

Psalm 62

“God Alone Is My Hope”

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Ordinary Time

This week as I was reading Augustine’s sermon on Psalm 62, I found his sermon introduction so delightful and also full of insight that I wanted to share it with you. This is how Augustine of Hippo began his sermon on Psalm 62 some 1600 years ago as he preached on the Northern coast of Africa - meditating on the exact same portion of God’s word that we today, though in a different age and in a different tongue.

"All the utterances of God are to us a delight. The sweetness that we find in his word is to us an inducement to speak, and to you an incentive to listen, so that with the help of him who grants us such exquisite enjoyment, our land may yield its fruit. I can see that you do not find it tedious to listen, for the palate of your hearts is a discerning one, which rejects nothing that is good for you, but seizes it eagerly and assimilates it to your profit. I congratulate you on your good taste. Therefore, we propose to speak to you today about the psalm we have just sung."

Listen now to God’s word from Psalm 62, which is printed on the back of your order of worship if you’d like to read along.

Interestingly, this is one of the few psalms in the psalter that contain no petitions to God.

There are, by my count, seven imperatives in the psalm, but each of these requests are addressed not to God, but rather to the psalmist’s own soul, or to his readers - indeed, God is not directly addressed in the psalm at all until the last verse.

As such, psalm 62 is what we might call a wisdom psalm. It lays out for us who read it and pray it a vision of reality — who God is, and who we are, and it calls us to believe what it says to be true - not only the abstract, but true, indeed for us personally today.

Listen now.

Psalm 62

To the choirmaster: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

*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 heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. Selah*

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.*

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you.

Blessed Lord, who caused all the holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear this portion of your word, and to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest these words, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.*

We'll talk about the rest of the psalm in a few minutes, but I want to take some time here, at the beginning of our time together to meditate on this verse, which seems to me carries with it the thesis of the psalm as a whole.

Listen to these words again. Let them sit in your mind for a moment. Ponder them in your heart.

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.*

Yesterday, in God's providence, I was in a circumstance where I found myself driving in the car for about three hours. There wasn't much traffic, it wasn't particularly stressful driving — and apart from one brief phone call, I just drove in silence - no music, no audio lectures, just silence.

And there, in the silence for three hours, I just meditated on this one verse, letting it roll around in my mind, thinking about each of the words and how they hang together, thinking about the importance of the word "alone" in this verse, and the phrase, "in silence," and how much richer they make this statement that David gives us.

Listen to it again:

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.*

That statement seems to me to be a profound confession of faith, dependence, and submission to God.

It is for God *alone* that David is waiting. He is waiting for no one but God. Only God is worthy to be waited for in this way of absolute dependence.

And why does David wait for God? It is because only God can give him the help he needs. Only God can fix what is broken in his life, only God can rescue him, only God can bring the healing that his soul needs.

But how does David wait? He waits in silence.

Waiting in silence is, it seems to me, the ultimate act of submission to God.

Silence is what happens when our words run out, when our strength is fully spent.

Silence before God means that we have given up the illusion of trying to control God or manipulate him or force him to do whatever it is we think he should do.

We're silent because there's nothing left to say, no option other than to commit ourselves into his hands.

What God does is no longer something we're trying to influence.

When we are silent before God we acknowledge that our hope is only in the action of God — not in ourselves, and he will act in the time and manner he alone chooses.

The book of Job is full of a great deal of wisdom that Job speaks aloud as he wrestles with God and with his own soul in light of the desperate suffering he is experiencing.

There are chapters and chapters of Job's words. And I commend them to you as real wisdom.

But in many ways, the wisest thing that Job says comes at the end of the book in chapter 40, where Job finally says this to God: *"I lay my hand upon my mouth."*

And then, of course, it is in Job's silence, when he has finally run out of words, when he stops talking, that God begins to speak.

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.*

David is not just describing his own experience here. He is telling us some crucial, something fundamental about the life of faith.

Indeed, beloved, if you are going to live a Christian life, then you will, at some point, have to live into the truth of David's words here.

You too will need to learn what it means for your soul to wait on God alone in silence - what it means to enter into that deep, deep posture of faith and submission and obedience.

Indeed, waiting on God alone in silence is always, from the very beginning, the kind of faith that God has called his people into.

Think of Noah, adrift on a boat, the whole world an ocean, waiting in silence for months for the rain to end and the waters to recede and the dry land to appear again.

Think of Abraham, walking on that three day journey, Isaac at his side, as they traveled to Mount Moriah where Abraham knew, but Isaac did not, God had commanded him to sacrifice his son.

Think of Moses, tending sheep in the wilderness for forty years after his escape from the house of Pharaoh, forty years of silently waiting to see how God would, in fact, deliver his people from slavery.

Think of Ruth, as she slips into the darkened threshing floor and lies down at the feet of Boaz, silently waiting all night for him to awake and hoping, trusting, that God would protect and rescue and deliver her in that place of vulnerability.

Think of Mary, who, opened her mouth and spoke the magnificent immediately after Jesus' conception, but then waited silently for nine months, trusting that even though she had never known a man, still, what the angel had promised was true - that she would bear the Son of God in her own body.

Think of Simeon and Anna, at the temple for decades, waiting silently for the consolation of Israel.

But of course, all these acts of silent faith and submission and obedience to God point, above all things to our Lord Jesus Christ, for there is no silence, no powerlessness so profound in all of human history as the silence and powerlessness of the corpse of Jesus as he waited silently in the tomb three days, fulfilling completely these words so that we might walk in them too:

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.*

There's something almost frightening about silence in our culture today.

If you go into a doctor's office, or any other place where a group of people are waiting for something, you'll discover quickly how uncomfortable most humans are these days with silence — as evidenced, above all things, by how quickly they pull out their phones.

And I get it. Silence and inaction is disorienting. Philosophers have rightly pondered the terror that can come when silence falls and humans are left alone with nothing to distract them from either their own self, or from God.

For the past three or four years, when we have gone on men's and women's retreats as a church, one of the central features of those retreats have been a time in the morning when everyone is required to go off and find a nice spot to sit by themselves in silence - no phone, no books, no music, no distractions - for a whole hour and do nothing but ponder their own selves and the presence of God.

As you might imagine, the feedback I get from participants on this practice is mixed. Some people love it. Some people find it excruciating or worse. Some people find they just can't do it - twenty minutes in and they're already cheating.

Incidentally, I absolutely recommend actual literal silence as a way to embody the kind of faith and submission to God this psalm describes. If an hour is too impractical or too terrifying, then try five or ten minutes.

I promise you, if you begin to spend even five minutes a day silently alone with God with no distractions, just pondering your own soul and what God is doing in your life, you will very likely discover that Spirit will begin to work on you in ways you hadn't expected.

But of course, this psalm is not only about waiting on God in literal silence.

It's also about metaphorical silence - waiting on God in a posture of fundamental hope, faith, submission & obedience.

Fascinatingly, this reality is actually worked out in the structure of the psalm itself.

For God alone my soul waits in silence — that's what David says at the very beginning of this psalm, and if you read the rest of psalm carefully, you'll realize that this is one of the very few psalms in the psalter that does not contain a single petition to God — in fact God is only addressed directly at the end of the psalm in the last two verses.

Not that there is anything wrong with asking God for things. Not at all. The Scripture is full of that kind of prayer.

But this psalm is designed to expand our vision of prayer, to help us realize that prayer is actually more than offering petitions or even thanksgivings to God - prayer also is waiting in silence before God's face for God to act - and indeed, there is a kind of communion with God that is possible only when we stop asking him for things and simply rest before his face, waiting in silence for him to act.

In fact, this whole psalm is a sustained meditation on the uselessness and powerlessness of human action and flowers in the end with a profound affirmation of God's power and love.

In verses 1-2, David gives us the theme of the psalm - it's central argument.

*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.*

Then, in verses 3-4, David addresses the wicked, pointing on the futile cycle of their violence and bids for power, their ceaseless action that accomplishes nothing:

*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.*

After considering the wicked, David returns to his central theme of waiting on God in silence and hoping in him alone, repeating verses 1-2 almost verbatim, but with one significant change.

Now instead of stating these things abstractly, he is speaking to his own soul directly.

In this psalm, David addresses himself, which is another way in which this psalm should expand our vision of prayer - for prayer is not only the place we wrestle with God - it is also where we wrestle with our own hearts, our own souls.

David writes in verses 5-8:

*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 heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.*

Then, in verses 9-10, David returns to his earlier theme of the futility of human action, human control, human manipulation that he began in verses 3-4 and develops it even further:

*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.*

I would argue that this whole psalm itself is an expression of the statement David makes in verse 1.

David is not literally silent in this psalm, but in these first 10 verses not once has he addressed God directly, not once has he asked God for anything. Instead he has wrestled with his own heart and soul and with the weakness and futility of mankind - himself included.

But all of this silence leads him to a profound conclusion. In verses 11-12, David sums up everything he has learned and he says:

*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.*

Beloved, do see what David has done here? He is actually showing us what the Spirit will teach us over time as we wait silently for God.

This is what we will learn in our silence, in our waiting for God alone.

First, that power belongs to God - not to us, and indeed not to any man. All power, all sovereignty belongs to God.

We learn this in our silent waiting, in our submission, in our faith - we learn the power of God.

But that is not the only thing we learn in that place of silence.

We learn also that to God belongs steadfast love. We learn of God's steadfast love in our place of silent waiting because it is in that place that God's help, God's deliverance comes to us.

It is in our silence, in our patience, in our dependence that God actually draws near and reveals to us his steadfast love - his covenant love - his love that always manifests itself in our redemption.

Beloved, I know that some of you are in a place of waiting silently before God.

And that may feel like weakness, or failure, or that somehow, because things are quiet, that God has stopped working.

But what this psalm shows you is that place of silent waiting is actually a holy place, for it is that place that you will learn, in a way you couldn't otherwise know - the power and steadfast love of God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.