

Love your enemies

I love the Psalms; maybe because I grew up in a musical family, maybe because I like poetry. The writers of the psalms really knew how to express emotions. I think the psalms are the most personal writings in the Old Testament.

There were probably several authors of the Psalms, but David was probably the writer of the majority of them. Asaph, the choirmaster that David appointed over the temple, wrote several psalms.

Like the songs we listen to today, and the hymns we sing here in church, psalms have different feelings associated with them. Some of them are praise and worship songs, to be sung directly to God. Some are songs of thanksgiving to God, thanking him for things He's done for His children. There are some psalms that are categorized as "royal psalms", which may have been used for coronations and weddings. But the largest category of psalms is songs of lament; where the author of the psalm is complaining to God, or praying for help for a situation.

Psalm 57 is one of these psalms of lament. It's one of my favorite psalms to read and meditate on when I feel like I'm being overwhelmed or when life seems to be ganging up on me and there seems like there's no way out.

Psalm 57

*1 Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,
for in you I take refuge.*

*I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed.*

*2 I cry out to God Most High,
to God, who vindicates me.*

*3 He sends from heaven and saves me,
rebuking those who hotly pursue me—
God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.*

*4 I am in the midst of lions;
I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts—
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.*

*5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.*

*6 They spread a net for my feet—
I was bowed down in distress.
They dug a pit in my path—
but they have fallen into it themselves.*

*7 My heart, O God, is steadfast,
my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.*

*8 Awake, my soul!
Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.*

*9 I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.*

*10 For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*

*11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.*

I love how this psalm starts out with David explaining his current situation to God, then letting God know what he wants done, but then he finishes with praise to God; praise that's not contingent on God doing what David asked. It's like David is saying "Here's my problem, and the way I would like You to solve it, but You're in charge, so I praise You."

Another thing I love about Psalm 57 is we know the situation that surrounds the song; why David wrote it to begin with.

Last week I talked a little about David and Goliath. Did it seem a little odd to you how David could just walk up to Saul and speak his mind? Well, David and Saul had some history together.

After Samuel anointed David (which is a story for another time), the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, and he was tormented by an evil or harmful spirit. Let's pick up the story in 1 Samuel 16:15.

1 Samuel 16:15-23

15 Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. 16 Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the lyre. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better."

17 So Saul said to his attendants, "Find someone who plays well and bring him to me."

18 One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the Lord is with him."

19 Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep." 20 So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul.

21 David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. 22 Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him."

23 Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

So, David was Saul's court musician, if you will. Well, after he killed Goliath, David became more popular than Saul. Saul would send David out on missions against Israel's enemies, and David was always successful. I'm sure this was intimidating for Saul. At one point, Saul tried to kill David with a spear in the king's house. When Saul's daughter fell in love with David, Saul felt even more intimidated, and was afraid David was going to kill him and take over. David finally fled from Saul into the wilderness, but had a band of about 600 followers who supported him.

Let's pick up the story again in 1 Samuel 24.

1 Samuel 24:1-22

¹ After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." ² So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats.

³ He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.

⁴ The men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said[b] to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

⁵ Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶ He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." ⁷ With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸ Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and

prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹ He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" ¹⁰ This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed.' ¹¹ See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹² May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³ As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

¹⁴ "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? ¹⁵ May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

¹⁶ When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. ¹⁷ "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. ¹⁸ You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹ When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today. ²⁰ I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. ²¹ Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

²² So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

David gave his promise here to Saul that he wouldn't kill him. David did what was right, even though it wasn't what everyone around him wanted him to do.

Let's see how we can apply all this to us today. Even though Saul was trying to kill David, when David had the chance and the support of everyone around him, he let Saul live. Now, I doubt we'll be in the exact same situation, but I know I've been in somewhat similar situations.

"Look what he did to you! Get even!"

I've even been known to say that I don't get even, I get ahead. In other words, if someone does something to me, I'm going to one-up you. But that's not what we're supposed to do, is it? What did Jesus say about it?

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor [Leviticus 19:18] and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Greek word used here for perfect in verse 48 is teleios. It doesn't mean perfect quite the way we think of perfect. The definition in Strong's lexicon that I think applies the best here is "consummate human integrity and virtue". And the word for love used throughout this passage is the same word used for love in John 3:16 & 17, agape. We need to love those who hate us, our enemies, the same way that God loves the world.

God loves us, but hates our sin. We need to learn to do the same thing. I've said it a few times, it's not an easy thing to do, but I think if we can show love for the people around us, we will be showing Jesus to them, even if they don't know who Jesus is. And that will give us an opportunity to share Jesus with people around us.

Before: Leviticus 19:15-18

After: John 3:16-21

Questions

1. Do you have a favorite Psalm, one that comforts you, or helps you focus more on God?
2. Have you ever been in a situation like the situation between David and Saul, where you were hurt or wrongfully accused of something? Did people around you tell you that you could get even, or even ahead? What did you do, or what should you have done?
3. In the Matthew 5 passage, Jesus uses how tax collectors and pagans behave within their own group as examples of how to behave toward everyone. If Jesus were saying this today, who would he use instead of tax collectors and pagans?
4. In the Galilee Translation (GTP) of the New Testament, the Greek word Agape is translated with into the phrase “give yourself to others, for their good, expecting nothing in return”. How does this describe what God did in John 3:16 and 17?