

Exposition on Psalm 57

by St. Augustine

The sermon explores the significance of Psalm 57, highlighting Christ's Passion, prayer, salvation, and exaltation, and encouraging believers to emulate His patience and trust in God's will.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:3, Psalm 56:1-2, Psalm 56:7, Psalm 56:9, Matthew 24:12, John 2:19, John 19:22, Romans 5:3, Romans 10:4, 1 Corinthians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Philippians 2:8

Topics: "Christology", "Resurrection"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, emphasizing His dual nature as God with the Father and Man with us, seated at the right hand of the Father. He delves into the Psalms, connecting them to the Passion of the Lord and highlighting how King David's experiences with Saul foreshadowed Christ's suffering. St. Augustine draws parallels between David fleeing from Saul and Christ hiding in the tomb, explaining how Christ's patience and concealment in the tomb led to His resurrection. He explores the significance of Christ's suffering, resurrection, and exaltation above the heavens, urging believers to find hope and perseverance in Him.

Transcript

1. We have heard in the Gospel just now, brethren, how loves us our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God with the Father, Man with us, out of our own selves, now at the right hand of the Father; you have heard how much He loves us....

2. Because then this Psalm is singing of the Passion of the Lord, see what is the title that it has: at the end. The end is Christ. Romans 10:4 Why has He been called end? Not as one that consumes, but one that consummates.

3. At the end, corrupt not, for David himself, for the inscription of the title; when he fled from the face of Saul into a cavern. We referring to holy Scripture, do find indeed how holy David, that king of Israel, from whom too the Psalter of David has received the name thereof, had suffered for persecutor Saul the king of his own people, as many of you know that have either read or have heard the Scriptures. King David had then for persecutor Saul: and whereas the one was most gentle, the other most ferocious: the one mild, the other envious; the one patient, the other cruel; the one beneficent, the other ungrateful: he endured him with so much mildness, that when he had gotten him into his hands him he touched not, hurt not.. ..What reference has this to Christ? If all things which then were being done, were figures of things future, we find there Christ, and by far in the greatest degree. For this, corrupt not for the inscription of the title, I

see not how it belongs to that David. For not any title was inscribed over David himself which Saul would corrupt. But we see in the Passion of the Lord that there had been written a title, King of the Jews: in order that this title might put to the blush these very men, seeing that from their King they withheld not their hands. For in them Saul was, in Christ David was. For Christ, as says the Apostolic Gospel, is, as we know, as we confess, of the seed of David after the flesh; for after the Godhead He is above David, above all men, above heaven and earth, above angels, above all things visible and invisible....And because already it had been sung through the Holy Spirit, Unto the end, corrupt not, for the inscription of the title: Pilate answered them, What I have written, I have written: John 19:22 why do ye suggest to me falsehood? I corrupt not truth.

4. What therefore is, When he fled from the face of Saul into a cavern? Which thing indeed the former David also did: but because in him we find not the inscription of the title, in the latter let us find the flight into the cavern. 1 Samuel 24:3 For that cavern wherein David hid himself did figure somewhat. But wherefore hid he himself? It was in order that he might be concealed and not be found. What is to be hidden in a cavern? To be hidden in earth. For he that flees into a cavern, with earth is covered so that he may not be seen. But Jesus did carry earth, flesh which He had received from earth: and in it He concealed Himself, in order that by Jews He might not be discovered as God. For if they had known, never the Lord of glory would they have crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:8 Why therefore the Lord of glory found they not? Because in a cavern He had hidden Himself, that is, the flesh's weakness to their eyes He presented, but the Majesty of the Godhead in the body's clothing, as though in a hiding-place of the earth, He hid....But wherefore even unto death willed He to be patient? It was in order that He might flee from the face of Saul into a cavern. For a cavern may be understood as a lower part of the earth. And certainly, as is manifest and certain to all, His Body in a Tomb was laid, which was cut in a Rock. This Tomb therefore was the Cavern; there He fled from the face of Saul. For so long the Jews did persecute Him, even until He was laid in a cavern. Whence prove we that so long they persecuted Him, until therein He was laid? Even when dead, and, on the Cross hanging, with lance they wounded Him. John 19:34 But when shrouded, the funeral celebrated, He was laid in a cavern, no longer had they anything which to the Flesh they might do. Rose therefore the Lord again out of that cavern unhurt, uncorrupt, from that place whither He had fled from the face of Saul: concealing Himself from ungodly men, whom Saul prefigured, but showing Himself to His members. For the members of Him rising again by His members were handled: for the members of Him, the Apostles, touched Him rising again and believed; Luke 24:39 and behold nothing profited the persecution of Saul. Hear we therefore now the Psalm; because concerning the title thereof enough we have spoken, as far as the Lord has deigned to give.

5. Have pity on me, O God, have pity on me, for in You has trusted my Soul Psalm 56:1. Christ in the Passion says, Have pity on Me, O God. To God, God says, Have pity on Me! He that with the Father has pity on you, in you cries, Have pity on Me. For that part of Him which is crying, Have pity on Me, is yours: from you this He received, for the sake of you, that you should be delivered, with Flesh He was clothed. The flesh itself cries: Have pity on Me, O God, have pity on me: Man himself, soul and flesh. For whole Man did the Word take upon Him, and whole Man the Word became. Let it not therefore be thought that there Soul was not, because the Evangelist thus says: The Word was made flesh, and dwelled in us. John 1:14 For man is called flesh, as in another place says the Scripture, And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Shall anywise flesh alone see, and shall Soul not be there?...You hear the Master praying, learn thou to pray. For to this end He prayed, in order that He might teach how to pray: because to this end He suffered, in order that He might teach how to suffer; to this end He rose again, in order that He might teach how to hope for rising again. And in the shadow of Your wings I will hope, until iniquity pass over. This now

evidently whole Christ does say: here is also our voice. For not yet has passed over, still rife is iniquity. And in the end our Lord Himself said there should be an abounding of iniquity: And since iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold; but he that shall have persevered unto the end, the same shall be saved. Matthew 24:12 But who shall persevere even unto the end, even until iniquity pass over? He that shall have been in the Body of Christ, he that shall have been in the members of Christ, and from the Head shall have learned the patience of persevering. Thou passest away, and behold passed are your temptations; and you go into another life whither have gone holy men, if holy you have been. Into another life have gone Martyrs; if Martyr you shall have been, you also go into another life. Because you have passed away hence, has by any means iniquity therefore passed away? There are born other unrighteous men, as there die some unrighteous men. In like manner therefore as some unrighteous men die and others are born: so some just men go, and others are born. Even unto the end of the world neither iniquity will be wanting to oppress, nor righteousness to suffer....

6. I will cry to God most high Psalm 56:2. If most high He is, how hears He you crying? Confidence has been engendered by experience: to God, he says, who had done good to me. If before that I was seeking Him, He did good to me, when I cry shall He not hearken to me? For good to us the Lord God has done in sending to us our Saviour Jesus Christ, that He might die for our offenses, and rise again for our justification. Romans 4:25 For what sort of men has He willed His Son to die? For ungodly men. But ungodly men were not seeking God, and have been sought of God. For He is Most High in such sort, as that not far from Him is our misery and our groaning: because near is the Lord to them that have bruised the heart. God that has done good to me.

7. He has sent from heaven and has saved me Psalm 56:3. Now the Man Himself, now the Flesh Itself, now the Son of God after His partaking of ourselves, of Him it is manifest, how He was saved, and has sent from heaven the Father and has saved Him, has sent from heaven, and has raised Him again: but in order that you may know, that also the Lord Himself has raised again Himself; both truths are written in Scripture, both that the Father has raised Him again, and that Himself Himself has raised again.

Hear ye how the Father has raised Him again: the Apostle says, He has been made, he says, obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross: wherefore God also has exalted Him, and has given Him a name which is above every name. Philippians 2:8-9 You have heard of the Father raising again and exalting the Son; hear ye how that He too Himself His flesh has raised again. Under the figure of a temple He says to the Jews, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

John 2:19 But the Evangelist has explained to us what it was that He said: But this, he says, He spoke of the Temple of His Body. Now therefore out of the person of one praying, out of the person of a man, out of the person of the flesh, He says, He has saved me. He has given unto reproach those that trampled on me. Them that have trampled on Him, that over Him dead have insulted, that Him as though man have crucified, because God they perceived not, them He has given unto reproach.

See ye whether it has not been so done. The thing we do not believe as yet to come, but fulfilled we acknowledge it. The Jews raged against Christ, they were overbearing against Christ. Where? In the city of Jerusalem. For where they reigned, there they were puffed up, there their necks they lifted up. After the Passion of the Lord thence they were rooted out; and they lost the kingdom, wherein Christ for King they would not acknowledge. In what manner they have been given unto reproach, see ye: dispersed they have been throughout all nations, nowhere having a settlement, nowhere a sure abode.

But for this reason still Jews they are, in order that our books they may carry to their confusion. For whenever we wish to show Christ prophesied of, we produce to the heathen these writings. And lest perchance men hard of belief should say that we Christians have composed these books, so that together with the Gospel which we have preached we have forged the Prophet, through whom there might seem to be foretold that which we preach: by this we convince them; namely, that all the very writings wherein Christ has been prophesied are with the Jews, all these very writings the Jews have.

We produce documents from enemies, to confound other enemies. In what sort of reproach therefore are the Jews? A document the Jew carries, wherefrom a Christian may believe. Our librarians they have become, just as slaves are wont behind their masters to carry documents, in such sort that these faint in carrying, those profit by reading. Unto such a reproach have been given the Jews: and there has been fulfilled that which so long before has been foretold, He has given unto reproach those that trampled on me.

But how great a reproach it is, brethren, that this verse they should read, and themselves being blind should look upon their mirror! For in the same manner the Jews appear in the holy Scripture which they carry, as appears the face of a blind man in a mirror: by other men it is seen, by himself not seen.

8. You were inquiring perhaps when he said, He has sent from heaven and has saved me. What has He sent from heaven? Whom has He sent from heaven? An Angel has He sent, to save Christ, and through a servant is the Lord saved? For all Angels are creatures serving Christ. For obedience there might have been sent Angels, for service they might have been sent, not for succour: as is written, Angels ministered unto Him, Matthew 4:11 not like men merciful to one indigent, but like subjects to One Omnipotent. What therefore has He sent from heaven, and has saved me? Now we hear in another verse what from heaven He has sent. He has sent from heaven His mercy and His truth. For what purpose? And has drawn out my soul from the midst of the lions' cubs. Hath sent, he says, from heaven His mercy and His truth: and Christ Himself says, I am Truth. There was sent therefore Truth, that it should draw out my soul hence from the midst of the lions' whelps: there was sent mercy. Christ Himself we find to be both mercy and truth; mercy in suffering with us, and truth in requiting us...Who are the lions' whelps? That lesser people, unto evil deceived, unto evil led away by the chiefs of the Jews: so that these are lions, those lions' whelps. All roared, all slew. For we are to hear even here the slaying of these very men, presently in the following verses of this Psalm.

9. And has drawn out, he says, my soul from the midst of the lions' whelps Psalm 56:4. Why do you say, And has drawn out my soul? For what had you suffered, that your soul should be drawn out? I have slept troubled. Christ has intimated His death....

10. Whence troubled? Who troubling? Let us see in what manner he brands an evil conscience upon the Jews, wishing to excuse themselves of the slaying of the Lord. For to this end, as the Gospel speaks, to the judge they delivered Him, that they might not themselves seem to have killed Him....Let us question Him, and say, since You have slept troubled, who have persecuted You? Who have slain You? Was it perchance Pilate, who to soldiers gave You, on the Tree to be hanged, with nails to be pierced?

Hear who they were, Sons of men Psalm 56:5. Of them He speaks, whom for persecutors He suffered. But how did they slay, that steel bare not? They that sword drew not, that made no assault upon Him to slay; whence slew they? Their teeth are arms and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Do not consider the unarmed hands, but the mouth armed: from thence the sword proceeded, wherewith Christ

was to be slain: in like manner also as from the mouth of Christ, that wherewith the Jews were to be slain.

For He has a sword twice whetted: Revelation 1:16 and rising again He has smitten them, and has severed from them those whom He would make His faithful people. They an evil sword, He a good sword: they evil arrows, He good arrows. For He has Himself also arrows good, words good, whence He pierces the faithful heart, in order that He may be loved. Therefore of one kind are their arrows, and of another kind their sword. Sons of men, their teeth are arms and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sabre.

Tongue of sons of men is a sharp sabre, and their teeth arms and arrows. When therefore did they smite, save when they clamoured, Crucify, crucify? 11. And what have they done to You, O Lord? Let the Prophet here exult! For above, all those verses the Lord was speaking: a Prophet indeed, but in the person of the Lord, because in the Prophet is the Lord....Be exalted, he says, above the Heavens, O God. Man on the Cross, and above the Heavens, God. Let them continue on the earth raging, Thou in Heaven be judging.

Where are they that were raging? Where are their teeth, the arms and arrows? Have not the stripes of them been made the arrows of infants? For in another place a Psalm this says, desiring to prove them vainly to have raged, and vainly unto frenzies to have been driven headlong: for nothing they were able to do to Christ when for the time crucified, and afterwards when He was rising again, and in Heaven was sitting. How do infants make to themselves arrows? Of reeds? But what arrows?

Or what powers? Or what bows? Or what wound? Be Thou exalted above the Heavens, O God, and above all the earth Your glory Psalm 56:6. Wherefore exalted above the Heavens, O God? Brethren, God exalted above the Heavens we see not, but we believe: but above all the earth His glory to be not only we believe, but also see. But what kind of madness heretics are afflicted with, I pray you observe. They being cut off from the bond of the Church of Christ, and to a part holding, the whole losing, will not communicate with the whole earth, where is spread abroad the glory of Christ.

But we Catholics are in all the earth, because with all the world we communicate, wherever the Glory of Christ is spread abroad. For we see that which then was sung, now fulfilled. There has been exalted above the Heavens our God, and above all the earth the Glory of the Same. O heretical insanity! That which you see not you believe with me, that which you see you deny; you believe with me in Christ exalted above the Heavens, a thing which we see not; and deniest His Glory over all the earth, a thing which we see.

12. ...Let your Love see the Lord speaking to us, and exhorting us by His example: A trap they have prepared for My feet, and have bowed down My Soul Psalm 56:7. They wished to bring It down as if from Heaven, and to the lower places to weigh It down: They have bowed My Soul: they have dug before My face a pit and themselves have fallen into it. Me have they hurt, or themselves? Behold He has been exalted above the Heavens, God, and behold above all the earth the Glory of the Same: the kingdom of Christ we see, where is the kingdom of the Jews? Since therefore they did that which to have done they ought not, there has been done in their case that which to have suffered they ought: themselves have dug a ditch, and themselves have fallen into it. For their persecuting Christ, to Christ did no hurt, but to themselves did hurt. And do not suppose, brethren, that themselves alone has this befallen. Every one that prepares a pit for his brother, it must needs be that himself fall into it....

13. But the patience of good men with preparation of heart accepts the will of God: and glories in tribulations, saying that which follows: Prepared is my heart, O God, I will sing and play Psalm 56:8. What

has he done to me? He has prepared a pit, my heart is prepared. He has prepared pit to deceive, shall I not prepare heart to suffer? He has prepared pit to oppress, shall I not prepare heart to endure? Therefore he shall fall into it, but I will sing and play. Hear the heart prepared in an Apostle, because he has imitated his Lord: We glory, he says, in tribulations: because tribulation works patience: patience probation, probation hope, but hope makes not ashamed: because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us. Romans 5:3 He was in oppressions, in chains, in prisons, in stripes, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, 2 Corinthians 11:27 in every wasting of toils and pains, and he was saying, We glory in tribulations. Whence, but that prepared was his heart? Therefore he was singing and playing.

14. Rise up, my glory Psalm 56:9. He that had fled from the face of Saul into a cavern, says, Rise up, my glory: glorified be Jesus after His Passion. Rise up, psaltery and harp. He calls upon what to rise? Two organs I see: but Body of Christ one I see, one flesh has risen again, and two organs have risen. The one organ then is the psaltery, the other the harp. Organs is the word used for all instruments of musicians. Not only is that called an organ, which is great, and blown into with bellows; but whatsoever is adapted to playing and is corporeal, whereof for an instrument the player makes use, is said to be an organ. But distinguished from one another are these organs.. .What therefore do these two organs figure to us? For Christ the Lord our God is waking up His psaltery and His harp; and He says, I will rise up at the dawn. I suppose that here ye now perceive the Lord rising. We have read thereof in the Gospel: Mark 16:2 see the hour of the Resurrection. How long through shadows was Christ being sought? He has shone, be He acknowledged; at the dawn He rose again. But what is psaltery? What is harp? Through His flesh two kinds of deeds the Lord has wrought, miracles and sufferings: miracles from above have been, sufferings from below have been. But those miracles which He did were divine; but through Body He did them, through flesh He did them. The flesh therefore working things divine, is the psaltery: the flesh suffering things human is the harp. Let the psaltery sound, let the blind be enlightened, let the deaf hear, let the paralytics be braced to strength, the lame walk, the sick rise up, the dead rise again; this is the sound of the Psaltery. Let there sound also the harp, let Him hunger, thirst, sleep, be held, scourged, derided, crucified, buried. When therefore you see in that Flesh certain things to have sounded from above, certain things from the lower part, one flesh has risen again, and in one flesh we acknowledge both psaltery and harp. And these two kinds of things done have fulfilled the Gospel, and it is preached in the nations: for both the miracles and the sufferings of the Lord are preached.

15. Therefore there has risen psaltery and harp in the dawn, and he confesses to the Lord; and says what? I will confess to You among the peoples, O Lord, and will play to You among the nations: for magnified even unto the Heavens has been Your mercy, and even unto the clouds Your truth Psalm 57:10. Heavens above clouds, and clouds below heavens: and nevertheless to this nearest heaven belong clouds. But sometimes clouds rest upon the mountains, even so far in the nearest air are they rolled. But a Heaven above there is, the habitations of Angels, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers. This therefore may perchance seem to be what should have been said: Unto the Heavens Your truth, and even unto the clouds Your mercy. For in Heaven Angels praise God, seeing the very form of truth, without any darkness of vision, without any admixture of unreality: they see, love, praise, are not wearied. There is truth: but here in our own misery surely there is mercy. For to a miserable one must be rendered mercy. For there is no need of mercy above, where is no miserable one. I have said this because that it seems as though it might have been more fittingly said, Magnified even unto the Heavens has been Your truth, and even unto the clouds Your mercy. For clouds we understand to be preachers of truth, men bearing that flesh in a manner dark, whence God both gleams in miracles, and thunders in precepts.. .Glory to our

Lord, and to the Mercy of the Same, and to the Truth of the Same, because neither has He forsaken by mercy to make us blessed through His Grace, nor defrauded us of truth: because first Truth veiled in flesh came to us and healed through His flesh the interior eye of our heart, in order that hereafter face to face we may be able to see It. 1 Corinthians 13:12 Giving therefore to Him thanks, let us say with the same Psalm the last verses, which sometime since too I have said, Be Thou exalted above the Heavens, O God, and above all the earth Your glory Psalm 57:11. For this to Him the Prophet said so many years before; this now we see; this therefore let us also say.

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