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8-2-26

How will I Know that God is for Me?

Psalm 56:9

This morning I want to lump together six Psalms and give you a general overview of them, demonstrating to you that they share common themes. Then, I want to highlight one particular verse from Psalm 56 that really caught my attention and relate it to a question that most of us have asked at one time or another over the course of our lives. I think this will be a worthy exercise for us.

The psalms of which I speak are Psalms 54 – 59. And I could give you a technical term that would describe the category of these Psalms, but this information is incidental to the bigger picture.

What's important for us to understand ~~now~~ is that they share common themes – and this is not to say that other Psalms wouldn't also fall into this same category. But in general, the themes that are common with these Psalms are as follows:

1. **Opposition to God, his people, and his ways is always active and never-ending**. In other words, evil never sleeps and its always on the offensive ready to destroy whatever it can get its hands on.

Let me give you a couple of verses to prove my point:

Psalm 54:3: *"Strangers are attacking me; ruthless men seek my life – men without regard for God."*

Psalm 55: 9 – 11: *"I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets."*

Psalm 59:3 - 4: *"See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me ... I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me."*

Now my intention for quoting these verses is not to frighten anybody or disparage anyone or make them paranoid. I quote them simply to remind us, and to make us all aware of the fact that this is the world in which we live. There are dark forces that are operating 24/7 to keep us questioning God, doubting God, keep us from loving Him, and even tempting us to hate and reject Him.

Of course, there are other forces for good that are doing just the opposite and are actually keeping these evil forces at bay, but the important point here is that we must remove our rose-colored glasses and see reality for what it is: a battle of good versus evil of which we find ourselves in the midst.

We can't operate in this world naively or live under the false pretense that everything and everybody has our best interests in mind. They don't! The human heart is attracted to the darkness, and the devil and his minions know the exact buttons they need to push to keep us in the darkness. And the sad truth is, that we'll blissfully follow the darkness unless someone is willing pull us back into the light!

We learn about this reality in the book of Ephesians where Paul writes in Ephesians 5:15: *"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."*

Later in chapter 6, Paul exhorts us to *"put on the full armor of God so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the*

authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

So, this is common theme number 1:

There are dark and evil forces ready and willing to knock us off the path or ^{cease us to} completely miss the path that God has set for us, and we must be aware of this fact, and prepare accordingly. And, I don't consider myself as an alarmist. I just read God's Word, and with God's help, I interpret it and try to understand it and obey it. What else can I do?

The **second common theme** among these particular Psalms – and you'll probably say ...well, duh, of course this would be a theme - is that there is always a plea, a cry – basically a prayer to God to be rescued from evil. This is so obvious, in fact, we may tend to overlook its importance: But we must look outside ourselves to a higher power if we desire rescue – if want to be saved.

Psalm 54:1 -2: ***"Save me, O God, by your name. Hear my prayer, O God, listen to the words of my mouth."***

Psalm 55:1 - 2: ***"Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me."***

Psalm 59:1: ***"Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me."***

Some people have a real problem with the fact that they must rely on someone else for their salvation. They may think this is a sign of weakness or incompetence - the fact that the fulfilling of one's need must come at the hands of another - and I admit that they are, for the most part, correct. **Humanity is unable and completely impotent to save itself.**

We absolutely do need outside intervention to rescue us from a destiny that awaits us - one that's completely horrific and incompatible with God's desire for mankind!

So, we call out to the only One who can save us – Jesus Christ.

It would be foolishness to continue in our spiritual pride and believe in the false notion that science or education, technology or wealth or a certain system of government can save humanity from its sin, but many people believe just that.

Of course, the devil wants us to believe we have the power to save ourselves by becoming like gods ourselves. In this way, the devil keeps us from coming to God for salvation, thus fulfilling his primary goal – usurping God's authority *and trying to steal His glory.*

No, to believe we can somehow save ourselves is to make a mockery of Christ's purpose for coming to earth and becoming a man in the first place. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

The immediate context of this verse occurs when Zacchaeus made the startling announcement to Jesus that he was giving half of all his possessions to the poor and paying back those he cheated 4x what he took from them.

And so, Jesus proclaims that salvation has come to the house of Zacchaeus, not because Zacchaeus had all of a sudden become generous, but because his action is a direct result of a changed, forgiven, and saved heart. Zacchaeus no longer trusts his wealth and possessions to be his salvation and security for him. Instead, he placed his trust in the One true God. How can we not do the same?

Psalm 57:3: *"He sends from heaven and saves me ... He sends his love and faithfulness."* God sent His Son.

The third theme that is shared by these particular psalms is that there is a prayer to God to judge and stop evil and those who do evil. Should we be at all surprised by this?

Psalm 54:5: *"Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness **destroy them.**"*

Psalm 56:7: *"On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God **bring down the nations.**"*

Psalm 59:13 *"**Consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more.**"*

These words by the psalmist are vivid and real - a raw display of emotions - ^{but} ~~and~~ they are just the beginning! "Break their teeth" the psalmist says, "tear out their fangs."

And oh, by the way God, don't kill them right away, let them suffer a bit and be tortured for awhile so they can feel the pain they've caused us. That's what I see happening in verse 11 of Psalm 59: *"But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might, make them wander about, and bring them down."*

In this world, very few things satisfy us as much as seeing justice being served. We enjoy seeing a criminal getting his just desserts. And this is probably a commentary on both the environment in which we live – namely a fallen and corrupt world where we see so little justice, so when we do, we're almost tempted to jump for joy.

But also, it's a testimony of our creatureliness before God. We should recognize our innate desire and hunger to see things put aright.

And if we think about this for one minute, hopefully we'll recognize God's handiwork upon us. God wants justice and righteousness and goodness to prevail, and deep down so do we and it's because this is how God has made us to be. We are his creatures, and we are made in His image. As Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17:28: *"For in Him we live and move and have our being. We are his offspring."*

And this truth we must never forget: We are the offspring of a God whose name is righteousness, as the prophet Jeremiah prophesized concerning the Messiah: *"He will be called the Lord Our Righteousness."*

And so, if we, who are so easily corrupted in heart and mind and soul, can crave and long for righteousness that seems so elusive, how much more will our holy God, whose name is righteousness, move heaven and earth until all things are made right in His sight?

As the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15: 25 – 28: *"Then the end will come, when the Messiah hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When he does this, then the Son of Man himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."*

In short, this means that every injustice that has ever been perpetrated on the face of this earth will someday be rectified and made right according to God, because God, who is above all and reigns over all and is perfectly just and holy, will it to be so.

This is according to God's word as spoken through the prophet Isaiah in 14:24: *"The Lord Almighty has sworn, surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand."*

Theme 4 that is common among these Psalms: **A profession of complete trust in God's certainty to save - no ifs, ands, or buts.**

54:7: *"For he has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes."*

55:22: *"Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall."*

59:16: *"But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble."*

This last verse using the word "morning" is especially poignant in light of the fact that just before ~~notes~~ this, David remarks that his enemies: "return at evening snarling like dogs and prowl about the city." And yet he gets to see another day!

I don't know about you, but when I'm down in the dumps or am suffering through some terrible situation or anxious thoughts, sleep and peace can be extremely elusive, and morning can't come fast enough. But when it does, a ray of sun is like a ray of hope and reminder that God has preserved us to see another day.

How can we ever forget Jeremiah's comforting words from Lamentations: *"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

Well, there are other themes that these Psalms have in common, but ~~I'm~~ I'm running out of time. One is that the Psalmist almost always makes a promise or a vow to praise and worship his Savior, and more often than not, he extends an invitation for other believers to do the same: "Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples for great is your love reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies." ~~Praying~~ Watch out, praising God can be contagious! Have you ever caught a case?

I conclude my message by making good on the promise with which I started – by posing the question that I thought about after reading verse 9 from Psalm 56. The psalmist writes, "Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me."

And I was struck by this statement: "By this I will know that God is for me." ^{last}

And it made me immediately wonder ... what other things and ways demonstrate to me that God is for me? He already pointed out one: When God rescues me from my enemies – and this is a huge way, and I'll finish with this point, but often we hear people say and believe that God is against them – and I'm not necessarily arguing against this thought, because God can be against us if we continually fight and oppose him, but his plan for opposing has as its goal to wake us up to his grace and mercy, so He uses his world and the pressures of the world to bring us back into a righteous relationship with him.

But here some other ways that we can know that God is for us, I hope these thoughts are an encouragement to you:

① **Did the sun rise today?** Then this means that God is giving you another opportunity to live in his creation, to experience His glory, and receive his amazing grace. God is for you.

② **Do you have food to eat, water to drink, and shelter to go to when the sun sets and the weather turns harsh?** Then God is for you. He knows our every need and supplies us with them even without our asking.

③ **Do you have a family or a group of people that claim you as their own?** Then this means that God is looking out for you – for your emotional, physical and spiritual needs. He knows that this life can be hard and cruel and unforgiving, but he's given us each other to lean on and to care for. God is for you. Now, I know your family is not perfect – no family is - and there's probably a million things you'd like to change about your family structure, but God has placed in the family you need to be in. Through them, he will teach you about his eternal family.

④ **Has God given you a skill, ability, or talent that you can use to bring purpose and, satisfaction to your life?** Has he taught you how to use it in the service of others and for his kingdom? Then God is giving you dignity, and He is definitely for you.

Has God given you a mind that allows you to reflect upon his creation, to ponder the universe, and ask with David, *"What is man that you are mindful of him – that you care for him?"* Then you know that God is for you.

Have you the capacity to feel the gamut of human emotions – love/hate, sorrow and gladness, fear and courage, guilt and forgiveness? Then God is for you and wants you to experience what it truly means to be human.

And finally, has God given his Son to you? Then absolutely we can say, without a shadow of doubt that God is for you, because in giving his Son, He has given not only his best, God has given himself so that when we believe in Him, we put into motion the most glorious ^{part} of God's plan – that we, his own creatures might dwell with God most High for all eternity because He himself came to our rescue and defeated our greatest enemies: spiritual pride, unbelief, sin and death,
Our enemies have turned back even before we called for help, and by this we know that God is for us. Amen.

despair
Because God came to our rescue

Benediction:

John 17:3 *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."* Amen.