
The Pilgrim's Joyous Song

Psalm 5⁶

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More hurt and harm has been done by the tongue than all the flashing swords in history. Vicious talk and venomous words have destroyed relationships and reputations. Lies and slander are the tools of political destruction. Candidates will take threads of truth about their opponents and weave them together into a fabric of lies. Rapier wit savaging character is admired.

To many, the injuries from words are deep and often crippling. The inner life of memories is haunted by abusive shouting or destructive silences. There are fresh wounds, lately inflicted by friend and foe alike.

Some experience this at work in the daily environment of cut throat competition, vicious infighting for resources and unrestrained appetites for recognition and promotion. From bosses to associates, people undermine your work, question your integrity, attack your reputation or slowly erode your confidence. How is the pilgrim to live with all this?

Some experience this in families where relationships are strained or shattered. We struggle with the long drip of discontented nagging, the frustrating futility of inattention and disconnection, the wearying weight of financial burdens, the trying trouble of child rearing, the nagging fear of insecurity. Angry, frustrated, harsh words, slammed doors – O the pains and perplexities the pilgrim feels!

Some even experience this in church where ministry focus is lost and spiritual nurture has declined. Pastors and people become more focused on what is in it for themselves. Numbers drive decisions. The Bible is not clearly taught. There is little difference between believers and unbelievers in the way they live. Standing for truth and right, for decisive and distinctive reliance on the Word of God brings scorn. How does the pilgrim worship when Christian people pollute their gatherings?

David knew what it was like to be surrounded by falsehoods and enemies.

In the initial years after his anointing to be king, his enemy was Saul. The man whose place he would eventually take hated him with a bitter jealousy. He was at times wooed and at times hunted by Saul. Many of you know what this like...

In the middle years, David's enemies were those nations around him who plotted and fought to conquer Israel and plunder her growing riches. Many a cold night was spent pursuing and defeating those who would snuff the heritage of God.

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In his declining years, David's sons and royal counselors became his enemies. In deep deceit and treachery, David knew the soul tearing anguish of wicked, traitorous sons and scheming friends.

Why do enemies cause so much pain and turmoil? Why do we so often quickly identify with the words of the first verse here: "Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my *groaning*." Let me briefly suggest why adversaries disturb us so much.

There is the *UNCERTAINTY* they cause. The words of slander and deeds of hurt and harm create a sense of disquiet and distrust. We seem to always need to be "on the guard."

There are the *QUESTIONS* they create. So often adversaries cause us to question our own actions and motives. Even worse, they place marks against our own reputations in the eyes of others.

There is the *HARM* they intend. Just like we flinch away from physical blows, so we flinch in our souls against the future harm we can't see but we think is aimed at us.

There is the *UNHAPPINESS* they inflict. Adversaries can do more to rob our joy than just about anything else. Knowing that people are against you and are aiming to destroy you can cause such heaviness in spirit.

Must it only be enemies *per se*, that cause the kind of pain and distress that brings us to this Psalm? No, there are other circumstances and situations that ring uncertainty, questions, harm and unhappiness – great heaviness of spirit.

Yet, all of this adds up to what this Psalm calls *GROANING*. What does the pilgrim do when we are groaning? What did the heavenly Pilgrim do when He was set to groaning?

Our Cry to God

(v.1-3)

This Psalm is a prayer – no, a plea for God's protection. It begins where too many of us are not in the regular course of life, much less in the wrenching conflicts of living.

¹ Give ear to my words, O Lord;
consider my groaning.

² Give attention to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God, for to you do I pray.

³ O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.

Its Earnest Request

(v.1-2)

He begins with an earnest request. His plea is simply, "Please hear me, O God." It is expressed in the verbs: give ear, consider and heed. He wants God to give him attention – turn His ears to the words of his mouth; to weigh his heaviness; to respond to his cry for help.

This cry goes up to one who is King and God. It comes up from one whose fealty is unquestioned – whose loyalty and relationship is expressed when he calls upon "my King and my God." This is not David's ownership of God as though God were compelled to respond. Though these words he swears his allegiance to the High King of Heaven whose audience he desires and whose help he hopes in.

Now does he pray this because God is deaf or distant? No, he prays this because if his desire. God is ever please with those whose faith in Him sees the utter transcendent greatness and holy glory of God and still seeks and pursues and lays hold of God. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. Words like these are the movement of drawing near to God. And he is drawing near to God exclusively. He is not going to man or idols in his need; he is praying to God. So, we must learn to draw near to God with words that express our allegiance and desire and humble fealty.

Its Disciplined Regularity

(v.3)

This man of God comes with a disciplined regularity. In the morning, God will hear coming up from earth the pleading prayer of his people. He asserts the continued commitment to early and eager seeking of God. *In the morning* and *every morning* he will arise to seek God and to sacrifice before Him.

Now why say this? Why is this important?

Because it is the tendency in our fallenness to be undisciplined and irregular in our communion and fellowship with God. In this day, we do not sense our duty and its accompanying discipline to spend regular time with God in His Word and prayer. Relationship with any person at any level is maintained by frequent talks and interaction. If you do not spend time with the Lord, you will drift slowly away and then He will seem distant and it will be your fault. Can you say to God, "In every morning of my life, you will hear the voice of my praying?"

Because it is the tendency in our selfishness to only come to God when we think we need Him. When we are in trouble or have some huge decision, then we begin to come to God. Now hear me: that is what we ought to do. But that special coming in trouble ought to be framed by all the disciplined devotion of a daily drawing near.

Where is God when pilgrims groan? He is as near as our desire to commune with Him. Frankly, God can more pointedly ask us: where were you when you were groaning? Here is where God is when we are groaning: He is at the place of our morning prayers.

Our Confidence in God**(v.4-7)**

Why do we not come to God as we ought? Why do we not pray regularly? It seems to me that people really do not have confidence in God. We think wrongly about Him, His character and ways and thus do not come as we have the privilege of coming.

⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.

⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.

⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Its Defining Roots**(v.4)**

This is what I see here. David's confidence in God springs up from roots of an accurate understanding of God. These defining roots are not only "God is like this..." stated positively, but also "God is not like this..." stated negatively. So for David, in contrast to the idols and false gods surrounding him and Israel, God is different. The idols and false gods revel in wickedness and debauchery and degrading passions. But God is not like that. He does not delight in evil and so the evildoer cannot dwell in God's presence.

This is important for our thinking. If we think wrongly about God, then we are not thinking about God at all. If we attribute to Him what He is not, we have replaced Him in our hearts with something other than Himself. This is critical for as A.W. Tozer has said, "How a man thinks about God is the most important thing about him."

So if we think of God as one who has no pleasure in sin and sinners, then we will think more seriously about our own sin. And we will be encouraged to come to God with prayers that align our requests with God's character, agenda and purposes.

Its Condemning Results**(v.5-6)**

This is what David does. Here are the condemning results of the God who takes no pleasure in sin or sinners.

Notice how this is constructed:

A - The character of God - no pleasure in sin

B - The boastful who do not stand

C - God who hates

B- The liars who will be destroyed

C - God who abhors

A - The contrast of God's man - pursuing God.

So David's adversaries are those who are bragging in their prideful wickedness and whose lives are characterized by deceit and violence. Their ambitions drive them to deceive and destroy others.

And these people are the objects of God's condemnation. Watch the progression here: sinners will not stand before God, are hated by God, will be destroyed by God and are abhorred by God. Let us make no mistake that the cross has procured some sort of benign

winking at sin from God. Yes, He extends a genuine offer of clemency to any who will believe and bow. But understand that you who reject the God of the Bible and act wickedly will one day be condemned. Your present misery and shackles may come because of the evil spiritual master you serve and are enslaved to. But even more, it comes because God has moved with His holy anger against you. This is the time and day to receive His mercies in Jesus and to trust Him and bow to Him.

Its Encouraging Response

(v.7)

This is what David does. David's encouraging response by the covenant love and mercies of God is to come into His place of worship and reverently bow before God. He draws a distinct contrast between those who live wickedly and he who bows worshipfully.

So this is where pilgrim must go when we are groaning. God is in His place of worship. Now, David is in the Old Covenant where the emphasis is on a place and a building and the particulars of a Temple and priests. But we live in the New Covenant where the emphasis is not on a place, but on a people gathered. Those people are the Temple of God where He dwells and among whose living stones deeds of sacrificial love are offered up as worship by the mercy and empowering grace of God.

So the high necessity for regular assembling together is not because of this building, but because of this people and our God. Your absence from evening worship and flocks is a revelation of the priority and place of God and God's people in your life. You have been called out of sin and darkness to live and worship with God's people in God's kingdom. We are to seek God's kingdom first. We do not forsake our gathering together because it is an overt forsaking of God's people and our duty and delight to serve God by serving one another.

Where will pilgrims go when we are groaning? We will seek out God among His people.

Our Conduct before God

(v.8-10)

Because we are surrounded by adversaries we plead with God in regards to our conduct before Him.

⁸ Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.

⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth;
their inmost self is destruction;
their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.

¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.

Its Pursued Righteousness

(v.8)

Our conduct before God is in a righteousness we diligently pursue. That we need leading in righteousness and straight paths before us turns on being surrounded by foes. If we are

surrounded by people who lie, deceive, slander and destroy then we desperately need clear direction from God in paths of righteousness.

What is being sought for is the way of wisdom. It is the choices and decisions step by step that are in conformity to God's character and to His Word. It is clarity all along the way when we take the providence of God and the precepts and principles of His Word and we interface them in such a way that we know what to do. So we bring them to bear on the next choice and cluster of decisions facing us.

Its Contrasted Rottenness

(v.9)

Look at the contrasted rottenness of the sinners surrounding him. Like David, we need clarity in the way of holiness because we are encircled by people full of deceit and lies. The warning here is both in their inward character and their outward conduct. Paul quotes this text in Romans 3 as part of his proof of the universal sinfulness of man. There is therefore a great danger that we will become like them or make choices along the trajectory of their sin and sinfulness.

Its Differing Ruin

(v.10)

David aligns himself and his praying with God's character and purpose. His prayer has in it a note of authoritative announcement. "Hold them guilty, O God." You are who you are and they are what they are so let their guilt be decided and let their sentence be executed.

Interesting to note how David calls for God to use their own sinful deceits and devices, their own plotting to bring about their own ruin. This is something that God has declared Himself He will do. There are the natural consequences of sinning in God's world. And there is the special intervention of God so that sinners become ever more entangled in the web of their sin.

Now why can this be David's prayer? Because they are rebellious against God. The multitude of their sins is evidence of their rebellion. God has moved at the cross to provide the way that rebellious sinners can seek the mercy of God. So in the hardness of these words of judgment, there is still hope and help from our Redeemer. But no person who intends to continue his rebellion, to hold onto the weapons of his warfare against God can sue for the mercy of God. You avoid the condemnation and ruin of these stanzas, you must turn from your rebellion and bow in humility before this great God.

So where is God when pilgrims are groaning? He is not among the rebellious.

Our Commendation of God

(v.11-12)

Stanza one represented our personal communion with God. This last stanza brings us to our public commendation of God.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.

¹² For you bless the righteous, O Lord;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.

Here the structure points us to the thought:

- Call to the Lord (v. 1-3)
- Character of God (v. 4-6)
- Consecration of the Worshipper (v. 7-8)
- Conduct of the Wicked (v. 9-10)
- Confidence in the Lord (v. 11-12)

Its Secure Rejoicing

(v.11)

This is where our groaning in private turns into glorying in public. What a wonderfully amazing thing it is when we can move from our personal fellowship with God into our corporate exulting in God. Look at these verbs. Be glad. Sing for joy. Exult in You.

But this is not the way our groaning feels to us. How are we supposed to move from the heaviness and hardness and unhappiness of our groaning times to affections of gladness, joy and exultation? Do we just do this through sheer will? Is it merely a choice or set of decisions?

No, our affections (emotions, if you will) arise from what we think and what we want. The union of believe and desire produces choice and affections. This is exactly what we see here. Our groaning turns to glorying when we:

KNOW THAT GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND SHELTER. Now I am not talking about the mere outward recitation of facts. I am talking about faith: believing that God is a trustworthy refuge and sure shelter in a way that looks like trust, rest and confidence. Some of you say, "I know God is..." and then act as though it is not so. My beloved, true faith embraces God as trustworthy and able and rests in His promises.

DESIRE THE REFUGE AND SHELTER GOD PROVIDES. Here for many is the rub. We know that God provides a shelter and a refuge, *but we don't want the one He provides.* I can easily illustrate this in a parallel problem: we believe God will meet our needs. But times are hard and things are expensive so we turn away from pursuing the kingdom first and place family, home and work at the center of things. Or, we believe that God will protect us and give us grace to make right choices in opposition and difficult relationships. Then we do not respond to attacks in a Christ-like and God-honoring way, which usual-

ly involves being kind, responding with soft words and doing good deeds for those who attack. We want to protection, just not the one He provides.

KNOW AND DESIRE THE NAME OF GOD; that is, His character and fame. You see, we need to be simply besotted with God. Nothing should matter to us but that God's character and His fame and reputation is upheld.

Its Blessed Refuge

(v.12)

So this is where we land in this Psalm. There is a blessed place of refuge for God's righteous people. He surrounds us with the shield of His favor and watches over our lives with deep love and diligent concern. When we are so confident that this is so, great will be our gladness, our joy and our exultation.

Where is God when we are groaning? He is in the center of that refuge and shelter He provides for our joy and gladness.

Reflect and Respond

Just very simply in closing.

Where do pilgrims go when we are groaning?

WE GO THE PLACE OF OUR MORNING PRAYERS. Will you commune with God regularly?

WE GO TO GOD AMONG HIS PEOPLE. Will you pay whatever price you must in order to gather with God's people?

WE DO NOT GO AMONG THE REBELLIOUS. Do you pursue God's righteous ways, particularly when you are surrounded by evil?

WE GO TO GOD IN THE CENTER OF THAT REFUGE AND SHELTER HE PROVIDES FOR OUR JOY AND GLADNESS. Will you so trust God and embrace His authentic refuges and so be filled with gladness, joy and exultation?

From groaning to glorying, this is the life of the pilgrim. And so it is often the sighing and singing of the pilgrim. Let us together commit ourselves to turn our groaning into glorying as we trust, simply trust our wonderful Savior and Sovereign.