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## God's Reputation Is In Our Hands

### Psalm 57

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An ambassador is one who represents another. If I had an ambassador, that ambassador would represent my beliefs, my opinions. In essence, my very reputation would be in his hands.

The New Testament says that if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, you are an ambassador of Jesus. Your assignment is to represent Jesus to the world. How you live your life—what you say, what you do, your attitudes—all reflect what you believe to be true about God.

The Bible also says that as followers of Jesus we are a light—but specifically, we are a light that shines in the darkness. The reality is, if I have a flashlight and I shine it in the light, you can tell it's on—but just barely. But when I take that same flashlight and I shine it in the darkness, suddenly the light becomes very evident.

If you take those two concepts and pull them together, the reality is we are never more effective as an ambassador of Jesus Christ than when we go through the storms of life. When all is well, sometimes it's hard to see the light shining. The followers of Jesus, the religious people, the good people—they all seem very much alike. But it's in the storms of life that suddenly there is revealed a dramatic difference.

How do we respond correctly in the storms of life? How do we properly represent God when we are going through those difficult times, those storms, those trials in our lives? If you have a Bible, turn with me to Psalm 57 and we'll try to answer that.

Psalm 57 is a psalm of David. Underneath the number is the tiny writing (which is almost too small to read...but I know it's there) that's called the superscription. It's actually put in by editors later. Most of the time we believe it's accurate, maybe not all the time. This tells us it's "for the choir director; set to Al-tashheth"—which is a Hebrew word that means "do not destroy." It's telling you that's the tune. Now you're all familiar with the tune "Do Not Destroy," so as we go through this psalm, just hum that in your head and that's the music behind the psalm.

You also see that same thing with Psalm 58, 59, on to Psalm 75. So there were certain tunes that many of these psalms fit in with. It also tells us this is "a Mikhtam of David." You might want to write this down: What is a Mikhtam? The answer is we don't know. Nobody knows, but it is...so that's all we know.

Then it also tells us it's "when David fled from Saul in the cave." This is very important background to this psalm. In 1 Samuel 24 David is fleeing from King Saul because Saul wants to kill David. David hides in a cave. Then in chapter 25, the next chapter, there is another event. And then in chapter 26 he hides in a cave again. So there are two different cave incidents, with one chapter in between.

Commentators argue about which one of these cave incidents is behind the psalm. In my mind, there's no question it's the second one—because I think David was in a completely different frame of mind in chapter 24. I think a significant thing happened in chapter 25 that changed his life. And I think chapter 26, then, is a reflection of that.

I'll give you the story in summary here. When David is in the cave (in chapter 24), he and his men are hiding there, and Saul comes in to relieve himself. They realize in the darkness this is their

chance to attack him and kill him. David is close enough to Saul in the darkness that he can reach out, take Saul's robe and cut a piece of the robe off. So he's right there with his weapon. And I think David very much intended to kill Saul, but at the last minute changed his mind and stopped his soldiers and told them, "We can't do this; this is God's anointed." But I do think he was that close.

In chapter 25 (the very next chapter) David is interacting with a worthless man by the name of Nabal, whose name actually means "worthless." He was kind of a cranky, wicked old man, but a man of great wealth. David asks him for a favor, and Nabal turns him down, which just absolutely sets David off. So he goes back and gets his troops. They mount up and they're going to go wipe out Nabal and every single person there.

So they're marching in and they have plans for destruction when Abigail, Nabal's wife, who was a godly woman, steps out and stops David and his little troop and asks him what he is doing. If he kills these people in cold blood, he will be no different than Nabal. If he really believes and trusts in his God, why doesn't he trust God with this circumstance instead of taking matters into his own hands? David immediately realizes she is right. He confesses that and really repents and says, "We just about made a huge mistake here. We have got to trust God."

David and his troops stop, and by the end of 1 Samuel 25 Nabal falls over dead and David marries Abigail (which is another sermon; that's another story). But immediately following that, there's another cave incident. So you have cave, then this incident, and then cave. Anytime you have two passages that are so similar, the writer is begging you for some comparison.

What happens in the second cave incident is the same thing. David has an opportunity to kill Saul, and yet this time it doesn't even cross his mind to do so—because he has learned through the Nabal incident that he just must trust God with his circumstances. He has no right to destroy God's anointed king. So David knows that; he doesn't even attempt anything on Saul. And I think that's a changing point in David's life. He understood very clearly that ultimately he must trust God, not take matters into his own hand. That's the lesson Saul *never* learned.

I think it's then out of that second cave incident that David writes Psalm 57. He understands that he has God's reputation in his hands, and how he responds in these difficult circumstances will communicate to the nations around him what he really believes to be true of his God.

Psalm 57 is written as a song, so basically the format is that verses 1 through 4 are the first verse. Verse 5 is the chorus. Verses 6 through 10 are the second verse. And verse 11 is the chorus again. The chorus, then, really carries the theme, and the two verses build on that. So I want to read verse 5 (which is exactly like verse 11) just to get us focused going into the psalm. He says:

**Be exalted above the heavens, O God; let Your glory be above all the earth. (\*NASB)**

In other words, what he's saying is his desire is that God's reputation would be enhanced, that God's glory would be lifted up over the earth. He'll mention later that as the nations of the earth look on, they will know that God is God. So he understands this concept of being an ambassador, a representative of God. And people will form their view of God based on how David responds to these circumstances. With that in mind, let's go back to verse 1. David says:

**Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, for my soul takes refuge in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by.**

I think verse 1 is very important to set the tone for the psalm. In essence, it deals with attitude. The first thing we have to deal with to respond properly to the storms of life is to make sure our attitude is correct. David comes as a broken sinner, appealing to the grace of God.

One of the problems we have in our culture is it's very easy for people to slip into this "I'm a victim" mode. That's one of the defining marks of our culture today. Whenever anything happens, suddenly *I'm a victim...and this is unfair...and poor me*. And people like to wallow in that. The reality is that forms a mindset that says, *I deserve better; this isn't fair; I didn't have this coming*.

And so what happens is we even enter the presence of God with a mindset of entitlement. In essence we're saying to God, "God, You owe me; this is unfair; I deserve better." That kind of an attitude will never lead to experiencing God as our refuge in times of storm. The reality is God doesn't owe us anything. We are poor broken sinners, and frankly we get what we deserve.

David comes before God and says, "God, I come on the basis of Your grace. I know I don't deserve what I'm asking for, but on the basis of Your grace I come." And that sets the proper tone for God to respond to David's need. He says:

**For my soul takes refuge in You;** (v. 1b)

Literally the verb tense is "my soul has been—and continues to—take refuge in You."

**And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge...** (v. 1c)

Now what does he mean by "the shadow of Your wings"? There are a couple of possibilities. One is this idea of a bird, like a hen, bringing the chicks up under her wing and they find refuge in the shadow of her wings. And that's possible.

But I think, given the flavor of the psalm, there's a much deeper, richer understanding of that phrase. As a matter of fact, I think most of the time this phrase is in reference to the Ark of the Covenant. During the time of David there was a large tent that was known as the tabernacle. Within that tent, there was a compartment called the Holy of Holies; and within the Holy of Holies there was the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the very presence of God.

On top of the Ark of the Covenant there were two cherubim, and they were like angels with large wings. The wings were open and hovered over the top of the ark. In the shadow of the wings was a grate known as the mercy seat. This was to be the place where a holy God met sinful people. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take the blood and would enter into the Holy of Holies and go up to the Ark of the Covenant. He would take this blood and pour it through the grate, and it would go into the Ark of the Covenant.

All this happened under the shadow of the wings, and that was symbolic of God's promise to Abraham that one day He would shed His blood to atone for their sins so that sinful people could have a relationship with a holy God. Of course, we understand the ultimate fulfillment of that was Jesus Christ on the cross. It was when God literally shed His blood to atone for the sins of the world.

Therefore, what David is saying is, "The basis by which I find refuge in God is under the shadow of His wings"—meaning "it is based on the blood of God that has been shed in atonement for my sin." Now it's very important to understand that. Oftentimes when we are going through the storms of life—when we're going through very difficult circumstances—it's our own fault; it's because we've

made bad choices; it's because we've gotten ourselves into a mess. Sometimes we feel that under the pile, and it's often because of those dynamics that the darkness is the most dark.

In those times, we need a place of refuge the most. But if I have it in my head that the basis by which I find refuge in God is because of my performance—because I've been such a “good Christian,” because I've been doing everything right—then what happens is the time when you need that place of refuge the most, is the time when it's not available.

Many people, when they are in the storm of their own making, distance themselves from God—because in their minds they're thinking, *God doesn't want anything to do with me; I'm just a big mess-up*. But that's bad theology. Your ability to enter the presence of God has *never* been based on your performance. It has never been based on whether you're a mess-up or not. It has always been based on what happened under the shadow of His wings: when a holy God shed His blood to atone for your sin.

Therefore, even if your storm is caused by your biggest mess-up, you are welcomed into the presence of God to find refuge. That is why David opens appealing to the grace of God—because he knows that's the only basis by which he can enter into God's presence and find refuge. And I think that's what he's referring to here.

**...Until destruction passes by. I will cry to God Most High...** (vs. 1d-2a)

This is kind of an unusual construction for the name of God. It basically means “the God who is above all other gods; the God who is unbeatable, undefeatable.” David finds refuge in the God that cannot be beaten.

**To God who accomplishes all things for me.** (v. 2b)

That word “accomplishes” means to complete or to fulfill. Some of you have the gift of starting projects, but you don't necessarily have the gift of completing projects. Some people just seem to have that gift, much to your spouse's dismay. Now, I am on the other end of the scale. I have the obsessive gift of completion: if I start it, I get kind of obsessive until it's completed—again, much to my wife's dismay.

God always completes what He starts. Paul affirmed the same thing in the New Testament: that God will be faithful to complete what He started in you. Oftentimes when we're in the midst of the storm, it feels like everything is coming unraveled—like we started something but we're not going to finish it. It was a dream that looked so good but now it's all coming apart. And that's part of the struggle of the storm: it just feels like everything is coming unraveled—like God started something...and then it all fell apart.

David is recognizing that that's not true—that even in the midst of the darkest days, God will be faithful to complete what He started. And you have to believe that, even though it doesn't seem like it sometimes. David had been anointed to be the next king of Israel—and now he's hiding from Saul and it looks like Saul is going to wipe him out.

It must have seemed to David like that was never going to happen. And yet he is remembering, *God promised. He started this; He will finish it*. God will put him on the throne. His throne will endure forever. So even in the darkest night, he remembered, *This is a God who accomplishes—who finishes—what He started*.

**He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me.  
God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth.** (v. 3)

David is saying, “When I am in my trial—when I am in my storm—God will send from heaven His love and His truth.” Now isn’t it true to say that when we go through the storms of life, those are the two things we tend to doubt. We tend to doubt the love of God. We think, *God, where are You? Why would You allow this? Why does it have to be this way?* And we wonder, *Does He really love me?*

The second thing we tend to doubt is His truth. God has promised He will never leave or forsake us. God has promised He will never take us through anything that we can’t handle. God has promised He will finish what He started. The question is, do we believe God tells the truth? When we get in the midst of a storm—and we are characterized by anxiety, by fear, by anger, by bitterness—what we’re communicating to the people around is, *I don’t think God tells the truth.*

We affirmed it this morning in our music. We said, “Forever God is faithful; forever God is strong.” The question is, do we believe that? And if we believe this, why are we anxious? If we believe this, why are we fearful? Why are we angry? Why are we bitter? The reality is, in the storms of life we have an opportunity to affirm we really do believe this. And it will be evident in our attitudes, in our emotions, in our response to very difficult circumstances.

Because this psalm is poetry, it’s common for David to describe his enemies in very metaphorical language, and that’s what he does in verse 4:

**My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword.**

He’s using metaphorical language to describe Saul and his army: like they’re lions, like fire-breathing dragons, and their teeth are these swords and spears. But note that David is saying that he will lie down in the midst of it. Sometimes we think of God as our refuge as if everything just goes away—all the bad stuff goes away. But what he’s saying is that God is our refuge right in the middle of it—and he’s surrounded by a pride of man-eating lions with these teeth like swords and spears. He is saying, “But I’m just going to lie down here and take a nap. Because I trust God, I’ll sleep in the midst of the storm.” Then he gets to the chorus:

**Be exalted above the heavens, O God; let Your glory be above all the earth.** (v. 5)

In other words, he is saying the reason why he wants to respond correctly, the reason why he’s concerned about how he responds is because he wants God’s reputation to be enhanced. He wants to properly reflect his God to the world. Verse 6:

**They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down; they dug a pit before me.**

Now if you just take those three lines, it sounds like we’re in trouble here—because the enemy is there; the enemy has dug a pit; David’s soul is bowed down; he’s about to fall in the pit. And so the fourth line is kind of a twist. Instead of David falling in the pit, the enemy falls in the pit.

**They themselves have fallen into the midst of it.**

The word *Selah* there, most people think means “stop and think about it.” And it’s well-placed

there, because this line comes out of nowhere. We think David is going to fall in the pit, and instead the enemy does. It's as if he says, "Stop and think about *that* for a minute."

**My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!  
Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.** (vs. 7-8)

Future tense here—he is talking about the dawn. The dawn is this picture of the sun just beginning to come up after going through the darkness. It's this idea of coming through the storm and seeing the clouds start to break. And suddenly we realize, *The storm is about over and God has carried me through it*. So there's this eruption of celebration and praise.

He says, "My heart is steadfast." That's a word that means it is fixed; it's immovable. In essence he is saying, "My emotions are not all over the board, but rather—because I believe this to be true of God—my heart is fixed; it's steadfast."

David uses this same word in Psalm 8 when he says, "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast *ordained*"—that's the word right there. In other words, just as God has taken the moon and the stars and fixed them in the solar system, so God has fixed David's heart. He has ordained it to be there and to stay there. That is his stability in the midst of the storm. And it causes him to erupt with praise for God.

**I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to You  
among the nations.** (v. 9)

Notice how consistently that fits with the chorus. He is saying that he will erupt in praise to all the people of all of the nations. In other words, he wants everyone on earth to know that his God is God, that his God's reputation might be enhanced.

**For Your lovingkindness is great to the heavens and Your truth to the clouds.** (v. 10)

That's a very interesting picture: the same two things out of verse 3. In verse 3 it was God's *love* and God's *truth* that came down from the heavens to David. But now it is the dawn and he has awakened; he has come through the storm. And as he begins to celebrate God—that love and that truth—it is as if it's reflected off David and is shooting back into the heavens to provide this witness to the nations of the earth, that they might know that God is a God of love and God is a God of truth. He is in essence reflecting back that truth—that others might know his God.

And then he concludes with the chorus again:

**Be exalted above the heavens, O God; let Your glory be above all the earth.** (v. 11)

David understood that in his position, he had an opportunity to properly reflect his God in such a way that the nations would see and would know that his God is God—that God's reputation was literally in his hands.

Do you realize on a daily basis God puts His reputation in *your* hands? He has asked you to represent Him to the people you work with, the people you go to school with, the people in your neighborhood, the people in your family. And the reality is, when everything's going well, it's hard to tell if the light is on or not. When that light shines most brightly is when it shines in the midst of darkness. Those are the times when the people around you will watch to see if you really believe what you say you believe.

If people around you know you claim to be a follower of Jesus, I guarantee you they are watching. And you may make some impact when all is well. But when the storms of life come, that's when they will watch to see if your God *really* makes a difference.

It starts with a right attitude. We don't come to God saying, "God, this is all unfair, and I deserve better"—with an attitude of entitlement. But rather we come to God in brokenness and humility, appealing to His grace—recognizing it's only by the death of Jesus that we have access into the presence of a holy God, and it's there that we will find our refuge. We believe that God loves us. We believe God tells the truth—that He will finish what He started; that one day we'll see the dawn and we'll come out of this. And we will celebrate, and others will know that God is God.

Most of you are probably familiar with the name John Wesley. He was a dynamic preacher and writer and he, along with his brother, were really the ones that started the whole Methodist movement. But what began his journey toward conversion is really quite interesting. He was a businessman and he was on a ship out in the Atlantic. And the ship encountered a tremendous storm—so much so that most of them thought they were going to perish.

Everybody was in panic mode at the fear that they would perish there in the Atlantic...*except* for one small group of Moravian believers—Moravian Christians who responded with a tranquility and a peace that went beyond description. And John Wesley could not process that. It just absolutely struck him that there was something dramatically different about *those* people.

Well, obviously they didn't perish. And when they got back to dry ground, it sent John Wesley on a relentless pursuit of trying to figure out what made those people different...which ultimately led to his conversion to Jesus Christ.

The reality is you will never better represent God than when you represent Him in the storms of life. It is in those moments during the storm, when we identify ourselves as true followers of Jesus Christ, that we have the greatest opportunity to enhance His reputation, that others might come to know Him.

*Our Father, we're thankful that You are a God who is faithful. You're a God who is strong. You're a God who will never leave us or forsake us. You're a God who always finishes what You start. Lord, even in our darkest hour, You will pour down from heaven Your love and Your truth. Lord, it is really pretty easy to affirm these truths when all is well in life. But it is another story when we're in the midst of the storm. Yet, Lord, it is in those moments that others are watching most intently. Lord, I pray for each of us that we might properly represent You in the midst of the storms of life—that Your reputation would be lifted up, that others might come to know Jesus as Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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