all our trust and hopes in people or money or other things: "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him."

Now, it's one thing for me to speak about these Psalms on the radio, but what about when real life hits? Can we be sure that these Psalms will hold good? This is where it's good to remember that the Bible is truly God's word, and it is also a true record of history. David was a real person, and what happened to him is a true account. He did go through many times of great difficulty, and he also made his share of mistakes, some of them very serious. And yet God came through for him – these are not fictional accounts. We know from the Scripture that God cares about us, too. Peter says so in his first epistle, chapter 7 and verse 5,

Casting all your care upon Him [that is, God], for He cares for you.

David is one of the most famous characters of the Old Testament, and when I searched his name on the Blue Letter Bible online, in the New King James version, I saw that he is mentioned 1,105 times! Interestingly, we find David's name mentioned for the last time at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation chapter 22 verse 16, which reads as follows: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

David trusted in God, and was delivered, and David was justly famous in Israel, but as we mentioned at the start, the hymn writer James Montgomery speaks of "Great David's greater Son", the Lord Jesus Himself. The Rock that defended David also came to this earth, to be born as one of David's descendants. In first Corinthians chapter 10, verse 4, Paul, speaking about the rock that gave water in the wilderness to the Israelites on their way to the promised land, says,

For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

It is interesting how Paul identifies the Lord Jesus as the Rock. The point for us to take home is that the Rock who delivered David is not going to let us down. He has already proved it at the cross. This adds a wonderful meaning to Psalm 62 verses 6 and 7, which I will read again:

He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Psalms 61 and 62, God is my Rock, talk number T1432. I hope it has helped and encouraged you!

¹ Derek Kidner, p.241, Psalms 1-72: an introduction and commentary. Inter-Varsity Press, 1973; reprinted 2008.

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