

The Only Psalm Psalm 62

PHCC

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I have a confession to make. I drive my wife crazy! I wish I could say that the reason is that I am a hunk, but unfortunately I don't mean *that* kind of crazy. Instead I drive her crazy because I'm a bit too lackadaisical for a woman with her radar going all the time. I think she'd tell you that my standard response when a tornado is heading for the house would be, "Ak, it will be alright." Or suppose a dirty bomb has just exploded near my office... "Ak, I'll be fine." Or our kids are being held hostage by Jihadists... "Ak, let's not blow this out of proportion." And they call me Mr. Sensitivity! Husbands, please, don't try this at home!

Ak! That's been a favorite word of mine for years. Ak! With a sweep of the hand problems melt and crises crumble. Ak! Now I just love the Bible; love to study it. God's word is rich, and true, and excellent, and deep. As the Psalmist says, "*Your statutes are my delight, they are my counselors.*" But sometimes there is an extra special nugget waiting for you as you mine the Scriptures! And so it was with Psalm 62.

Israel's great king David wrote Psalm 62. That means it was composed about 3000 years ago. It's stood the test of time. It's a short Psalm... only twelve verses. Some of the broadest truths about God, and Man, and Life are compressed into this epitome of poetic expression. And yet this is a Psalm with a laser-like focus. That focus is *trust in God alone- God only*. David sharpens the focus by beginning six of the first nine verses with the Hebrew word translated as alone or only. In fact, because of this repetition Psalm 62 is sometimes called the "Only Psalm." Not because there are not 149 other Psalms in Scripture, but because this one has such an emphasis on the Hebrew word translated as "only." You may be wondering what that Hebrew word is. Let me pronounce that word in English. Can you guess how it sounds? You guessed it..."AK!" Half the verses of this Psalm begin with "ak." What a great Psalm!!! I think we'd all better take a closer look at the "Only Psalm."

Here is how it begins:

*Psalms 62:1 My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.*

The first phrase says it all. *My soul finds rest in God alone*. I could almost stop here, say the benediction, and send us all home. (No such luck, Margaret!) As I read through the Psalms searching for the best of the best, this phrase gripped me and wouldn't let go. *My soul finds rest in God alone*. Our pace of life never lets up. In the richest epoch in human history, in the most comfortable and materially blessed nation on earth, in county at the top of the heap we have found no rest. We build bigger homes, get better jobs,

send our kids in better schools, sign up for more soccer teams, piano lessons, and pottery classes than all the legions of humanity past. We hit the gym, watch our carbs, and schlep our laptops, cell phones, blackberries... We are never unplugged. At work MITRE's cafeteria has 2 large screen displays with CNN broadcasting eternally forever amen; the exercise room has multiple silent displays and as you pump iron or peddle the exercise bike you tune your walkman to get the audio for your screen of choice. I figured I'd take refuge in the one room of guaranteed silence, the corporate library. I don't think so! There was Wolf Blitzer babbling at me from right over the librarian's head! Technological blessing is no peace! Rest does not come easy in our 24-7 culture. Don't you wish the world would just pause for a while? David says: *My soul finds rest in God alone.*

The Hebrew word for rest here literally means silence or stillness. *Only* God can give us that stillness and peace. God *alone* can quiet the din of a noisy world. Jesus understands our weariness. He knows our burdens. His promise in Matthew 11 is sweet and refreshing:

Mt 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls..."

Several years ago I flew to Okinawa on business. It was a long enough trip that the company sent me business class on a 747. That was great. We had individual seats that reclined to a horizontal position, flight attendants indulging our every whim, and unlimited snacking! (That one really put a smile on *my* face!!) But actually, the benefit I enjoyed the most was a set of noise canceling headphones. Put them on and all the whoosh, and clatter, hydraulic whines disappeared as if by magic. But even though this was great, digital signal processing has its limits and I could still discern those hard-to-cancel low-frequency rumbles.

This applies to our souls as well. Even if we could quiet the slings and arrows of the external world that continually wear us down, there would still be a deep rumble in our souls that we can not silence. That rumble is our sin. Sin is not a popular topic today. But sin is real and sin is sickening. Romans 1 describes those who have followed sin to its end state:

Ro 1:29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

Ro 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

Ro 1:31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Aren't you glad that we're not *that* bad! That's for sure! And what's more Paul teaches that *"since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* (Romans 1:20) Those disgusting, filthy, slimeballs are

aware of God and have no excuse for their depraved behavior. But as that old cartoon sheriff used to say, “Wait just one cotton-pickin’ minute!” Because Paul goes on to say in Romans 2:

Ro 2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

What Paul is saying here is that if we are guilty of violating any of God’s commands we deserve condemnation just as does the worst imaginable sinner. Throughout Romans he hammers the point that we are all sinners, we know it, the wages of sin is death, and we are headed for the eternal wrath of God. Biblical wrath is not a mild-mannered word. The word used for wrath is the Greek “orge” the same word from which we get the English word “orgy”. “Orge” means an unrestrained, passionate, all-consuming rage. What is more, this fury will ultimately be unleashed by an all-powerful God.

When I preach love to tell stories, joke around, and share the joy the Lord gives me, but this is this is not a joking matter. This is the most sobering, grim, and terrifying news we could ever hear. As deeply as God loves his children, with equal depth God abhors and furiously punishes sin. Sin is not to be trivialized, sugar-coated, excused, or ignored. It is with good reason that there is a restlessness that rumbles in our souls. No matter how we may try to suppress the truth, while under the cold, dark shadow of sin, it is not well with our souls.

But as Jack Miller of World Harvest Missions has said, “Cheer up, you’re worse than you think. But God’s grace is greater than you can imagine!” The second part of verse 1 provides solace for my sin-anxious soul:

*Ps 62:1 My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.*

It’s very reassuring, but what a strange statement. “**My salvation comes from him.**” This same God with apoplectic hatred for sin is the source of salvation for the sinner. **My salvation comes from him.** Right here David, inspired by God, telegraphs the message of the Gospel a thousand years before Paul wrote Romans: (Old Testament you go girl!) Here’s what Paul said in Romans 3:

Ro 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Ro 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...

So the answer to the dark night of the soul is faith in Jesus Christ and his righteousness rather than keeping the requirements of God’s law. God provides this salvation by punishing Christ the innocent one for the sins committed by those who put their faith in

him. What is more, he even gives us the very faith that saves us! In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul puts it like this:

*Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
Eph 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Not only does my salvation come from him, but he gives me purpose and prepares good works for me to carry out for my good and his glory. Continuing the passage in Ephesians 2 he says:

Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Wow! Real peace and true rest for our souls only through God, salvation from eternal disaster provided only through faith in His son, faith provided only by Him, and meaning, purpose, and direction planned out by Him alone before the creation of the world. Not bad for the first verse of Psalm 62. Verse 2:

*Ps 62:2 He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

Here we are reminded that he alone is our rock and our salvation. Our Lord is often called the Rock in the Old Testament just as Jesus is our Rock and Cornerstone upon which we rest. Rock is strong and immovable and the fortresses of David's day were built of rock and set on rocky heights. When I think of fortresses the massive schloss or castle that overlooks Heidelberg, Germany comes to mind with its enormous gates and massive stone walls. Safe within such a fortress the Psalmist says "I will never be shaken," or actually a bit more accurately translated, "I will not be *greatly* shaken."

Are you familiar with the Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center out in Colorado? The CMOC as it's called is the nerve center for North American Ballistic Missile Defense. This is a four and a half acre complex of buildings as large as 3 stories high embedded in the middle of a rock mountain. The complex was formed by removing 693,000 tons of rock with one and a half million pounds of dynamite and is buttressed with 115,000 massive rock bolts ranging in length from 6 to 32 feet. The 1/3 mile long tunnel leading to the CMOC is walled off with enormous steel and concrete blast doors. The intent of this 18 billion dollar fortress is to withstand earthquakes or direct hits by nuclear missiles. The whole complex rests on over 1300 half-ton springs and is designed to sway 12" in any direction. This is a picture of the protection David conveys when he says, "He is my fortress, I will never be greatly shaken." When we are secured by the Lord, life's earthquakes and atomic blasts may rattle us but never destroy us. Is this security available elsewhere? Again David says:

*Ps 62:2 He **alone** is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

These are the principles. But how does this play out in real life? David's life may be the best test case in all of scripture. In his commentary on Psalm 62 _____ McGee points out that, "Although the inspired text does not give us this information, tradition tells us that this psalm came from the greatest heartbreak of David's life- the rebellion led by his son Absalom."¹ I'd like to read part of the wonderful description McGee gives about the setting for this psalm:

"We turn to the historical record and read this language: *'And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot; and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up' (2 Sam. 15:30)*. That was a tragic time in the life of David. It was his dramatic moment, his time of crisis...

"Absalom, David's son, is marching into Jerusalem. His entry is forcing a time of decision. There are some who are choosing David; others choosing Absalom. It is a time when David has found who are the loyal and disloyal in the ranks. The betrayers and followers are well-marked. An important man is Ahithophel (related by marriage through Bathsheba to David), an astute statesman, a man of sagacity, of wonderful ability, a counselor upon whom David had leaned. Ahithophel has deserted and gone over to Absalom. It was a great grief to David when he found that this trusted man had deserted him. Then Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, came and said that his master, the son of Jonathan, whom David had befriended, had also betrayed him.

"As David fled from the city, barefoot and weeping, there stood Shimei, a Benjamite, still loyal to former King Saul. From a heart of bitter hatred for David, he threw stones and heaped cursings upon the old king as he fled.

"We see Absalom entering Jerusalem in triumph, and the same crowd that once shouted to the rafters for David is now shouting deliriously for Absalom..."

"As we read this psalm which comes from his heart in this hour of darkness, this time of testing, this hour of defeat, we are amazed to find not one note of discouragement, nor suggestion of fear, nor word of distress. There is neither rancor nor bitterness welling up in the heart of the psalmist..."

Let's read David's description of this tragic time:

Ps 62:3 How long will you assault a man?

*Would all of you throw him down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?*

Ps 62:4 They fully intend to topple him

from his lofty place;

they take delight in lies.

With their mouths they bless,

¹ Psalm 62 commentary by McGee.

but in their hearts they curse.

The weary king David has endured a prolonged assault with no end in sight. A horde of enemies have all conspired to cast him down from his exalted position. David refers to himself as a leaning wall using a word that means stretched to the breaking point. He is tottering on the brink. Verse 4 calmly describes the nature of evil men who come against us. They are relentless. How do we know? There's that word "ak" again. This time "ak" is rendered as "fully". *They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place.* There is no room for mercy or compromise. Their only intent is to destroy David. They represent all those controlled by sin and reminiscent of Noah's contemporaries before the flood: *Ge 6:5 "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."* This is a description of all who are not led by the Spirit of God. Every thought, word, and deed, even those that appear to be altruistic or noble, are, at best, tainted by sinful motives.

What is more, those controlled by the sinful nature are by nature liars. We remember that Jesus called Satan "the father of lies." Like Satan, when these men lie, they speak their native language. And David's attackers deceive not merely for expediency, they actually love to lie, they take delight in lies. We see this in our culture today. Hypocrisy in politics; distortion of the media; truth sold out in the workplace, in the community, in the family. Brothers and sisters in Christ, as an aside, the blatant abuse of the truth all around us provides us one of the most powerful opportunities to stand apart and obtain a hearing for our faith. We need to live by the truth. Our yes should be yes and our no no. Our word should be trusted. Our commitments kept. Our love sincere, not hypocritical. Our attitudes aligned with our speech. Otherwise we will be lumped with liars and with hypocrites who as David puts it:

*With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.*

Let us rather *reveal* the intent of our hearts and speak the truth in love. As the Proverbs say, "*An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.*" (*Prov. 24:26*) But I digress.

As we reach verse 5 the description of David's plight has been completed and his response to crisis is next documented. What *is* his answer to assault? How *does* he respond to adversity? Verses 5 and 6 reveal the answer. We find that these verses are essentially a restatement of the beliefs from verses 1 and 2:

*Ps 62:5 Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.
Ps 62:6 He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.*

There are three small but significant differences from David's original propositions. First verse 5 is shifted from a statement of principle to an imperative. When the rubber meets the road David exhorts his soul to find rest in God alone. His response to crisis is not to

panic and forget God, nor to lash out and blame God for his predicament. Instead, when pressured himself he puts all his weight on God; he recognizes that the *only* recourse for his soul is to trust in God *only*. He retreats from Jerusalem leaving behind the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence and power and leaves his reinstatement to God's providence. Nor does he allow his mighty man Abishai to behead the insolent rogue Shimei, choosing instead not to usurp God's prerogative for judgment. This fits with the second difference from verse 1. The word salvation is replaced by "hope." Here David realizes that he need not take matters into his own hands. His responsibility is to honor God and let God's good providence take its course. All David's hope is in the Lord rather than his own power or strength. This is remarkable restraint and an amazing fleshing out of his confidence in God alone.

The third change is in verse 6 where David closes with the words I will not be shaken. In the Hebrew the word for greatly has now been removed. The 1300 springs have been removed. He will not sway or rattle when attacked. God alone has been his fortress and in that fortress he is not shaken at all. Testing of David has revealed a trust in God only that is even greater than that at first.

At this point David broadens the scope of his trust beyond safety and salvation. In verses 7 and 8 David proclaims:

Ps 62:7 My salvation and my honor depend on God;

he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

Ps 62:8 Trust in him at all times, O people;

pour out your hearts to him,

for God is our refuge.

Verse 7 adds our honor to the equation. "*My salvation and my honor depend on God;*" What a difficult thing for us to master. We spend so much of our time striving for the approval of others. But all our honor is dependent upon the Lord. Do we really believe this teaching of scripture? 250 years ago Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian, took this principle to the mat when falsely accused. He refused to defend himself against the spurious charges, relying on God alone to vindicate him. He persisted to the point that he was removed from his position as church pastor. It took years but at last his accuser, overcome by guilt, of his own accord confessed that he had fabricated the charges and Jonathan Edwards was completely cleared. This seems to us an odd way to react, but nonetheless powerfully illustrates a Godly man's trust in God alone for his honor.

Verse 8 provides a corollary to the "only" principle. Here David exhorts us to trust in him "at all times." David knows the fickleness of the human heart. By faith he slew a giant and built a great nation, by sight he stole a man's wife and murdered to cover up. The exhortation here is to not only trust in God alone but to do so day in, day out, over the long haul- at all times. We can only do this by God's gracious leading and the preserving grace of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. A lifestyle of prayer is the best barometer of the Spirit's preserving presence and surest safeguard against distance from

God. Thus David commands us to, “*pour out your hearts to him...*” God is not cold and distant. God is not a taskmaster but a refuge. He desires warm and intimate relationship with his people. There is no sin too heinous to confess, no problem too immense to cast on his shoulders, no wound too deep for him to heal, no joy or delight too small for him to share in as we bring thanksgiving and praise to the lover of our souls.

My wife is a great communicator. She spends hours talking on the phone encouraging, chiding, laughing, sharing her life and faith with friends and family. For years I thought it odd that she could have assembled a group of phone buddies that all uniformly had the gift of gab. Then I thought about it some more. What was the common denominator here...? Anyway I ask you to follow my wife’s example. I urge you to dial up the Lord and pour out your heart to him, the minutes are free!

Psalm 62 closes with a masterpiece of perspective. The last 4 verses paint man and his efforts alongside God on the same canvas. Recently World Magazine (which I recommend for getting a Christian perspective on the news) reported on a minor hubbub in Kent County, Maryland. In the courthouse there, which was built atop a former cemetery, a security camera captured a round, translucent, white object, walking up and down a staircase. Creeped-out, the employees started hearing things. But just when people had concluded that the place was haunted, a security expert busted the ghost story. The ghost turned out to be an insect on the camera lens; it had appeared white because of the lens’ curvature.² When we have a proper perspective our often distorted reality undergoes dramatic change. Psalm 62 gives a spiritual expert’s perspective on man and God. If we take it to heart our man-centered lives undergo paradigm shift.

Verse 9 is a perspective buster:

*Ps 62:9 Lowborn men are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie;
if weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.*

Our significance pales before our majestic and glorious God. *Lowborn men are but a breath.* Have you ever watched your breath on a cold day? Have you ever tried to weigh the contents of a balloon? James says, “*What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*” When put in perspective relative to an immortal, omniscient, all powerful God we are insignificant. Even nations vanish in this perspective. The prophet Isaiah puts it this way:

*Isa 40:15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.*

That is why our pride and sense of self-importance are so ludicrous. Perhaps the lowborn recognize their limited significance though most might not admit to being a mere breath,

² World Magazine, August 28, 2004.

but the highborn are no more significant in God's economy than the lowborn! We have a friend who's mother worked as a teenager in a famous ice cream parlor not far from the Kennedy family compound in Hyannisport, MA. She told us that the Kennedy kids used to frequent the place and were generally loud, rowdy, and obnoxious. But every once in a while when things were starting to get particularly out of hand one of them would say to the others in a Boston Brahmin accent, "Remember who you are!" and all would settle down. David has news for the highborn. Their power and importance is a lie. We ultimately have nothing to fear at the hands of the rich and powerful.

Once in a while, when the caped-wonder, Dave Crenshaw accomplishes yet another remarkable achievement, the Session promptly offers to double his salary. This works for us since two times zero is still zero. Likewise David tells us when you put the lowborn and the highborn together in the scale they weigh nothing. Looked at this way I think verse 9 is actually kind of humorous. It pokes a needle into the puffed up balloon of the high and mighty.

This having been said, it is also important to put wealth in perspective. Wealth, too, is a vapor. As the proverb says, *"Do not wear yourself out to get rich. Have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle"*

David puts it this way in verse 10:

*Ps 62:10 Do not trust in extortion
or take pride in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.*

Wealth is a deceiver. It tempts us in the direction of all kinds of evil, extortion, and theft in major or minor ways. We bend the rules, steal time from our families, and wear ourselves out to get that 10% more that then leads to a need for 10% beyond that. Are you on the 10% treadmill? Our wealth is for thankful enjoyment and blessing others but not for enslaving us to a never-ending lifestyle of misery that is just a little bit covetous and a tiny bit corrupt. Paul warns us in 1 Tim 6 about devotion to money:

1Ti 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Jesus reminds us of the rich fool who built bigger barns but was not rich toward God. The night his life was demanded of him it was all for naught. Erin and I were watching a show about the most glorious homes in the world recently. Bill Gates's mansion of technological wizardry in Seattle, a 110,000 square foot home on the beach in the Hamptons, and Donald Trump's New York Trump Towers penthouse where all is real gold and mirrors so he can see the one he worships. Impressive, but as Dave Crenshaw

points out not too cool for him if he comes before the God's Throne of Judgement and hears the words, "You're fired!" Jesus said,

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? (Matt 16:26).

We can not find rest in God alone if we hope to find some of our rest in possessions.

Appropriately David closes this Psalm with a simple proclamation of God's essence.

*Ps 62:11 One thing God has spoken,
two things have I heard:
that you, O God, are strong,
Ps 62:12 and that you, O Lord, are loving.
Surely you will reward each person
according to what he has done.*

These things were spoken and I heard them in the table grace my family said when I was growing up: "God is great. God is good. And we thank him for our food." I was delighted to hear that RC Sproul's family also used this grace when he was growing up. But as he puts it his Grandmother who had a thick Dutch accent would say, "God is great. God is good. And we thank him for our "fud" (*rhymes with good*). This is a summary that even a child can understand. God is strong and great but he is also tenderly loving and gracious.

I think it is glorious that we can spend a lifetime deepening our understanding of God's character and growing in our love and relationship with Him and appreciation for who he is. In 1649 an assembly of Godly men completed the Westminster Confession of Faith which remains as the statement of faith for the PCA. Like David these men had a proper focus on God. I'd like to read their eloquent and somewhat longer summary of God's character:

"There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being, and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving, iniquity, transgression and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

“God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, not deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory, in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service and obedience, he is pleased to require of them.”

Translation:

*“... (Y)ou, O God, are strong and... you, O Lord, are loving.
Surely you will reward each person
according to what he has done.”*

Jesus told about one man who built his house on the sand and when the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house it fell with a great crash. If your life is not built on the rock of Christ it will ultimately fall. But built upon the rock of Christ and him alone we will pass through the storms of life and say with David:

*My soul finds rest in God **alone**;*

And because we stand on Christ the Rock; when the tornadoes, dirty-bombs, and hostage-takers come, may we all proclaim with David our new favorite word “AK!”

And all whose souls who find rest in God alone said: Amen.