

Preaching the Psalms  
Psalm 54 Sermon  
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Imagine the opening scene of a movie, a man is frantically running through the woods. He hears a helicopter overhead and the camera zooms out to show a team of elite soldiers in a hot pursuit. The music continues to build, your heart is in your throat, up ahead you can see another squad of elite soldiers waiting for him. They don't look friendly. The man taps his earpiece and yells loudly "Where are you? Any day now would be good!"

The screen goes black, you hear shots.

A pretty intense situation.

He is surrounded and in desperate need of rescue. There's nothing he can do to save himself. Someone else must intervene. He calls. He waits.

Can you imagine what he must be feeling? Terrified? Angry? Exhausted?

Desperately hopeful that whoever was on the other end of that call was going to show up soon.

Can you relate? Hopefully, you haven't been chased by elite soldiers, but have you ever been in a situation where you desperately needed someone to act on your behalf? You were surrounded. Out of options. Angry and afraid.

This is the backdrop for Psalm 54, our text today. We don't know who is desperately in need of help. Some believe that the author of this psalm is David when he was running from Saul. He had hidden in the desert of Ziph and the Ziphites went to Saul to let him know that his enemy was hiding out in their territory. On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that this could be a Psalm that is reflective of an unidentified falsely accused individual appealing to God. Both viewpoints agree on the fact that the psalmist is in desperate need of God's help. He's on his knees, face to the ground, crying out to God. Let's listen in to hear his prayer.

Save me, O God, by Your name,  
And vindicate me by Your power.

<sup>2</sup>Hear my prayer, O God;  
Give ear to the words of my mouth.

<sup>3</sup>For strangers have risen against me  
And violent men have sought my life;  
They have not set God before them. *Selah.*

<sup>4</sup> Behold, God is my helper;  
The Lord is the sustainer of my soul.

<sup>5</sup> He will recompense the evil to my foes;  
Destroy them in Your faithfulness.

<sup>6</sup> Willingly I will sacrifice to You;  
I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for it is good.

<sup>7</sup> For He has delivered me from all trouble,  
And my eye has looked *with satisfaction* upon my enemies.

Note that there is a pattern of repetition or parallelism in this psalm. Each verse, with the exception of verse 3, is divided into two lines of poetic text, both emphasizing the same point.

### *Display on screen*

<b>Verse 1</b>	<i>Save by your name</i>	Vindicate me by your power
<b>Verse 2</b>	<i>Hear my prayer</i>	Give ear to the words of my mouth
<b>Verse 3</b>	<i>Strangers against me</i>	Violent men have sought my life
<b>Verse 4</b>	<i>God is my helper</i>	The Lord is the sustainer of my soul
<b>Verse 5</b>	<i>Recompense evil</i>	Destroy them
<b>Verse 6</b>	<i>Sacrifice to You</i>	Give thanks to your name
<b>Verse 7</b>	<i>Delivered me</i>	Looked with satisfaction upon my enemies

This poetic characteristic is common throughout the book of Psalms. One can see how the second line helps the reader gain a better understanding of the first line. The psalmist may have used repetition because this text originated orally, and the repetition helped the hearers slow down and understand the meaning. This list is also a demonstration of the timelessness of the psalms. The character of God and aspects of a relationship with God remain the same throughout time.

When you look at this list, what characteristics have you found true in your life? How has God saved you? How has God sustained you? What have you done to give God thanks?

In our time together this morning I would like us to consider three points:

- Psalm 54 is a personal lament.
- Psalm 54 is about a relationship with God.
- Psalm 54 helps us understand living in the “already but not yet”.

**First, Psalm 54 is a personal lament.** The elements of a lament are a plea for help, declaration of confidence, and thanksgiving/sacrifice. In this psalm the plea for help is found in verses 1- 3 where the psalmist declares his complaint and his appeal to God for relief and vindication. He is being attacked by violent men who

are not in a right relationship with God. In verse 4 the psalmist changes his focus from his problem to declaring his confidence in God as his helper and sustainer. In verses 5- 6 he declares what God will do and what he will do in thanksgiving. Before God does anything, the author is already declaring that God has delivered him from his trouble.

Lament is not a word in most people's vocabulary. A situation in my life that prompted a lament was a 2016 cancer diagnosis. Both of my parents died from cancer, so it was not new to my story. It was, however, an enemy that I was powerless to defeat. I would categorize my conversation with God as a lament. There were initial pleas for the suspicious tissue not to be cancer. Upon diagnosis the pleas were for it to be treatable and not to have spread. I would say pretty early in this process, I decided to put my trust completely in God and give Him thanks for whatever the future held. I was at peace knowing that He already knew the future and He had provided for me. God was indeed faithful in providing excellent medical care and complete removal of all cancer.

But that's a chapter from my story. What about you? When you look back through the seasons of your life, can you find a time when you poured out those gut level emotions to God? We are talking about the ugly cry here, yelling, screaming, face flat on the floor before God. How did these scenes end? After your emotions were spent, were you resting in God's faithfulness?

**Now on to our second point, Psalm 54 is about a relationship with God.**

The psalmist appeals to God in every verse. He begins by crying out to the name of God for help. Crying out to the name of God is significant because God's character and his personality are all bound up in his name. The psalmist' use of the word vindicate, a legal term, appeals to God in his role as judge of all. This cry for justice is also reflected in the psalmist' declaration that God will recompense evil to his foes. In his role as judge, God will stand for justice, and He will rule and dispense punishment. It is worth noting that the psalmist is not going to do anything himself, he is appealing to the righteousness and the justice of God. The psalmist is asking God to be true to himself. God cannot abide evil, so the psalmist is asking him to destroy or remove it. God hears, God helps and ultimately God declares judgement. In response to what God has done, the psalmist declares I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

The psalmist' language reflects a level of intimacy with God. He knows the character of God and what God can do. He has a great deal of comfort in expressing his request and his emotions. In the midst of this life-threatening situation, he is confident that God his helper, and sustainer will deliver him. It is an amazing example of faith that he is giving thanks before he has any evidence of God's deliverance. I wonder if we looked back through the chapters of our lives, could we find examples of such steadfast faith in God?

**Let's take a look at our final point, Psalm 54 helps us understand living in the "already but not yet".**

Verse 7 reads: "For He has delivered me from all trouble, And my eye has looked *with satisfaction* upon my enemies." The tense of verse 7 is described as prophetic perfect which means the author is declaring that God has delivered him ***even though*** he can't see it with his physical eyes. Sometimes this is described as the concept of "already but not yet." The psalmist believes that God has delivered him which is the "already" even though he hasn't seen it with his physical eyes, which would be the "not yet". Because of what God has promised, He is worthy of our thanksgiving. He is worthy of our thanksgiving ***even if*** we do not see our deliverance yet. Like the psalmist we should give him glory and thanksgiving and have an unbridled hope for our deliverance, no matter what we see before us. Are you living in this hope? Are you looking at your life through physical eyes or can you see "the already but not yet" through the eyes of faith?

**So, what does Psalm 54 mean for our lives in 2023?**

Not many of us can relate to the situation that the psalmist found himself in. Few of us have experienced running from someone trying to kill us. If the author of this psalm could maintain his faith in the Lord to deliver him, how much more should we in 2023?

I encourage you to think about this psalm in relation to your life:

- Know that God ***can*** save you.
- Know that God ***will*** save you.
- Know that God ***makes things right***.

God is listening and He knows those who are rising against Him and against His kingdom. God is the same now as He was in the time of the psalmist. God will repay evil to those who do evil. We should see, with our spiritual eyes, that God has already delivered us and give thanks.

Take a moment and answer these questions honestly.

- Are you surrounded, and need God to deliver you?
- Are you completely open and honest with God about those who are attacking or accusing you?
- Have you declared that God is your helper and the sustainer of your soul?
- What does your life look like as you wait for God to deliver you?
- Are you giving God thanks for delivering you even though you can't see it with your physical eyes?

And now as we close, I would like to invite the worship team to come to the front. In a moment I'm going to give you the space and time to do a little business with God. As the music quietly plays, I would like you to think about what is it that **you** are asking God to save you from?

Express your heart's cry to God regarding this situation - be raw and honest. Whatever is in your heart pour it out to God. Nothing is too big, and nothing is too small. It's OK to cry, it's OK to be angry, just be respectful of the people around you. After you have poured out what's in your heart, focus on the psalmist's words in verse 4 "Behold God is my helper; the Lord is the sustainer of my soul." Think about these words and focus on what God has **already** done for you.

***Musicians will quietly play background music for 3-4 minutes.***

We will conclude the sermon with a song of praise to God. I encourage you to think about the words of the psalmist as you are singing. Be intentional about releasing the situation and thanking God for what **He's already done**. Be intentional about making your praise for God bigger than **anything** or **anyone** coming against you.

Worship team will lead us in singing:

1. A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing;  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and pow'r are great, and, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.
2. Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,  
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing;  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.
3. And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us;  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

4. That word above all earthly pow'rs, no thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth;  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.

### **Benediction**

Behold, God is my helper;  
The Lord is the sustainer of my soul.

Willingly I will sacrifice to You;  
I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for it is good

Choose to be confident that God **will help you** and He **will sustain you**. The next time you lift your voice to the heavens and yell "Where are you? Any day now would be good!" **know** that He is **with you**, and He **will save you**.