

“GOD IS FOR ME”

Psalm 56

Well, David, the writer of this psalm, is in it up to his neck. In fact, things are going so badly for him that he has defected to the enemy and is feigning madness to stop being killed by either side in the bloody civil war in which he has got involved. You can read about it in *Samuel 21:10-15*. King Saul, the king of Israel, is hounding him out of a sense of jealousy and David ends up with nowhere to go other than to the Philistines – the people who have been at war with Israel on and off for many years and the people from whom came Goliath, the champion whom David himself had killed in the only bit of the story many people know.

While David is in Gath, the Philistines' main city, he writes this song in which he catalogues his woes. I reckon David was the Old Testament equivalent of the country and western songwriter – their songs are always so full of trouble and strife. I remember one person (Bily Conolly, I think) saying that the perfect C&W song would have a title like *My wife (Windowlene) went off and left me after all the kids shot themselves because their drunken granny rolled off the cliff in her wheelchair!* My brother used to write songs for a little band he played in and he was only ever inspired after he'd broken up with a girlfriend. I remember standing at a wedding once and his bass player was complaining that Paul was too happily involved with his fiancée to write any songs any more

Anyway, enough of that. David in this psalm writes about being hounded and attacked (v1); slandered (v2); being afraid (v3); being misrepresented (v5); having to be continually on the lookout for ambush (v6). It's a pretty sticky situation and David is obviously fed up with it all. The only comfort he seems to have is knowing that God knows all about it. Indeed, David is sure that God has a record of all that has gone wrong in his life and so he has faith that God is actually on his side in the long run. If you know any more of the story of David, you'll know that God has protected him in all kinds of difficulties in the past (v13) and allowed him to walk in the light of life.

David's situation may not be mirrored exactly in our own lives – I don't know you, but I don't suppose there are many of you here this morning who are on the run from the enemy and are pretending to be mad to escape further reprisals – but I wouldn't mind betting that all of us here have had to put up with at least some of the things he describes and probably a great many other things as well. And I reckon that there's a good few people here this morning who are grappling with the feelings of frustration and loneliness that David had to face, for all sorts of reasons – some of which may mean that you are here today to seek some kind of healing.

Things go wrong, don't they? Life isn't a bed of roses, whatever some evangelists may try to tell us. And sometimes we can feel terribly vulnerable. Maybe we haven't had to resort to the extreme measures that David had to – maybe we've had to go even farther. The Bible is terribly honest about the ups and downs of life. It carries the kind of “health warning” for Christianity that financial institutions have to carry on their advertising – “*Your emotional state can go down as well as up*”. The Psalms are full of this kind of complaint and we need to face up to the fact that life can be a pain in the neck a lot of the time. That's not the way God intended it to be: that's not the way he really wants it to be now. But with all the sin and suffering in the world, that's the way it is. And don't listen to anyone who tells you otherwise – they are just not being biblical.

But the good news isn't just that you're not the only one going through this. It can be something of an encouragement that even the great figures of the Bible – David, Moses, Paul – had their moments of despair. The real good news is that there's some kind of help available. Those letter-day psalmists, *The Altar Boys*, put it like this in the lyrics of a song entitled *You are loved*. I think I've quoted it before, but there's no escaping the truth of the words:

*To all the hearts that have been broken
To all the dreamers with abandoned dreams
To everyone in need of a friend now
You are loved! You are loved!
To all the rebels wounded in battle*

*To all the rockers who have lost that beat
To all the users all used up now
You are loved! You are loved!
God cares about you more than you think.*

Isn't that what David is saying here? In v9 he states what is surely the central truth of the whole of Scripture, although we must be very careful not to take it as some kind of legitimisation of individualism – “*God is for me.*” God is on your side, he loves you, you matter to him. He knows what you're going through, and because he loves you so much he even notes down all that you've had to go through. I was reading an article a while back about an American pastor's family who had had to cope with the enormous pressure and trauma of child abuse and the toll that it took on so many aspects of their life together. The writer put this in the article: “*Through the long months of asking 'God, where were you?' Janene [the pastor's wife] discovered a comforting Old Testament passage ... Psalm 56:8. Meditating on that truth, Janene realised how painful it was for God to watch his only son die on the cross.*”

That's why we can trust God to help us: because he has allowed himself to go through the same upsets that we have. Jesus, his only and greatly loved Son, has lived as a human being and identifies with us in all the crises of life. That's what the writer of the letter to the Hebrew Christians means when he writes *Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16*. All we need do – all we *can* do – is cry for help.

And God has shown that he's prepared to help us by going all the way for us. He has actually “*delivered us from death*” (v13). Many, if not all, our problems have about them the fear of what the future might

bring. Just think about it for a moment – what are you worried about? What might happen. Well, your past experience may lead to believe that there's a pretty good chance of something happening, but it hasn't yet – and it may not! Ultimately, I believe, all human beings are afraid at a deep subconscious level of what will happen when this life comes to an end. Deep within us is the fear of standing before the living God, of meeting our Creator and Judge. It's there beneath every other fear – but we are delivered from it by Jesus.

You see, when Jesus died on the cross, he made it possible for us to “*walk before God in the light of life*” (v13b). He took with him all the sin and all the mess in our lives which weigh on our conscience and feed our fear. He made it possible for us to be released from our guilt and frustration, to escape from what David elsewhere calls “*the valley of the shadow of death*” – to escape from it into the light of his presence.

Life doesn't have to be a constant battle, it doesn't have to be a series of crises climaxing in the greatest crisis of all as we stand before God. God isn't our enemy – he is “*for us*”, and, as Paul says in *Romans 8*, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” All those things which God has noted down will also go as we turn to him in trust and acceptance. That phrase in v8 about “*listing my tears on a scroll*” can also be translated as “*you have stored up my tears in a bottle*”. It's a wonderful image, isn't it? God has stored up every one of your tears in a bottle – all those tears you have cried with other people: and all those secret tears, those tears you have wept alone, for shame, for guilt, for pain and anxiety which no-one else knows about. God's seen them. And he's kept them. Somewhere he has a bottle with your name on it – maybe nearly full, maybe almost empty. But he knows your hurts and your fears, and as they are dealt with by trusting Jesus and the amazing sacrifice he made for you, so those tears leak out and disappear. The bottle's still there, because there will still be more tears to store, but God knows all about them.

The hurts and memories of the past are dealt with at the cross. Jesus took it all on himself as he hung there for you and for me. Phil Driscoll is a trumpeter and singer who used to be part of Joe Cocker's band. As a Christian he has written some wonderful song about the battle that it is to be a Christian. One of the songs which I find the most moving is called *Jesus paid it all* and it includes these lines about Jesus on the cross:

*With every drop of blood that fell that day
A billion tears of pain were washed away
Ten thousand times ten thousand wars were
won*

*Till there was nothing left to pay
Jesus paid it all
With every stripe, the final sacrifice,
Jesus paid it all.*

Your life may not be such a mess as David's was, but that may be small comfort to you – it feels to you as though it is! Why not turn to God and ask him for help? Why not come to him now, perhaps for the first time, perhaps for the hundredth time and ask – plead – for his help? It may be the last resort, which some

people frown upon (“You shouldn't use God as the last resort. You should always approach him first.”). But God responds to that as to any other cry for help. The gospels are full of examples of people who turned to Jesus when everything else had failed – and my Bible doesn't have anything to suggest that Jesus turned round and said, “Sorry, mate. I only deal with people who come to me first!” There's the woman with the haemorrhage who had spent all her money on doctors and really came to Jesus as a last-ditch attempt to be healed. There's the lame man who had been sitting by the waters of the spa for years waiting for a cure. Jesus didn't turn them down; he demonstrated by his love, concern and healing the truth of David's words – *“God is for me.”*

God is for you this morning – he's rooting for you, he's calling to you to turn to him and he's pointing you to the fact that, in Jesus, he has *“delivered you from death”*. Are you going to take up his offer and *“walk in the light of life”* or are you going to wander off back to the Philistines, to all the hassles of trying to cope with life on your own? If you do, that's not just feigning madness, that really is madness!

David made no bones about his situation before God: he was wise enough to realise that God knew what was going on anyway. There was no point trying to hide things from God. If he was angry, then he might as well shout at God – God's big enough to take it. If he was fed up with life, well, why try and hide it. He didn't try to get himself right before he approached God – he called out to him just as he was – and God was once again ready to stand by him.

There's an opportunity for you to do something about it this morning. In a little while we are going to pray for those who feel they need God's help his healing. It may be for a physical ailment. It may be for an emotional difficulty. You can come here to the front and join with others as we simply put our hands on you as a sign of our oneness with you, and pray to God for his help and healing. You may have been many times before, or it may be the first time, but please come and join us if you'd like that.

Before that, the hymn we are going to sing next gives us an opportunity to use the words to turn to God ourselves. It's usually thought of as a hymn of commitment for those accepting Christ for the first time. But Charlotte Elliott's words allow us to express to God our fears and problems, and to come before him in trust and confidence – *“because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come.”* Charlotte Elliott was born into a notable evangelical family, but in 1821 she became ill and was left a permanent invalid. Distressed at her inability to become involved in active Christian work, she wrote this hymn as a confession of faith in 1836. After she died in 1871, more than a thousand letters were found thanking her for this hymn, including one from Wordsworth's son-in-law. May it be our confession of faith this morning as we come to the God who has promised to turn no-one away and recognise – I hope, with gladness – that God is for me.