

Psalms 56 and 57: The Heart of Davidic Worship

by Art Katz

Davidic worship is a lifestyle of faith that involves trusting in God's sovereignty and goodness, even in the midst of persecution and suffering.

Scripture: Psalm 56:3

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Davidic Worship"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the significance of Psalms 56 and 57 in understanding the heart of Davidic worship, illustrating how David faced persecution from both the unregenerate world and religious opposition. He highlights that true faith, like David's, invites opposition and suffering, which ultimately leads to a deeper relationship with God. Katz encourages believers to recognize their true identity beyond the physical, asserting that while flesh can harm the body, the essence of who we are in God remains inviolable. He concludes that authentic worship arises from a history of trials and God's faithfulness, culminating in a testimony that glorifies God before the nations.

Transcript

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Both of these psalms are psalms of persecution; one is about persecution from the Philistines, and the other is about persecution from Saul. The Philistines could be symbolic of persecution that arises from the unregenerate, unbelieving world that is historically at enmity with God and God's people. What shall we say of Saul? He could symbolize religious opposition, even from within the Israel of God. Both constitute a persecution for David. Psalm 56 begins, Be gracious to me, O God, for a people trample on me.

All day long foes oppress me. Psalm 57 begins, Be merciful to me, for in You my soul takes refuge. In the shadow of Your wings I take refuge, until the destroying storm passes by. I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills His perfect will for me...He will put to shame those who trample on me. My attention is caught by the word 'trample' in both psalms. It seems to be the fate of a 'David.' So what is a 'David'? He is the

epitome of the man of faith. We can never exhaust the meaning and spirit that is in that name, 'David.'

He is a lover of God, and because he is a lover of God, men hate him. We can therefore tell to what degree we are on the road to Davidic faith by the degree of opposition that we are experiencing, whether it comes from the Philistines or Saul, or what each represents. A life that is unopposed is probably not a life that is being deeply lived in God. David had a totality toward God, and his cry was always to the One Source alone, to which he would look. He would not turn to another.

He is being trampled, he is being oppressed, but in one psalm he cries out for grace, and in another psalm he cries out for mercy to God, though he is eminently the man of God. God is the exclusive source of answer to his every distress; it is that kind of relationship with God that has equally invited his distress. He would not have experienced this if he were just an average Joe, just 'getting by.' David is the epitome of a man whose heart is toward God. If this is not appropriate for us now, it will be.

If we pass this life and these Last Days without some measure of the oppression and persecution that fell upon David, I will be astonished. It is only God's grace now that gives us a breathing space and a season. However, as we come to the end and the issues become as real as they were at the beginning--and there is no other issue but God, the hatred of the world against Him and His people--we will be faced by unbelievable ferocity and violence, and we will be trampled on. Right now we are only having our toes stepped on--little insults, little offenses, or slight discomfort--but 'trampled,' being ground down, is not a word that is indiscriminately chosen.

"Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me all day long." You do not know if that is a literal statement of truth or if, for all effects and purposes, it feels like you are being trampled all day long. The issue is not whether this is an exaggeration, but of how he is taking it and how it affects him; it is therefore the issue of his cry to God. It is not the literal detail: "Is it really 'all day long' or just occasionally?" As far as David is concerned, it feels like all day long, and for some of us, it has already begun or will be all day long, without relief.

Many fight against me, O Most High. When I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God whose word I praise; in God I trust. I am not afraid; what can flesh do to me? (Ps 56:3,4). That is repeated again in verse 11: "in God I trust, I am not afraid; what can man do to me?" That needs examination. Do not let that phrase pass you by without screwing up your eyebrows and wondering why it is repeated with slight variation in two places. "What can flesh do to me? What can man do to me?"

Two things need to be considered: flesh, or those who are opposing David, and the "me" who is being opposed. Flesh can do nothing to me--it can't? Flesh can hang you, flesh can pull your fingernails out, flesh can burn you alive at the stake, and yet he says, "flesh can do nothing to me." How does that make sense, except that 'me' is something more, and even other than, the physical body that can be adversely affected by persecutors. There is a 'me' here; his soul, his essence, is inviolable.

Man can do nothing against that. What he is as a person in God, that sacred thing, that reality of what he is as David, neither man nor flesh can ever oppose or destruct or even harm. What is the implication there for us? Flesh can do nothing against me. That 'me' is something more than the physical body. This insight is for our instruction, and it is not the least of the reasons that God gave us the psalms. We need to know where "me" is for us. What is my 'me'? Is my 'me' in my body, that when someone is about to give me a hypodermic, I am afraid of a needle and afraid of pain?

All too much, we live in our body. Our body is our life. It is a statement of our generation and of the world that pampers the flesh. Their bodies are their life. What else should it be? How you feed it, how you pamper it, whether it is cold or warm. We have not yet come to the recognition that there is a 'me' that is more than just the frame in which the 'me' is contained. Without that recognition, we will inevitably be afraid. You are not afraid of what man and flesh can do to 'me' once you know who 'me' is and your reality is established in that 'me,' which is your true personhood in God.

The enemy can never touch that. They can burn you at the stake, but your soul is indestructible if that is where your life is. However, it is not going to be that way unless you come to a Davidic faith. It is a process of a realization of what is the ground and the essence of your being. You must move away from thinking of your physical body as your being. Remember what Paul says? "To be absent from the body is to be present with God." He called his body a tent. He was looking for the more enduring thing.

Our generation is exactly the opposite. Our generation is extremely body conscious, flesh conscious, and therefore fearful, but Paul is unafraid because that is not where he is living. The question for us is where are we living? How do we come to this Davidic place where we know where our 'me' is? All day long, they seek to injure my cause. All their thoughts are against me for evil; they stir up strife, they lurk, they watch my steps as they hope to have my life. So, repay them for their crime.

In wrath, cast down the peoples. (vv. 5-7). Why are they after his life? This theme comes up in the psalms all the time: "they are after my life." What is it about David that vexes them so that they will not have peace until he is dead? They do not want to just harass or to annoy; they are out to destroy this Davidic life. They cannot bear its existence. We need to understand that because that is exactly what is going to come against us to the degree that we represent, in our generation, what David represented in his.

The world hates God, and what it hates in David is God. They want to get their hands on God, as they did two thousand years ago at the Cross. Therefore, in the absence of that opportunity, if they can get their hands on any son of David, any son of God, any daughter of the Most High, whose life is God, then they will be out to crush that life. They hate that life. "Why do they seek my life?" is a continual cry in the psalms, because that life is the life of God. "They hope to have my life, so give it to them!"

David is inviting the Lord to retaliate. "You have kept count of my tossings and put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in Your record?" (v. 8). Is David "losing his marbles"? Is David getting too poetic: "You count my tears, You put them in a bottle, You know my moments; they are all recorded." Do we believe that God is so fastidiously attentive to the life of a David, that He knows all of his moments and has caught and kept all of his tears and has recorded them? If He has that kind of attitude and relationship with David, then what about us?

Are we equally an object of such love from God that He knows our every moment, our every cry, that He has kept a record of it? If so, not only is it a statement of the fastidiousness of God's love, the attentiveness in detail, then this is a remarkable statement that a casual believer would dismiss as just being poetic. I am insisting on the literal statement, and we need to know that we are that loved. All of us have our doubts, and many times it seems like we are ignored. We wonder, does He know, does He take note, does He recognize what we are going through?

He is silent, and we do not hear. Nevertheless, it is all recorded. Now, why is it all recorded? It is not just because God is a record-keeper, so why would it be recorded? It is because there will be a recompense. For everything that you have suffered here for His name--situations that God did not intervene in because

they served purposes of His own, things you were not even at liberty to understand--God will give recompense many times over. Those who are stripped will be rewarded; they will take their stripping with joy, knowing within themselves that they have a greater compensation in heaven, just as the saints described in the Bible knew.

They knew of a future reward. How did they know that? They read the Psalms. That is how they knew it. It does not say so; the book of Hebrews records their knowing, but it does not explain how they came to it. I am saying they came to it because they read the Psalms, because they knew the history of the God of Israel and believed that if God had that kind of attentiveness with David, then He also had it for them. Therefore, they could believe in the sovereignty of God, and take their stripping as if it was from God and not from men.

They could take it with joy because they knew within themselves that they had a recompense coming. This is the faith that has been passed on for generations. This is the most holy faith. It is more than the sum of its doctrines; it is a mode of living. It is a way of perceiving reality; it is reality itself! It is invisible and unknown, except for the record of what God has been pleased to express to us through those who knew Him in this reality, this intimacy, that we might live in that same Davidic faith.

If we live in it, do you know what we can expect? We can expect to be trampled. However, for everything that we suffer, every tear, every ache, it is recorded. We can bear it. It is a privilege and an honor. "Tossing" is when you are in bed and you cannot fall asleep. You turn to this side and, then you try the other side, then you try straight up, and all through the night, you are tossing and turning. Why? Because your soul has been agitated; something is taking place in the heavenlies.

Some issue is being transacted that you are not even conscious of, but you are being robbed of sleep. Do you know that the loss of sleep is another form of fasting? When I am not at liberty to fast when I travel because people spread the table for the visiting minister, the fasting takes place at night. There is a tossing that comes from the issues that we face, and there is a tossing that comes from the issues that we cannot even identify. I bet you that David was not inexperienced with tossing upon his bed, but what is he saying?

"You knew all my tossing. You knew what was distracting me. You knew why I was being harassed. You knew the enemy was jabbing me." Have you ever been jabbed by the enemy? Have you ever had erotic dreams and flights of fancy and fantasy that would put the greatest pornographers out of business and make them look like boy scouts in the most lurid details? Whatever it is, the enemy knows how to turn up the heat and to have us toss, but what David is saying is that every tossing is recorded.

The Lord knows it, and we will receive compensation. My enemies will retreat in the day that I call (v. 9). He has such confidence that his call is going to set something in motion, and that he is being heard. "This I know, that God is for me." You want to talk about the knowledge of God? "I'm trampled, I'm oppressed, I'm tossed at night, I'm cast about like a rag doll in the mouth of a mad dog, but this I know: God cares for me. God is for me." I know this because I even catch it from the saints.

They raise questions and objections and hold me to this and to that. Is there anything that more pierces a man through, or empties him, or lets the wind go out of his sails than to be opposed by a saint, or one that he knows, or one who has gone with him into the house of God and eaten food from his table, or one's spouse, one's family? There are ways that a man can be crunched by those closest to him, but this I know: whatever the crunching, God is for me. I know I am accepted in the Beloved.

This knowledge is critical. This I know. If I know this, then I can take the trampling. If I know this, then I can take the tossing. I know this--this I know: God is for me. That is why I am suffering this, because those who hate Him hate me, and I am willing to bear that for His name's sake. He will turn this to the good, and I know that He is for me. If I have noticed anything over the years about the saints, it is that they don't know. There is such deep insecurity among many Christians, even a sense of inferiority, as if God really does not know them, as if He does not really care for them.

That is why they go running to any and every so-called prophet, so that they can receive a personal word along with their social security number, or they can be told they have a scar on their right side or beauty mark on their back. They want to hear that because then they know that God knows them. Evidently, they do not have that knowledge and they need it so desperately that they are willing to go to someone with the gift of prophecy or even more questionably, a gift of divination, and they will get what they want.

What I am bringing up is why do they want it? Why do they need it? It is because they do not know what they ought to know and what David knew: God is for me. The suffering will come, and if you are experiencing suffering, God does not say, "Look, here is why you are going through this, and this is what I am going to bring out of this, and don't worry." He does not say that. He just lets it come upon you, and your ability to bear it without explanation is because you know that you know that God is for you.

This knowledge is not automatic; how do we come to that when the evidences seem to be contrary and He seems to be more and more absent? As I said to some men that came to teach us how to invoke the presence of God through our choruses, "You would be better off teaching us how to remain faithful to God without a sense of His presence." We need to have an inward knowing that cannot be, in any way, ever disturbed, ever put aside, ever questioned. You can cultivate that by reading the Psalms and believing that the God of David is your God, that you are just as dear in His sight, that He takes note of you and He knows your tossing, and that He has made a record.

"In God, I am not afraid." It is not, "I am not afraid for the moment." I am not afraid. The "am" is the statement of David's being, not his momentary thought in that moment. I am not afraid. Fear is not a component in my being. My "am" is fear-free. I am not afraid! My whole being is contrary to fear because God is for me. Do you know what that would mean for countless millions who are in mental institutions, who are taking drugs like Prozac and drugs that put them to sleep?

They have to have pills to wake up, pills to put them to sleep--they are not tossing and turning because of a Davidic relationship with God, but because of what men will think. "What about this program, and what about this budget, and what about this building program?" David says, "I am unafraid." You cannot buy that with money. If you want to invest money in stocks and bonds, invest in pharmaceutical companies, for they are soaring. They are making it by the billions; they are inventing drugs for kids in elementary school and kindergarten and for old age.

In every station of life, they are feeding kids drugs to neutralize them, to stabilize them, because they have this syndrome and that syndrome. If a kid is inattentive, they will have a drug for it--drug, drug, drug! However, to be unafraid... Let us just look at the conclusion of this psalm that interestingly moves from the emphasis on God--the psalmist calling on God for grace, for help, for mercy--to the psalmist's self-assertion, his own place, out of his own freedom, where the phrase, "I will, I will, I will" comes up repeatedly in Psalm 57, from verse 7: My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.

I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul. Here is the guy taking his own nature by the horns because the soul would rather stay in bed and not come to the meeting. "Awake, O harp and lyre. I will awaken the dawn." I will get up early. I choose to. "I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples. I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your steadfast love is as high as the heavens and Your faithfulness extends to the clouds." The dimensions are awesome: to the highest heights and to the lowest lows.

From earth to heaven, God is God. "Your love, Your mercy, Your steadfast love on the one hand, and Your faithfulness on the other." The mercy of God is as high as the heavens and as low as the earth. What an acknowledgment! How does a man come to this awareness of God, both in mercy and in faithfulness, except that there is a history of trials? Who was more sifted than David? Why did David go through this? Why is he pursued by Saul; why is he rejected by the Philistines? Why does his own son betray him and seek to take his life?

Because God is forming and shaping a model of what a Davidic relationship with God is. There is no shortcut, and the greater the intention of God, the greater the suffering of the soul in the purpose of God, so that he can sing praises like this: "I will." This is not religious; this is beyond religion. This is something out of the deepest knowledge of a God who, through all of the distresses, knows him, and loves him, and will deliver him. The praise is made to the nations and to the peoples.

We want to give a testimony by unfeigned praise in the midst of our duress and struggles to God, because we know that He loves and that whatever we are suffering is serving His purpose. When you can give praise like that to the unbelieving, the nations and the world about you, you have performed the ultimate witness of God that glorifies God, and can be a saving witness for the nations. This deep quality of praise that is unfeigned and cannot be forced has got to come out of a reality that God has established in the life of a believer over a course of time.

Probably one of the greatest travesties today is worship as manipulation through equipment, through musicality, and through song leaders. Only Davidic worship will be a testimony to the nations. It has to arise spontaneously out of our dealings, in which God has shown Himself faithful as high as the heavens and as low as the earth. Exquisite. This is the ultimate statement, and when it comes, the age will be done with. All will hear Davidic worship; they will have no excuse before God.

They will not say, "Well, this is a religious thing that men have learned to do, or was prompted." This is an unmistakably authentic thing and can only issue out of a believer who has this kind of history, by which His grace is made possible. It all goes together in one psalm; it begins with distress and ends with praise. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and let Your glory be over all the earth (v. 11). Not some cheapy, not some equivalent, not some appearance charismatically produced, but the glory that by its very definition is authentic.

And what is the glory? That the misfits, the rejects that have been cast off and would have been candidates for death have been taken off the dung heap, and through a process of God's steadfast faithfulness, they have been brought to a place where they will give praise to God before the nations and glorify Him. It is the sum-all and the be-all of the faith. Why don't we make that our prayer?

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