

Exposition on Psalm 60

by St. Augustine

The sermon explains the significance of Psalm 60, highlighting the transformation of the Church from its old state to its new state, where it becomes a figure of Christ and a heap of witness.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:8

Topics: "Psalm Interpretation", "Christology"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the symbolic actions of King David in the Psalms, representing both the Church as a whole and the Mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ. The victories and defeats of David are seen as prefiguring future events, urging believers to look beyond historical accounts to see deeper spiritual truths. The sermon delves into the significance of names and events in the Psalms, highlighting the transformation from earthly to heavenly life through Christ's actions. It emphasizes the importance of enduring tribulations, bearing the burdens of faith, and finding strength in God's mercy and salvation.

Transcript

1. David the king was one man, but not one man he figured; sometimes to wit he figured the Church of many men consisting, extended even unto the ends of the earth: but sometimes One Man he figured, Him he figured that is Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 2:5 In this Psalm therefore, or rather in this Psalm's title, certain victorious actions of David are spoken of:...To the end, in behalf of those men that shall be changed unto the title's inscription, unto teaching for David himself, when he burned up Mesopotamia in Syria, and Syria Sobal, and turned Joab, and smote Edom, in the valley of salt-pits twelve thousand. We read of these things in the books of the Reigns, that all those persons whom he has named, were defeated by David, that is, Mesopotamia in Syria, and Syria Sobal, Joab, Edom. These things were done, and just as they were done, so there they have been written, so they are read: let him read that will. Nevertheless, as the Prophetic Spirit in the Psalms' titles is wont to depart somewhat from the expression of things done, and to say something which in history is not found, and hence rather to admonish us that titles of this kind have been written not that we may know things done, but that things future may be prefigured....But here this thing is inserted for this special reason, that there it is not written that he burned up Mesopotamia in Syria, and Syria Sobal. But now let us begin to examine these things after the significations of things future, and to bring out the dimness of shadows into the light of the word.

2. What is to the end ye know. For the end of the law is Christ. Those that are changed ye know. For who but they that do pass from old life into new?...For you were sometime darkness, but now light in the Lord. Ephesians 5:8 But they are changed into the title's inscription,...who into the kingdom of Christ do pass over from the kingdom of the devil. It is well that they are changed unto this title's inscription. But they are changed, as follows, unto teaching. He added, for David himself unto teaching: that is, are changed not for themselves, but for David himself, and are changed unto teaching....When therefore would Christ have changed us, unless He had done that which He spoke of, Fire I have come to send into the world?

Luke 12:49 If therefore Christ came to send into the world fire, to wit to its health and profit, we must inquire not how He is to send the world into fire, but how into the world fire. Inasmuch as therefore He came to send fire into the world, let us inquire what is Mesopotamia which was burned up, what is Syria Sobal? The interpretations therefore of the names let us examine according to the Hebrew language, wherein first this Scripture was written. Mesopotamia they say is interpreted, exalted calling.

Now the whole world by calling has been exalted, Syria is interpreted lofty. But she which was lofty, burned up has been and humbled. Sobal is interpreted empty antiquity. Thanks to Christ that has burned her. Whenever old bushes are burned up, green places succeed; and more speedily and more plentifully, and more fully green, fresh ones spring out, when fire has gone before them to the burning up of the old. Let not therefore the fire of Christ be feared, hay it consumes. For all flesh is hay, and all the glory of man as flower of hay.

Isaiah 40:6 He burns up therefore those things with that fire. And turned Joab. Joab is interpreted enemy. There was turned an enemy, as you will understand it. If turned unto flight, the devil it is: if converted to the faith, a Christian it is. How unto flight? From the heart of a Christian: The Prince of this world, He says, now has been cast out. John 12:31 But how can a Christian turned to the Lord be an enemy turned? Because he has become a believer that had been an enemy.

Smote Edom. Edom is interpreted earthly. That earthly one ought to be smitten. For why should one live earthly, that ought to live heavenly? There has been slain therefore life earthly, let there live life heavenly. For as we have borne the image of the earthly, let us bear also the image of Him that is from Heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:49 See it slain: Mortify your members which are upon earth. Colossians 3:5 But when he had smitten Edom, he smote twelve thousand in the valley of salt-pits.

Twelve thousand is a perfect number, to which perfect number also the number of the twelve Apostles is ascribed: for not to no purpose is it, but because through the whole world was to be sent the Word. But the Word Ezekiel 37:9 of God, which is Christ, is in clouds, that is, in the preachers of truth. But the world of four parts does consist. The four parts thereof are exceeding well known to all, and often in the Scriptures they are mentioned: they are the same as the name of the four winds, East, West, North, and South.

To all these four parts was sent the Word, so that in the Trinity all might be called. The number twelve four times three do make. With reason therefore twelve thousand earthly things were smitten, the whole world was smitten: for from the whole world was chosen out the Church, mortified from earthly life. Why in the valley of salt-pits? A valley is humility: salt-pits signify savour. For many men are humbled, but emptily and foolishly, in empty oldness they are humbled. One suffers tribulation for money, suffers tribulation for temporal honour, suffers tribulation for the comforts of this life; he is to suffer tribulation and to be humbled: why not for the sake of God?

Why not for the sake of Christ? Why not for the savour of salt? Do you not know that to you has been said, You are the salt of earth, and, If the salt shall have been spoiled, for no other thing will it be of use, but to be cast out? Matthew 5:13 A good thing it is therefore wisely to be humbled. Behold now are not heretics being humbled? Have not laws been made even by men to condemn them, against whom divine laws do reign, which even before had condemned them? Behold they are humbled, behold they are put to flight, behold persecution they suffer, but without savour; for folly, for emptiness. For now the salt has been spoiled: therefore it has been cast out, to be trodden down of men. We have heard the title of the Psalm, let us hear also the words of the Psalm.

3. God, You have driven us back, and hast destroyed us Psalm 59:1. Is that David speaking that smote, that burned up, that defeated, and not they to whom He did these things, that is to say, their being smitten and driven back, that were evil men, and again their being made alive and returning in order that they might be good men? That destruction indeed that David made, strong of hand, our Christ, whose figure that man was bearing; He did those things, He made this destruction with His sword and with His fire: for both He brought into this world. Both Fire I have come to send into the world, Luke 12:49 you have in the Gospel: and A sword I have come to send into the earth, Matthew 10:34 you have in the Gospel. He brought in fire, whereby might be burned up Mesopotamia in Syria, and Syria Sobal: He brought in a sword whereby might be smitten Edom. Now again this destruction was made for the sake of those that are changed unto the title's inscription. Hear we therefore the voice of them: to their health smitten they were, being raised up let them speak. Let them say, therefore, that are changed into something better, changed unto the title's inscription, changed unto teaching for David himself; let them say, You have had mercy upon us. You have destroyed us, in order that You might build us; You have destroyed us that were ill built, hast destroyed empty oldness; in order that there may be a building unto a new man, building to abide for everlasting....

4. You have moved the earth, and hast troubled it Psalm 59:2. How has the earth been troubled? In the conscience of sinners. Whither go we? Whither flee we, when this sword has been brandished, Repent, for near has drawn the kingdom of Heaven? Matthew 3:2 Heal the crushings thereof, for moved it has been. Unworthy it is to be healed, if moved it has not been: but you speak, preachest, threatenest us with God, of coming judgment holdest not your peace, of the commandment of God you warn, from these things you abstain not; and he that hears, if he fears not, if he is not moved, is not worthy to be healed. Another hears, is moved, is stung, smites the breast, sheds tears....

5. The first labour is, that you should be displeasing to yourself, that sins you should battle out, that you should be changed into something better: the second labour, in return for your having been changed, is to bear the tribulations and temptations of this world, and amid them to hold on even unto the end. Of these things therefore when he was speaking, while pointing out such things, he adds what? You have shown to Your people hard things Psalm 59:3: to Your people now, made tributary after the victory of David. You have shown to Your people hard things. Wherein? In persecutions which the Church of Christ has endured, when so much blood of martyrs was spilled. You have given us to drink of the wine of goading. Of goading is what? Not of killing. For it was not a killing that destroys, but a medicine that smarts. You have given us to drink of the wine of goading.

6. Wherefore this? You have given to men fearing You, a sign that they should flee from the face of the bow Psalm 59:4. Through tribulations temporal, he says, You have signified to Your own to flee from the wrath of fire everlasting. For, says the Apostle Peter, Time it is that Judgment begin with the House of God. 1 Peter 4:17 And exhorting the Martyrs to endurance, when the world should rage, when slaughters

should be made at the hands of persecutors, when far and wide blood of believers should be spilled, when in chains, in prisons, in tortures, many hard things Christians should suffer, in these hard things, I say, lest they should faint, Peter says to them, Time it is that Judgment begin with the House of God, etc. What therefore is to be in the Judgment? The bow is bended, still in menacing posture it is, not yet in aiming. And see what there is in the bow: is there not an arrow to be shot forward? The string however is stretched back in a contrary direction to that in which it is going to be shot; and the more the stretching thereof has gone backward, with the greater swiftness it starts forward. What is it that I have said? The more the Judgment is deferred, with so much the greater swiftness it is to come. Therefore even for temporal tribulations to God let us render thanks, because He has given to His people a sign, that they should flee from the face of the bow: in order that His faithful ones having been exercised in tribulations temporal, may be worthy to avoid the condemnation of fire everlasting, which is to find out all them that do not believe these things.

7. That Your beloved may be delivered: save me with Your right hand, and hearken unto me Psalm 59:5. With Your right hand save me, Lord: so save me as that at the right hand I may stand. Not any safety temporal I require, in this matter Your Will be done. For a time what is good for us we are utterly ignorant: for what we should pray for as we ought we know not: Romans 8:26 but save me with Your right hand, so that even if in this time I suffer sundry tribulations, when the night of all tribulations has been spent, on the right hand I may be found among the sheep, not on the left hand among the goats. Matthew 25:33 And hearken unto me. Because now I am deserving that which You are willing to give; not with the words of my transgressions I am crying through the day, so that Thou hearken not, and in the night so that Thou hearken not, and that not for folly to me, but truly for my warning, by adding savour from the valley of salt-pits, so that in tribulation I may know what to ask: but I ask life everlasting; therefore hearken unto me, because Your right hand I ask....

8. God has spoken in His Holy One Psalm 59:6....In what Holy One of His? God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. 2 Corinthians 5:19 In that Holy One, of whom elsewhere you have heard, O God, in the Holy One is Your way. I will rejoice and will divide Sichima....and the valley of tabernacles I will measure out. Sichima is interpreted shoulders. But according to history, Jacob returning from Laban his father-in-law with all his kindred, hid the idols in Sichima Genesis 35:4 which he had from Syria, where for a long time he had dwelled, and at length was coming from thence. But tabernacles he made there because of his sheep and herds, and called the place Tabernacles. And these I will divide, says the Church. What is this, I will divide Sichima? If to the story where the idols were hidden is the reference, the Gentiles it signifies; I divide the Gentiles. I divide, is what? For not in all men is there faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:2 I divide, is what? Some will believe, others will not believe....The shoulders are divided, in order that their sins may burden some men, while others may take up the burden of Christ. For godly shoulders He was requiring when He said, For My yoke is gentle, and My burden is light. Matthew 11:30 Another burden oppresses and loads you, but Christ's burden relieves you: another burden has weight, Christ's burden has wings. For even if you pull off the wings from a bird, you remove a kind of weight; and the more weight you have taken away, the more on earth it will abide. She that you have chosen to disburden lies there: she flies not, because you have taken off a weight: let there be given back the weight, and she flies. Such is Christ's burden; let men carry it, and not be idle: let them not be heeded that will not bear it; let them bear it that will, and they shall find how light it is, how sweet, how pleasant, how ravishing unto Heaven, and from earth how transporting....Perchance because of the sheep of Jacob, the valley of Tabernacles is to be understood of the nation of the Jews, and the same is divided: for they have passed from thence that have believed, the rest have remained without.

9. Mine is Galaad Psalm 59:7. These names are read in the Scriptures of God. Galaad has the voice of an interpretation of its own and of a great Mystery: for it is interpreted the heap of testimony. How great a heap of testimony in the Martyrs? Mine is Galaad, mine is a heap of testimony, mine are the true Martyrs....Then meanly esteemed was the Church among men, then reproach on Her a Widow was being thrown, because Christ's She was, because the sign of the Cross on her brow She was wearing: not yet was there honour, censure there was then: when therefore not honour, but censure there was, then was made a heap of witness; and through the heap of witness was the Love of Christ enlarged; and through the enlargement of the Love of Christ, were the Gentiles possessed. There follows, And mine is Manasses; which is interpreted forgotten. For to Her had been said, Confusion for everlasting You shall forget, and of the reproach of Your widowhood You shall not be mindful. Isaiah 54:4 There was therefore a confusion of the Church once, which now has been forgotten: for of Her confusion and of the reproach of Her widowhood now She is not mindful. For when there was a sort of confusion among men, a heap of witness was made. Now no longer does any even remember that confusion, when it was a reproach to be a Christian, now no one remembers, now all have forgotten, now Mine is Manasses, and Ephraim the strength of My head. Ephraim is interpreted fruitfulness. Mine, he says, is fruitfulness, and this fruitfulness is the strength of My Head. For My Head is Christ. And whence is fruitfulness the strength of Him? Because unless a grain were to fall into the earth, it would not be multiplied, alone it would remain. John 12:24 Fall then to earth did Christ in His Passion, and there followed fruit-bearing in the Resurrection. He was hanging and was being despised: the grain was within, it had powers to draw after it all things. How in a grain do numbers of seeds lie hidden, something abject it appears to the eyes, but a power turning into itself matter and bringing forth fruit is hidden; so in Christ's Cross virtue was hidden, there appeared weakness. O mighty grain! Doubtless weak is He that hangs, Doubtless before Him that people did wag the head, Doubtless they said, If Son of God He is, let Him come down from the Cross. Matthew 27:40 Hear the strength of Him: that which is a weak thing of God, is stronger than men. 1 Corinthians 1:25 With reason so great fruitfulness has followed: it is mine, says the Church.

10. Juda is my king: Moab the pot of my hope Psalm 59:7. What Juda? He that is of the tribe of Juda. What Juda, but He to whom Jacob himself said, Juda, your brethren shall praise you? Genesis 49:8 What therefore should I fear, when Juda my king says, Fear not them that kill the body? Matthew 10:28 Moab the pot of my hope. Wherefore pot? Because tribulation. Wherefore of my hope? Because there has gone before Juda my king....Moab is perceived in the Gentiles. For that nation was born of sin, Genesis 19:37 that nation was born of the daughters of Lot, who lay with their father drunken, abusing a father. Better were it to have remained barren, than thus to have become mothers. But this was a kind of figure of them that abuse the law. For do not heed that law in the Latin language is of the feminine gender: in Greek of the masculine gender it is: but whether it be of the feminine gender in speaking, or of the masculine, the expression makes no difference to the truth. For law has rather a masculine force, because it rules, is not ruled. But moreover, the Apostle Paul says what? Good is the law, if any one use it lawfully. 1 Timothy 1:8 But those daughters of Lot unlawfully used their father. But in the same manner as good works begin to grow when a man uses well the law: so arise evil works, when a man ill uses the law. Furthermore, they ill using their father, that is, ill using the law, engendered the Moabites, by whom are signified evil works. Thence the tribulation of the Church, thence the pot boiling up. Of this pot in a certain place of prophecy is said, A pot heated by the North wind. Jeremiah 1:13 Whence but by the quarters of the devil, who has said, I will set my seat at the North? Isaiah 14:13 The chiefest tribulations therefore arise against the Church from none except from those that ill use the law....

11. Into Idumaea I will stretch out my shoe Psalm 59:8. The Church speaks, I will come through even unto Idumaea. Let tribulations rage, let the world boil with offenses, even unto those very persons that lead an earthly life (for Idumaea is interpreted earthly), even unto those same, even unto Idumaea, I will stretch out my shoe. Of what thing the shoe except of the Gospel? How beautiful the feet of them that tell of peace, that tell of good things, Romans 10:15 and the feet shod unto the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Ephesians 6:15 ...In these times we see, brethren, how many earthly men do perpetrate frauds for the sake of gain, for frauds perjuries; on account of their fears they consult fortune-tellers, astrologers: all these men are Edomites, earthly; and nevertheless all these men adore Christ, under His own shoe they are; now even unto Idumaea is stretched out His shoe. To Me Allophyli have been made subject. Who are Allophyli? Men of other race, not belonging to My race. They have been made subject, because many men adore Christ, and are not to reign with Christ.

12. Who will lead Me down into the city of standing round? Psalm 59:9. What is the city of standing round? If you remember already, I have made mention thereof in another Psalm, wherein has been said, And they shall go around the city. For the city of standing round is the compassing around of the Gentiles, which compassing around of the Gentiles in the middle thereof had the one nation of the Jews, worshipping one God: the rest of the compassing around of the Gentiles to idols made supplication, demons they did serve. And mystically it was called the city of standing round; because on all sides the Gentiles had poured themselves around, and had stood around that nation which did worship one God....Who will lead me down even unto Idumaea?

13. Wilt not Thou, O God, that hast driven us back? And will not Thou, O God, march forth in our powers? Psalm 59:10. Wilt not Thou lead us down, that hast driven us back? But wherefore hast driven us back? Because You have destroyed us. Wherefore hast destroyed us? Because angry You have been, and hast had pity on us. Thou therefore wilt lead down, that hast driven back; Thou, O God, that will not march forth in our powers, wilt lead down. What is, will not march forth in our powers? The world is to rage, the world is to tread us down, there is to be a heap of witnesses, built of the spilled blood of martyrs, and the raging heathen are to say, Where is the God of them? Then You will not march forth in our powers: against them You will not show Yourself, You will not show Your power, such as You have shown in David, in Moses, in Joshua the son of Nun, when to their might the Gentiles yielded, and when the slaughter had been ended, and the great laying waste repaired, into the land which Thou promised Thou leddest in Your people. This thing then You will not do, You will not march forth in our powers, but within You will work. What is, will not march forth? Wilt not show Yourself. For indeed when in chains the Martyrs were being led along, when they were being shut up in prison, when they were being led forth to be mocked, when to the beasts they were exposed, when they were being smitten with the sword, when with fire they were being burned, were they not despised as though forsaken, as though without helper? In what manner was God working within? In what manner within was He comforting? In what manner to these men was He making sweet the hope of life everlasting? In what manner was He not forsaking the hearts of them, where the man was dwelling in silence, well if good, ill if evil? Was He then by any means forsaking, because He was not marching forth in the powers of them? By not marching forth in the powers of them, did He not the more lead down the Church even unto Idumaea, lead down the Church even unto the city of standing around? For if the Church chose to war and to use the sword, She would seem to be fighting for life present: but because she was despising life present, therefore there was made a heap of witness for the life that shall be.

14. Thou therefore, O God, that will not march forth in our powers, Give to us aid from tribulation, and vain is the safety of man Psalm 59:11. Go now they that salt have not, and desire safety temporal for their friends, which is empty oldness. Give to us aid: from thence whence You were supposed to forsake, thence succour. In God we will do valour, and Himself to nothing shall bring down our enemies Psalm 59:12. We will not do valour with the sword, not with horses, not with breastplates, not with shields, not in the mightiness of an army, not abroad. But where? Within, where we are not seen. Where within? In God we will do virtue: and as if abjects, and as if trodden down, men as if of no consideration we shall be, but Himself to nothing shall bring down our enemies. In a word, this thing has been done to our enemies. Trodden down have been the Martyrs: by suffering, by enduring, by persevering even unto the end, in God they have done valour. Himself also has done that which follows: to nothing He has brought down the enemies of them. Where are now the enemies of the Martyrs, except perchance that now drunken men with their cups do persecute those whom at that time frenzied men did use with stones to persecute?

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