



Preach the Gospel to Yourself

Part 3

When You're Feeling Vulnerable

Psalm 62

David Sunday September 16, 2018

As we prepare for the Refresh & Reset Conference coming up September 28-30, I'm doing a short series of messages this month on the theme of preaching the gospel to yourself. Next month I'm looking forward to beginning a longer series on the Gospel of Mark.

Today's sermon is for those who are vulnerable to danger and attack, misunderstanding and betrayal—and they know they're vulnerable. They feel like they're in a cabin on a beach in North Carolina and Hurricane Florence is bearing down. They can't get out and they can't escape. They're vulnerable.

Even if you don't feel that now, some day you'll realize it. We're all vulnerable. And when we are vulnerable, we need to know how to preach the gospel to ourselves. The Holy Spirit is going to help us with that through the mouth and pen of King David in Psalm 62. Let's worship God together as we pay attention to the reading of His living and holy Word:

¹ For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. ² He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. ³ How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? ⁴ They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. Selah

⁵ For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷ On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. ⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him; God is a refuge for us.

⁹ Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. ¹⁰ Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

¹¹ Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, ¹² and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.

This is God's Word. Thanks be to God.

Let's pray.

Thank You, Lord, that we have the assurance that through the storm we are held. One of the ways You hold us—perhaps the chief way You hold us—is by speaking Your Word to us. We believe these words are inspired by Your Spirit, living, active and profitable for us today. So please, Lord, penetrate our hearts. Speak in 300 different ways as you see the needs of the hearts of Your people today. Let everyone in this room know they have heard from You. I need Your help and I pray for the help of Your Spirit to preach, and for each of us as we listen to Your Word today. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Athanasius, the early church father, loved this psalm. He loved all the psalms, but he said of this one, "Against all attempts on your body, your state, your soul, your fame—and against temptations, tribulations, machinations and defamations—save this soul." This is a great way to describe what this psalm is able to do in our hearts. It's able to fortify us from all the things that make us vulnerable.

King David was writing this psalm when he was under attack. We see that in verses three and four. We don't know the exact circumstances—we're not told. Was this at a time when King Saul was pursuing him in his maniacal rage? Or maybe it was later in David's life, when his son Absalom was mounting a coup to take the throne from his own father? We don't know. All we know is that David was under attack from people who were jealous of how God had lifted him up to a high position.

They made attempts on David's body, attacking and battering him. He says in verse three, "*How long will all of you attack a man to batter him..?*" They found him at his weakest, when he was "*like a leaning wall, a tottering fence...*" They tried to knock him down. They attacked David's status as king, scheming to "*...thrust him down from his high position*" (verse four). And they attacked his soul; taking "*pleasure in falsehood,*" blessing him in their mouths but cursing him in their hearts.

This means whatever any of us is going through today, there's nothing we're going through that King David wouldn't be able to identify with and understand. The scope of this psalm is wide

enough to include all the “temptations, tribulations, machinations and defamations” that could come against us.

Many of you know what it's like to be under attack. This room is full of people who have been betrayed, battered, bruised or beaten, some even physically. There are people here who have been stabbed in the back, cheated, slandered or robbed. There are people here who have been molested, abused, unjustly divorced and abandoned—and much more.

You know what it's like to have your soul shaken to the core. But there is a way to have peace, to rest secure, to be confident that “it is well with my soul.” God gave us this psalm, because He wanted us to see that His people can grow in confidence in Him, even when nothing is changing in our circumstances. I read a prayer by Scotty Smith based on this psalm. He said to the Lord, “Nothing really has to change for Your peace to rule in my heart.” That settled in a good place in my heart when I read that.

Nothing really has to change for God's peace to rule in your heart, even if your enemy keeps trying to bring you down. Even if the person who offended you never apologizes. Even if your abuser blames it all on you, because that's usually what they do in order to assuage their own conscience—they add to their sin by blaming the one they've abused and wronged. Even if the people who have ruined your life on the outside never change, never admit the wrong they've done, never repent, it is still possible to have peace and confidence, resting secure in the love of God and His power.

That's where David rests at the end of his psalm. “God, You have power to defeat my enemies, power to defend me, power to keep me in the storm because steadfast love belongs to You. You are full of covenant loyalty and faithfulness; nothing will separate me from Your love. You will render to a man according to his work. You're going to judge the wicked. And those who do evil to Your Kingdom and to Your people and never repent—they will get their due from a just God.”

What I want us to see and believe and rest in this morning, as God's people, is that nothing has to change in our circumstances for God's peace to rule in our hearts. Nothing ever has to change on the outside for God's peace to always reign on the inside. No matter what's happening around us or to us, it's possible to have God's peace ruling within us. That's why this psalm was written. It was written while David is under attack. It was not written after the fact. Nothing changes from the beginning to the end of this psalm about the circumstances, but we actually do see growth taking place in David's own soul, even in this psalm.

Did you notice in verse two, after he says, “You alone are *‘my rock and my salvation, my fortress’*” he says, “*I shall not be greatly shaken*”? That's a beautiful statement of faith and

confidence in God. He believes his soul is secure. He's saying, "I might be moved, but I'm not going to be removed from Your care and protection." Charles Spurgeon says, "He might be moved like a ship at anchor that swings with the tide but is not swept away by the tempest." We know what that's like—to be shaken, but not greatly shaken as in being ripped away from God. That will never happen.

Notice where he's at in verse six: "*He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.*" Not even in the least degree. His confidence in verse two was qualified: "*greatly shaken.*" But his confidence in verse six is absolute. So we see that he has faith that is alive and growing. His experience of finding refuge in God is strengthening his spiritual muscles. Again, nothing has really changed in his circumstances. It's the same brutal world. It's the same jungle out there. There is peace and rest within his soul.

Why nothing needs to change outside in order for God's peace to reign inside you...

Let's look at why nothing needs to change outside you in order for God's peace to reign inside you. As we think about how that can be in the life of a believer, I want to be very clear—this is not automatic. This is not easy. This isn't just "say the right thing." It is a battle for a believer to find rest in God alone. David was a passionate man and he knew all about tumult of soul. This isn't something he just did automatically. This was the result of the cultivation of God's means of grace in his life, probably over a long period of time, as he learned more and more of the character of God and His ways. I don't want you to think this is easy, or that you can do this without the help of God's people in your life.

We've heard some honest, instructive and encouraging testimonies this summer. I give thanks to Eric and Erika Swartz for sharing so openly and honestly with us, and also to David Woolen. Those are very helpful things for us to hear. We need to be made aware of what our body is experiencing. And not just the good things—we need to know about the hard things. We need to know about the struggles, the suffering. It wouldn't be right for me to ask people like that to give their testimonies and be vulnerable without me also being willing to be vulnerable.

So I want to tell you my testimony today. I want to tell you how this psalm resonates in my heart. I want you to know that when I'm preaching these sermons, I'm preaching the gospel to myself while I'm calling you to do it to yourself. I know what it's like to be downcast. I know what it's like to feel utterly defeated by my sin, ground into the dust, wondering, "Am I going to be able to rise?"

Last week and the week before, these are things I experience in my own life. I hope you know me well enough to know that I am a mere man, along with the rest of you. I am no stranger to the battles of soul I've been talking to you about these last couple of weeks. Pretty much every day of my life I feel vulnerable. I don't wake up feeling strong. So whatever confidence you might see in me, you need to know that it doesn't come from within me. That comes from God, from His Word, from His people encouraging me. It's not within myself.

I remember back in 2010, when Kate was in one of her stays in Northwestern Hospital downtown, there was so much to sort through regarding her cancer. Our kids were at the very vulnerable ages of 16, 14 and 10. They were at home, trying to wrap their minds around what was going on with their mom. I remember talking on the phone to one of my relatives in Kenosha and she said to me, "David, you are being a rock for your family through all this." She was kind and she meant it as an encouragement.

In a way I was glad, because what kind of dad and husband doesn't want to be a rock for his family? That's what we want to be, men. We do. But when she said that, I remembered feeling a twinge of panic. I thought, "If I'm the rock of our family, we are in trouble." You know how merciful God has been to us through these trials. He's kept my wife alive. He's given her strength to overcome enormous obstacles. When she turns 50, we're going to broadcast it loud and wide! This is a warning, because we're going to celebrate.

God has surrounded us with people like you in this church—friends and family—who have been to us what David is experiencing in this psalm. You have said to us over and over again, through your care, through your words, through your prayers, "Trust in Him at all times, David and Kate. Pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for you" (verse eight). You have said that to us. You have helped us draw from that refuge and we're very thankful. Because of God's love surrounding us, we were not greatly shaken. Verse two is true.

But you need to know that I was shaken. Not "greatly shaken" so as to be uprooted, but definitely shaken. Kate's cancer has been the most visible trial of our lives, but you know what it's like. It's not always the most visible things that are the most difficult to deal with. Just like you, there are those other hidden burdens, other darknesses, that we've gone through. Just like all of you have in your lives, we have some deep heartaches, some disappointments, some attacks, some broken relationships, some prolonged stresses. We're all just "frail children of dust and feeble as frail."

We're living in a fallen world with indwelling sin, weakness and frailty, but I was not paying enough attention to my frailty and weaknesses. Maybe I was trying to be a rock more than I realized. In 2015, three years ago, I was in a place where I really needed help. I remember waking

up in the morning just dreading the day—day after day after day. I remember being stuck in a bad cycle of dread and rumination, feeling overwhelmed by stress and grief and fear—even wrestling with anger in my heart. It was not about Kate's cancer, but over some other wrongs I could not make right.

My thoughts were all tangled up and it was like a dark cloud was smothering my soul. This went on and on and on. Thankfully, God has placed people around me who care for me, and I was able to say to them, "I need help." Justin encouraged me to go see David and Shona Murray and he made the connection for us. In September of 2015, Kate and I drove to Grand Rapids and spent about three hours with them.

They made it possible for me to pour out my heart in a way I had not been able to do up until that point. They started drawing out what was in my heart, helping me start untangle some of my soul's struggles. They were assertive, too, and I needed that. I needed someone to be assertive with me, saying, "Here's what's going on. Here's what you need to do about it." They told me—and I did not want to hear this—"On a scale of depression, David, you are moderate, moving toward severe. You need to make some immediate changes. You need to get some help."

Then they became part of that help—a huge part of that help—over these past three years. They have very generously served our church by counseling me, caring for me and Kate. That's why they're coming the week after next. I want you to be able to experience the wisdom, care and blessing I've experienced through this godly, humble, honest and joyful couple, who also know their fair share of these struggles.

I'm grateful to say I'm in a better place today because of their care and counsel, but it's not a triumphalistic thing I'm telling you. I would not say that I'm in a better place because all the depression and all the anxiety is gone forever—because, for me, I can remember a time since my youth when this dark cloud would descend. And really, throughout my life there have been times when it's like these enemies come knocking at the door of my mind. But through growing in God's grace and learning His Word, I've found weapons to say no to those enemies, to not open the door and not let them settle into my mind.

I expect that probably for the rest of my life I'm going to have to be battling these enemies in different ways, through joy and hope in the Lord. But what's brought me to this better place is I've had to be open. I've had to be honest. I've had to ask for help. I've had to learn through lots of stumbling that the only way to live is by grace. The only way to minister is by grace. If my heart is not quiet and at rest before God, I am much more likely to be impatient and irritable, making decisions out of fretfulness and fear—and none of that bears good fruit. And all God's people could say "Amen."

A couple verses that have become precious to me these last two years are Psalm 103:13-14: *“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”* God never expected us to be more than human. He never expected us to be invincible and invulnerable. He expects us to be dependent, to need Him, to rely on Him. He's not ashamed of our struggles. He's not ashamed of our humanity. He's not ashamed of our frailty. He shows His strength in our weakness.

God's love for me does not depend on my performance as a pastor. That's a good thing. He loved me when I was being formed in my mother's womb and when I was a little baby in my crib. He will love me when I'm an old man, when I can't preach, when maybe I can't even read much anymore. He'll love me forever! I'm a child of God. That's my identity. That's what secures me. That's where my hope and joy is.

So friends, I am not a rock. I'm not a rock for my family. I'm not a rock for the church. I am not the rock on which we depend. I am not a rock. But we have a Rock—and I have a Rock. That's what David is talking about here. We have a Rock of our salvation. And when “all around my soul gives way,” let's not pretend it never happens. That's fake. This is real.

When all around my soul gives way
He then is all my hope and stay
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand

[From My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less by Edward Mote]

That's what this psalm is teaching us. Nothing needs to change outside of us in order for God's peace to reign within us. Why is that? Because all the resources we need are found in one single place. Where is that place? In God alone. Did you notice how many times that word “alone” is repeated in Psalm 62?

- Verse one, *“For God alone my soul waits in silence.”*
- Verse two, *“He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress.”*
- Verse five, *“For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence.”*
- Verse six, *“He only is my rock and my salvation.”*

If nothing needs to change outside in order for God's peace to reign inside , then...

Friends, if you're not trusting in God alone, you're really not trusting in God at all. As one of the Puritans said, “If you stand with one foot on a rock and another foot in quicksand, you will just as surely perish as if you had both feet in quicksand.” Just imagine that. If you're going to get up on a rock, you need to get both feet up there. If you've got one over here in quicksand, you're

going down. You've got to stand totally on the Rock. God is worthy of our trust. He alone is worthy of our dependence. He alone is able to support us because of Who He is—and that will never change. Who God is will never change.

He will never stop being the Rock of our Salvation. Just think of the Rock of Gibraltar—massive and strong and stable. Our God is mightier!

Think of the children of Israel marching through the wilderness. They've just been delivered through the Red Sea. God has saved them mightily, yet all of a sudden they're thinking, "Ah, let's go back to Egypt." They're forgetting God's ways. They're grumbling and complaining, then they're thirsty. God says to Moses, "There's a rock over there. Strike that rock and water will gush forth for the God's people to drink." That's what happens—refreshment, life, sustenance. When it says God is our rock, it's saying He is our life. He is our refreshment. He is our sustenance. He is our provision.

Then there's another story later in Exodus. Moses is now on Mt. Sinai and the people are down on the ground making their golden calf with Aaron. God is telling Moses, "You've got to go back down there and bring them the law on these stone tablets." Moses is saying, "I don't want to go down there unless You're going with me."

Then Moses says, "O Lord, show me Your glory." God says, "I will let all My goodness pass before you and I will proclaim My name, 'The Lord.' But as for My face, no one can see My face and live. But here's a rock, Moses. Go stand on that rock and when I pass by, I will hide you in the cleft of the rock, then you'll see My glory from behind."

So the rock is a place of protection from the glory that would otherwise destroy us, so that now we can see that glory. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:4, "*The Rock was Christ.*" He's the Rock. He's the One Who provides refreshment in our famished, sin-sick souls. He's the One Who gives us life. He's the One Who protects us from the wrath of God that our sins deserve, so that now in the face of Jesus Christ, we can see the glory of God and live. That's not going to change, friends. Christ will forever be that Rock.

And He will be our Fortress. What's a fortress? It's up high, lifted up, out of reach of all the enemies. There's a moat down below filled with crocodiles. And along the slopes leading up to that fortress, all the armies of God are there with their weapons, ready to destroy anyone who tries to climb up there and attack the people of God. None of their arrows can get that high. You're in the fortress. You're safe. It's impregnable. You are secure from all alarm. That's our God. He is our fortress.

On Him, David says in verse seven, "*rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.*" Our glory, our honor, our reputation—they all rest on Him. "Lips may bless and

hearts may curse and lies like arrows pierce me.” What am I going to do? “I’m going to fix my heart on righteousness, on Him Who hears me.” I’m going to trust Him to protect my reputation.

Can we talk just a little bit about protecting our reputation? There’s probably nothing we protect more assiduously than our reputations. We want to be seen as competent, credible, dependable, strong, secure, godly, people of integrity. Maybe we want to be seen as cool. You want people to think well of you. Then with a word, or with something posted on the internet, your reputation dies. It’s horrible. You’re publicly shamed. Often the first instinct is rage, which comes from the Latin word *rabia*, from which we get the word rabies. In the words of Paul Maxwell, “When our reputation is attacked, we start foaming at the soul.” Rage. Protecting ourselves.

David says, “*On God rests my salvation and my glory.*” My honor depends on Him. He will be the defender of my reputation. Everyone around me might speak ill of me, but who are men? They’re just a breath (*hebel*, that word we studied in Ecclesiastes). They’re insubstantial. They’re fleeting. Whether they’re of high estate or low estate, put men in the balance and they’re just a breath. Their opinion doesn’t ultimately matter. What matters is that God is my honor. God’s the One Who protects my honor, my reputation. My glory comes from Him.

David is saying this when he was an adulterer and was guilty of murder. He was a sinner. But he’s saying, “My salvation is going to come from God; He’s going to glorify me in His presence. He’s going to lift me high. He’s going to say, ‘Do you see what My grace has done? Do you see what I’ve done in this man? See how he shines like the sun in the Kingdom of his Father? That’s My grace in his life.’”

That will happen to all of God’s people who trust in Jesus. No matter what you’ve done to tarnish your reputation here on earth, your glory and honor rest on God. He will glorify His trusting children.

So humble yourself. Admit your need of Him. Pour out your heart before Him. Let all that’s raging inside—all the toxic things that try to get in there in this fallen world—let it all pour out. No ancient Mesopotamian god would ever have said, “Pour out your heart before me.” They would have said, “Lash yourself. Make yourself bleed.” God says, “Give Me your heart. Tell Me what you’re feeling. Tell Me what’s hurting you. Tell Me what you’re perplexed by. Give it to Me at all times. I will be a refuge for you.”

Listen to what John Piper says: “It is better to be thought worse than you are now and have the Lord set things right in the last day, than to be thought better than you are now, only to have Jesus put you in your place in the end.” It doesn’t matter what people say or do, what they think. It doesn’t matter how much money you have—riches come and riches go. Don’t set your heart on that.

What matters is what God in heaven says of you. He's your Rock, your Refuge. If you find refuge in Him, you are safe. If you trust in yourself, or if you trust in people, or you trust in your riches, and you look for your glory from men and from what you can get on this earth, then you're going to find there's a day when the wrath of God rises and the floodgates of judgment come, then you won't have a refuge. Jesus is the Rock, the only Rock—everlasting, never-failing, our Redeemer, our God.

My soul finds rest in God alone,
My Rock and my salvation;
A fortress strong against my foes,
And I will not be shaken.
Though lips may bless and hearts

may curse,
And lies like arrows pierce me,
I'll fix my heart on righteousness,
I'll look to Him who hears me.

O praise Him, hallelujah,
My Delight and my reward;
Everlasting, never failing,
My Redeemer, my God.

Find rest, my soul, in God alone
Amid the world's temptations;
When evil seeks to take a hold
I'll cling to my salvation.

Though riches come and riches go,
Don't set your heart upon them;
The fields of hope in which I sow
Are harvested in heaven.

I'll set my gaze on God alone
And trust in Him completely;
With every day pour out my soul
And He will prove His mercy.

Though life is but a fleeting breath,
A sigh too brief to measure,
My King has crushed the curse of death
And I am His forever.

[My soul finds rest in God alone (Psalm 62) by Stuart
Townend & Aaron Keyes]

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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