

## PSALM 62

Psalm 62  
Philippians 2:5-11

We are beginning to see it in the press now, to hear it in the media - the demands that the bankers who caused this global crisis be brought to book. And there are people who, probably in conference rather than individually, made decisions which ended up being a risk to two too far. Do they feel badly for what the results have been? No one seems to know. No one, as far as I know has gone public to admit guilt or say sorry. But what of the others? What of those who didn't make the decisions but ended up servicing them - the rank and file of bankers? How do they feel? Some, I know, feel terrible.

We are beginning to hear the concrete realities now: companies shedding jobs - which means people losing work and status, and when that happens sometimes self-esteem goes too. It's not for nothing that these times of recession are also called depressions, because it isn't just stocks and shares which go down: it's people's emotional well-being. Anyone can feel depressed sometimes, when there is good reason, and just now good reasons don't seem far to seek. And at any time we can have personal reasons for feeling low. For some people the feeling comes more easily and lasts longer than for others.

Psalm 62 is the thoughts of someone in deep trouble, personal trouble. It is also the Psalm of someone with faith. It is a Psalm of David, written, most likely, after he has become King, since he refers to himself as a person of prominence. David has faith, no matter what, David always has faith, but the faith doesn't stop the trouble, and at times it has been shaken by it. He has looked to those who are of high estate, he has been tempted even to follow the way of the world, going for the easy options of robbery and extortion as a way out of trouble. So maybe his trouble is financial? Even Kings, especially in those days, could have financial difficulties. That may be a part of it, but also he has been slandered. People have spoken ill about him, and he knows it is not deserved. It could even be that this has happened because in a times of financial trouble he has held fast to the integrity his faith demands of him.

The first seven verses of the Psalm show us David in personal meditation, thinking to himself, talking to himself, even instructing himself. "Be silent before God, my soul and wait..." Being silent can be the hardest thing when we are oppressed by the misunderstandings of others, especially by their wilful misunderstandings. But David reminds himself, over and over in this psalm, that God is not going to turn from him or turn against him. God is his rock to which he has anchored his faith and his life, and so no matter how he feels, he *knows* that he is protected as though he were in a fortress. And so he can be silent before others and be silent before God, so that when he speaks he is also listening to God's response.

In V:3-4 he seems to be addressing his opponents, but this is more of a private thought concerning specific circumstances, it's what he might like to say to them, rather

than a speech which he is making for others to hear, an address to the assailants. He tells himself how it feels: as if he is a dry stone dyke, which has been badly maintained and now would fall over with just a little push - and someone is coming to give that shove.

This is a Psalm of David, so he knows what it is to be a prominent person, how his personal troubles soon become the talk of the city, how publicity makes it all worse. He knows about spins and leaks to the press - even if in those days the press was more the gossip in the market-places than words printed or broadcast. David knows that people who seem to be supporting him, are briefing against him behind his back. (You might think that with a monarchy that wouldn't matter. After all this is the King, not an elected leader. But he is not one of a long dynasty - the first of his line. And he is not king of a country with a long tradition of subservience to monarchy. At any point the people could decide against him. )

In V:8-11 after personal meditation David feels that he has something to say for others to hear, and he turns to speak to the people. What he says is nothing specific about his own circumstances, but a distillation of what he has learned from enduring them and thinking with God about them. The conclusion he has reached is that what people say ultimately doesn't matter because his deliverance and his honour rests on God, who is a mighty rock and, again, a refuge. And so he tells the people to trust in him, at all times. There is never a time when trusting in God is an inappropriate response.

And as he has found it helpful to pour out his thoughts and feelings in his private meditations, so he urges others to do the same: to bring it all to God. Of v: 8 Calvin says "To 'pour out' is all the more necessary considering the mischievous way which we have naturally to keep our troubles pent up in our hearts till they drive us to despair." Modern psychologists would agree with him. We need somewhere we can take our troubles, and honestly acknowledge them. And God is that place, that person.

David goes on to talk about humanity. He talks of those who are of low estate - most folk, then as now. And he says that we are just a breath. But those who are of high estate - and remember that this included himself, are just as insubstantial - just a delusion. Put people on the scales and instead of pulling down and registering a weight, the balances go upwards. Lighter than air. If you remember that, then your own troubles find perspective, and the opinions and insults of others find their true weight. What David has to say is that no one has any weight compared to God. Light as air, though they seem so portentous, lighter than a breath, although they are rich and humanly powerful. But power belongs to God. Without God all of us are like those light-as-air people.

And so v:12 becomes a prayer, a prayer of worship. For if all power belongs to God, David is reminded that God's is not a power such as those opponents of his would value. It is not brute power. No, for steadfast love - hesed - also belongs to God, and the two cannot be divorced. For many people this is self-contradictory. How is it possible to believe at the same time in God's power and in his steadfast love? Is it not more reasonable to say, in the words of one ditty: "If God be God, he is not good; if God be good he is not God"?

For many it is difficult to talk about the power of God and see that it expresses itself with any love in the various tragedies, large and small which afflict the world. So if

God is powerful , the thought goes, then he does not use that power in a loving way.

But similarly it is hard to hold on to a belief in God's love and avoid thinking that it is a powerless love, unable to act in the face of brutality. So how can David, how can Christians say that God has all power and all steadfast (not capricious) love? But if we believe only in the power of God why should we trust? And if we believe only in his love, then how can we hope that his purposes will triumph?

The vision of God's power and love come together in the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. Here the writer (probably not Paul: he's most likely quoting) ponders the mystery of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus had all of God's power, but he emptied himself to share our human life, even submitting to death on a cross. Through that act of self-emptying, he has been given the name that is above all names: or his name, that he already had, has been raised to be superior to all others. This hymn challenges us to believe that true power must express itself in steadfast love: it is not supreme power otherwise; and that steadfast love is ultimately the sole, powerful answer to the needs and troubles of this world.

What a conclusion to come to for someone who began in personal distress! No wonder he ends his psalm by addressing God in worship. After all, all talk about God is just an academic exercise unless it is transformed into worship of word and of deed.

Be silent, pour out your heart to God, and remembering to whom you are speaking, your rock and your refuge, find your distress given perspective and your thoughts turned to praise.