**Solid certainty in King Jesus**

Text: Psalm 61

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**Scriptures:** Ephesians 1:15-23; Psalm 61

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 163, 110, 61, 445, 465

**Series:** Occasional

**Theme:** The Psalmist, King David, finds confidence and security in God through prayer and praise

**Proposition:** Communion with God in prayer, remembrance and praise renews and strengthens our confidence in Christ

**Introduction**

Loneliness is a common condition today, especially amongst adults aged over 65 and younger people 15-24 years old. Loneliness increases the risk of increased physical health conditions and can have a damaging effect on mental wellbeing. In an age of social media and digital connection, loneliness has increased. The enforced isolation resulting from pandemic-related lockdowns and gathering size restrictions has also increased loneliness amongst populations throughout the world. Some of us are more outgoing, extrovert and social than others, but we have all been designed to be connected both to the person of God and to others made in His image.

It is hugely significant that after God had made this universe ‘very good’ (Gen 1:31) and had created Adam as a solitary single human being He said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone*” (Gen 2:18). Creation was incomplete without companionship. It is not surprising that loneliness and prolonged isolation are not good for our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health.

Yes, there is great benefit in having times of solitude for prayer, reflection and rest from the pressures of other people; yet too much time alone is problematic. Jesus regularly isolated himself from others for a time. For example, gospel writer Matthew records that “*after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone*” (Matt 14:23). Psalm 61 records the prayer of David, an ancestor of the man Jesus. David feels very alone as he prays in this psalm. We don’t know exactly where he was or what was happening in his life when he wrote this psalm. It’s clear from verse 2 that he was not in Jerusalem and from his petition in verse 6 that his kingship is under threat.

For these reasons some have suggested that the setting of this prayer was the time when David fled from his rebellious son Absalom. We read in 2 Samuel 15:12 that ‘*the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing*’. As a result, David fled Jerusalem and was effectively on the run from his own son. The Holy Spirit, in His perfect wisdom, directed David to write a psalm that applies to the situation of anyone who is isolated, who feels alone, vulnerable, afraid and extremely uncertain about their future.

Is this a psalm for those caught up in a global pandemic? It fits. So let’s look at this psalm, this prayer of David. God’s Word is ‘*profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*’ (2 Tim 3:16). Receiving God’s Word is one of the means by which the Lord restores the soul (Ps 23:3). This psalm reveals that communion with God in prayer, remembrance and praise renews and strengthens our confidence in Christ.

The three points of this sermon follow the unfolding pattern of the psalm:

1. Crying from a faint heart
2. Comfort in knowing the Lord
3. Confident prayer and praise
4. **Crying from a faint heart**

I was staying with one of my sons and his wife over the Christmas period. They have two children. I had forgotten how often toddlers cry, shriek, and scream – especially during the night! Being a grandparent is great – you may be able to help, but ultimately, it’s not your responsibility in the small hours of broken sleep; unless the parents are away. A contented, happy child does not cry; he or she certainly doesn’t scream with pain. That only happens when a basic need is not being met by the parent or caregiver upon whom the child is completely dependent.

This psalm begins with a scream **-** A shrill, piecing, ringing heartfelt cry to God. That is the meaning of the word translated ‘cry’ in the first verse. “*Hear my cry, O God; Give heed to my prayer*”. This is the cry, the scream, of a grown man, a king. Children, do you think sometimes adults are so distressed that they cry and scream? It happens, usually when they are alone. Brothers and sisters, is it right and appropriate that we cry or scream out to God in prayer when we are in great need? The clear answer from Psalm 61 is ‘yes’.

As we’ve already seen, David is not in Jerusalem. He is away from home and much more importantly He is away from the place of God’s dwelling in the Tabernacle. It is possible that Psalm 61 is connected to Psalm 60 and that David’s location is the same for both. Aram-zobah (60:1) was likely the region between the Euphrates and the Orontes rivers. However, David’s isolation is much more spiritual than geographical. Notice that he doesn’t give a specific location but writes in verse 2 “*From the end of the earth I call to You”.*

Perhaps you feel isolated from God, even when you are gathered together with others in a worship service. Perhaps you feel alone, even when you are ‘in a crowd’. David’s solitary cry is one of desperation. It expresses his great need. “*From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint*”. The Hebrew word translated ‘faint’ literally means covered. He is wrapped over and over in gloom, overwhelmed with distress. In turmoil within himself. Imagine, for example, being trapped in a deep pit - perhaps an abandoned well. You are crying out for help far away from anyone who could rescue you.

It is from this isolation, trouble and distress that David pleads with His God: “*Lead me to the rock that is higher than I*”. The image here is of a solid secure place of refuge from danger. It is said that Augustus Toplady, the writer of the hymn ‘Rock of Ages’ that he wrote the lyrics after he was caught in a fierce storm in England and took shelter in a gap in a gorge. The image of a rock as a place of safety is expressed elsewhere in Scripture, for example: “*The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold*” (Psalm 18:2).

More metaphors in this psalm further illustrate the security to be found only in the Lord. He is like a strong tower rising up from the walls of a fortified city (v3). (cf. Jud 9:50-53; Prov 18:10). He is like a protective mother bird who shields her young under her wings (v4). Remember those words of Jesus, conveying His desire to gather, protect and provide for His people: "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling*” (Matthew 23:37). (Also Ruth 2:12).

God’s tent is a safe place (v4). Now those who have experienced camping holidays where we’ve been rained out during a storm may not think of a temporary fabric structure as very secure. The reference here is to the Lord’s dwelling place in the Tabernacle in Jerusalem (ref. Ex 33:7-11; Numb 11:16-17). Under certain circumstances, a fleeing person could find safety by clinging to the horns of the altar in the Tabernacle (1 Kings 1:50).

This psalm is pointing us to our need to commune with God in prayer Our souls need this at all times, including when we are faint of heart and overwhelmed by the circumstances of life. Especially when we feel alone. The English preacher Charles Spurgeon, who knew much trouble of soul, who experienced much depression and weakness, yet who was so greatly used by God as a minister of the gospel said: “*He who communes with God is always at home*”

You’ll notice that the first four verses end with the word ‘Selah’. We don’t really know exactly what Selah means. It is some kind of a division or emphasis marker used 71 times in psalms and 3 times in Habakkuk (3:3,9,13). It could have been musical/liturgical sign. It might have been a signal for the congregation to sing/recite/lie prostrate on ground. Perhaps a cue for cymbals to clash, or the congregation to sing louder or with a higher pitch. We don’t really know exactly what Selah means. But we do know the benefit/the necessity of communion with God in prayer, especially when we are faint of heart. This is one of the means by which the Lord is pleased to comfort his struggling children, which brings us to our second point:

1. **Comfort in knowing the Lord**

One of the spiritual disciplines that some men and women of God maintain is keeping a prayer journal so that they can readily recall the Lord’s past blessings, answers to prayer, and ongoing protection. I don’t know if King David kept a journal, but it is clear that he looks back and remembers the Lord’s blessings in the past. You can see this in verses 3 and 5. Verse 3 read “*for* ***You have been*** *my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy*”. Verse **5** reads “*For* ***You have heard*** *my vows, O God; You have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name*”.

Have you ever known someone who is consistently very late for events or gatherings? If they do not arrive on time, you are generally not concerned, they are just behaving according to the patterns you have seen in the past. However, if someone who is always punctual is not present when you expect them to be, you might well become increasingly concerned that they have had an accident if they do not show up or else let you know that they are running late. Knowing someone very well means that you can usually quite accurately predict how they are going to behave in a given situation.

David knows that the Lord is faithful, and he had already experienced his God provide him with protection and strength in battle. David had already been blessed by the Lord’s answers to his prayers. David had experienced God’s covenant blessings in the past. {‘The inheritance of those who fear your name’ in verse 6 is primarily a reference to the promised land of Canaan, but also includes all the physical and spiritual covenant blessings from God’s bountiful grace}.

David’s prayer in verse 6: “*Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations!*” was, for him, a personal prayer for himself. It was based on his past experiences of God’s grace towards him and also on the promises that He had received from the Lord. His memory here is especially based on what we know as the Davidic covenant from 2 Sam 7:16 "*Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever".* God’s promise to David was not merely for his own reign, but for his entire royal dynasty to follow. You can see that David’s prayer here looks beyond himself to those rulers who will follow in the Davidic line. “*Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!*” (v6&7). It’s interesting that the Hebrew language in verse 6 can equally well be translated as a petition or as a confident declaration (as in NAS, KJV) ‘You *will prolong the life of the king*’.

This petition or declaration finds fulfilment in the everlasting kingdom of Christ. As the angel foretold to Mary: *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." (Luke 1:31-33).*

Jesus, the promised Davidic King, is forever the ascended, enthroned, Immanuel. By grace, Brothers and Sisters – He is ultimately our governing authority. Our King is God’s own Son, but also a man; One who knows about distress, trouble, suffering, betrayal, disappointment and loneliness. He knows what it is to be faint-of-heart. Jesus, the perfect man, experienced faintness of heart in the garden of Gethsemane with the awful prospect of the cross before Him. He said to His disciples there “*my soul is very sorrowful, even to death*” (Matt 26:38).

Prayer is especially comforting for us in times of distress because Jesus sympathises with our weaknesses (Heb 4:15). When we pray, we can recollect the hope to which He has called us – Eph 1:18. We can remember the riches of his glorious inheritance to us, his saints. We can be reminded of the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. We know that God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places. We recollect that Christ is head over all things. In Christ we have both a refuge and a high priest who understands what it is to be faint-of-heart.

If you are screaming crying inside today, cry out to God. Christ understands. He is the Rock who is higher than us all. A place of secure refuge. He invites you to come to Him – you who labour and are heavy laden - and He promises to give you rest. Comfort in Christ leads to confidence in Him…as we see in our 3rd point.

1. **Confident prayer and praise**

It is difficult to be confident when your heart is faint. What we have seen from Psalm 61 is that it is **as** God answers our prayer to be led to a stronger, higher, more secure place of shelter than we can provide for ourselves, that we gain greater confidence in Him. Just as David’s confidence is based on the faithfulness of God in the past in answering his prayers and protecting him and also on the faithfulness of God in keeping his promises, so likewise, our source of confidence is the same.

**God has promised** to conquer Satan, and to set us free: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and* ***you shall bruise his heel****."* (Gen 3:15).

**God has promised** to supernaturally change the hearts of spiritually dead people: "*This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people”* (Jer 31:33)*.*

**God has promised** a Saviour in whom we are made right with God. “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21).

**God has promised** a future without faintness-of-heart, without groaning, without sorrowful lament. A New Heaven and a New Earth where the dwelling place of God will be with His people. *He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Rev 21:3-4). There will be no faint-hearted prayers like Psalm 61 in the New Heavens and New Earth!

How did David respond in the midst of his distressing situation, which remained unchanged through the course of this psalm? His confidence, his trust in God was renewed **as** he remembered past answers to prayer and the faithfulness of God in keeping all his promises. He also committed Himself afresh to praise the Lord. “*So I will ever sing praise to Your name, as I perform my vows day after day*” (v8). “Forever” here conveys the idea of continuity, rather than eternity. The idea is, that having been strengthened in the Lord, David commits himself to a life of ongoing praise and faithful service.

Notice now that this psalm is not just for faint-hearted king David, but for all of us brothers and sisters in the Lord! Look at the start *“To the Choirmaster with stringed instruments”.* All of God’s people are to respond to His comfort with praise. Through Christ, all His people share in His kingly blessings (Eph 2:4-6).

Brothers and sisters, Christ is our safety, our dignity and our delight. He is the rock of our salvation, our solid foundation, our refuge. Praise God for “the working of the strength of His might’ “*Which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church*” (Eph 1:20b-22)

In Christ we have certain hope for a future which God has guaranteed so that we are know **now** that we have solid certainty in King Jesus – our Saviour who is preparing a place for us on the yet to be created New Earth. Until then, cry out to the Lord when you are faint-of-heart that He may lead you to the ROCK who is Christ (1 Cor 10:4) for safety and shelter.

AMEN.