

Psalm 57 "Who is Fighting Your Battles?" May 13, 2018

Well, let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 57. You'll notice in the superscription or the introductory little portion there that says that this is "A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave."

There's a great relationship obviously intertwining between the history books that you have in your Old Testament and the Psalms. Many of them were written with backgrounds that make the Psalm understandable. This morning these 11 verses are a Psalm of praise written by David for deliverance, thanking God for answered prayer. I think all of us could be singing at the top of our lungs when God answers prayer, how exciting that is. But it comes with a lesson, and the background and the lesson is, who do you allow to fight your battles? Do you really trust God with the things that are that important to you? Or do you end up messing with things yourself and then if things work out saying, well, isn't the Lord good? When actuality He had nothing to do with it. You've just been so busy doing it yourself. Who fights your battles? That's really the lesson.

And unlike next week, where we are going to look at Psalm 64, which has no background, it stands on its own, this lesson in this Psalm is utterly found in the background. So as we did last week, I'm going to tell you this week, we're going to spend 90 percent of our time looking at the background and five minutes looking at the Psalm. But it will only make sense once you have the background right.

The word "Michtam" means to engrave, and you find it on a lot of these Psalms. It literally means that God hopes that these things will be carved into your heart, that you won't lose them, that they'll be permanent lessons that will endure. A lot of Psalms are people of God under stress or difficulty crying out to the Lord, and you get to kind of stand with them and watch what happens. The cross-referencing Psalm for this one is

Psalm 108 if you want to write that into your margin, but the background is found in only one chapter, in I Samuel 24.

So let me give you the background so that you can learn the lesson in the context. David, as you might recall, discovered through Saul's son Jonathan that the days of hanging around the palace were over. David had been invited by Saul to play music for him, to serve him, to even go out to fight in his behalf, but Saul quickly became jealous of David's popularity; and not just his popularity, the fact that he was becoming more powerful. And so his determination at some point was, we're going to kill David. That's going to be my intention. And Jonathan, his son, went to tell David.

At the same time, or about the same time, David went home to his wife, and she said to him, "I had a dream last night that men were coming to surround the house and lay in wait for you, and their plan is to kill you by the morning." In fact, if you flip ahead -- flip ahead to Psalm 59, that's the subject of that Psalm -- and we won't be looking at that on Sunday morning -- but David in fear then decided to run for his life. He had about 400 guys with him at the time. And he wants to just get out of the country. As a young guy God's told him that he would be king, but that's all he knows. And that Saul is crazy, he knows that too.

So he gathers his men. He heads out for what will be the Philistine stronghold of Gath. In order to get there, he stops by a place called Nob. It is in the land of Israel. It's where the priest is. It is where he asked for showbread to eat. He is hungry. He asks if they have any weapons. He is given the sword of Goliath, which had been placed there by him. He had killed Goliath.

And then he runs off in his fear to Gath. The problem is Gath is Goliath's hometown. And so he has killed their hometown hero, and he walks into town carrying his sword. And you can imagine how long that lasted. He is quickly arrested. He is prepared to be brought before the king. In his fear, in his youngness, in his lack of trust in the Lord, he says the only way I'm getting out of there is to think -- have them think I'm nuts. I came here, that was nuts, and now I'll act nuts. And so he begins to spit up on himself, he runs headlong into the wall and

busts up his head. And the king takes one look and goes, yeah, get him out of here. And David got out by acting crazy, trusting in his own wisdom rather than in the Lord.

And he heads back to Judah, to the caves of Adullam, which were in the land itself. But he feels horrible. He's a young guy, but he realizes, man, I have let the Lord down already. I've trusted my own devices. I didn't trust in the Lord. And now these 400 men grow to 600 men and David decides, if anything, he's going to teach them that trust in God is to be done by them if they're going to be blessed. These are men that for the next seven and a half years will hang around with David before he ultimately gets to be the king over Israel and Saul is killed. So he begins to teach them. And he says to the Lord, I'm not going to do this again. I am certainly not going to trust in my own devices. You can read Psalm 34 and 56 which cover that whole situation.

He then takes his family and he moves them to Moab. Moab was the hometown of his father's grandmother Ruth. He moves them there for protection. While he is moving them, he is warned by the prophet, whose name was Gad, that he should head for the wilderness because Saul knows where's he's at and he's coming for him. As Saul comes towards David, he stops by the city that the priests had helped David, and they slay 85 priests who worked at the tabernacle, then go into town and kill everyone in town. That's Saul. Because he accuses them of helping David with food and weapons to flee the country. Meanwhile, David heads to a place called Keilah. It is a Jewish settlement. The Philistines were attacking it, stealing their food. We looked at it, you might remember, last week in Psalm 54. David helps them. He restores their strength. It's a walled city. The Lord tells him, these people are appreciative of your help, but not appreciative enough to hide you from this madman who they're afraid of, and when Saul comes here, they're going to point you out. So David is betrayed.

He runs from there back home to Judah, to the forest of Ziph. It's just a national park. David grew up there. He understood what was around there. He felt comfortable. The people that he knew, they were family and friends. Jonathan finds him there and says, hey, I know that my dad's nuts and you're under the gun, but don't worry. God's got you. And He's going to work this

thing out for you. Except Saul was headed there as well. Again, the Lord speaks to David and He said, your own people are going to betray you. They're going to sell you out to curry favor with this madman who sits upon the throne. And so to garner points with him, they said, hey, come get David. We'll keep an eye on him for you. And they do it twice in a number of months, betraying David, one of their own, to a man like Saul. And David has to handle -- we talked last week about how do you handle betrayal as a godly man, a godly woman.

So David's forced to flee again. This time he runs south into the desert. Saul's just an arm length away from catching David before the Lord intervenes and tells Saul there is a fight taking place in another city that he has to go protect, and he has to stop chasing David to go home to fight. And David, man, he gets away, barely.

Well, David continues to go south. He finally ends up in the western shores of the Dead Sea, a place that is called Engedi. It is a difficult place. Someone tells Saul that David is hiding in the Engedi area, and so Saul goes out and he finds 3,000 of the most trained and well-prepared soldiers that he could find. And he literally says to them, "I can't do this," three times. I'm like chasing a mouse. I'm starting to get embarrassed. That something has got to be done with this guy, so let's get him and take him out once and for all.

Which bring you to I Samuel 24. David and his men are on the run. Someone tells Saul that David is out there in the area of Engedi. And they are about to have another close encounter with Saul. Now, unless you're a new believer and you haven't read your Bible yet, or you're an old believer and never read your Bible, I'm sure this is a story you know well. You could probably stand up here and tell us the details. And so it'll be a helpful review for you, but the lesson is clearly on the front, and the front is, do you trust God or do you trust yourself when it comes to bringing deliverance or direction into your life? This is the time, 1 Samuel 24, that David and their 600 men with him now have to make a choice. Before they had no choice, they just had to run and run and run some more, but now they had the choice. They could take the fate of their future into their own hands, and David could be on the throne of Israel by morning, or they could let God handle it. And He has to do so in the light of or in the circumstances when it

looked like the tide has turned. Saul is being delivered to David on a silver platter.

The word "Engedi" means rocks of the wild goats. That should tell you how inhospitable this place is. It's an oasis in the desert. It has lots of fresh water springs. There are hundreds of caves. It is extremely steep paths that run around there. That city or that place has been around since Genesis 14, where it is mentioned for the first time as the Hazazon-tamar, which is what it was called after the people that lived there at the time. If you go there and you climb up to the top, you have this beautiful picture of the Dead Sea down below, as well as the area of destruction of Sodom and Gomorah. For the folks that go to Israel with us, it is one of their favorite places to stop. We go there, to the Dead Sea, to Masada, and to Beersheba. Everything in the desert during that day. We go in March so it's not 125 in the shade, and no shade.

But here comes Saul with 3,000 of his finest soldiers to play this cat and mouse game, and he's been embarrassed and he wants it to stop. We read that Saul comes here, but being a bit older -- in fact, he's quite a bit older than David is -- and it is hot and it is 1,400 feet below sea level. It is just blistering. Saul, I'm sure, had trouble keeping up with those very fit and well-trained soldiers. So as they're hiking up the hills and looking for David, we read in verse 3 of I Samuel 24 that Saul goes into a cave to attend to his needs. That's what New King James says. I think the New American Standard says he went in to relieve himself. King James says he went in to cover his feet. I think if you read the story, you realize that at some point, Saul falls asleep. You know, he needs a break, man. He's tired. He's -- this is too hot. This is too weary. He's driven and all, but he's also an older guy. Saul does, in the Bible, like to sleep while other people work anyway, so it seems to be consistent with the way that he does things.

As God would have it, Saul pulls into the one of the hundreds of caves in which are hiding 600 men with David at the back of the cave. I don't know if you've ever been driving in the car and you just know somebody's looking at you at the light. Well, there are 1,200 sets of eyes looking at Saul, and somehow he's oblivious. There were 6,000 eyes outside waiting for him. But anyway, he's able to get in there and he is able to fall

asleep, while in the shadows, here are these men hiding.

Well, David's men couldn't believe their eyes. Their response to David in 1 Samuel 24 is to say to David, "This is the day which the Lord spoke to you when He told you and you told us that the Lord would one day deliver the enemy into your hands, and look, we can do to him now whatever we want." And David himself was thrilled. A God-ordained opportunity to take Saul out once and for all. This would be the end of running. This would be the end of being afraid. This would be the realization, as far as the guys saw it, of everything that they had prayed for that God would deliver them. To them, the ends justified the means. Look, David, seize the opportunity while you have it. God is doing exactly what you said that He would do.

So David gets up from his hiding place. Saul is asleep. He brings his javelin -- or I should say his sword with him, and he approaches Saul and he begins to cut off his kingly robe, at least a part of it. And as he stands there, you have to believe that David hated this man more than anyone on the planet. I mean, think about so far in David's young life what this man had done to him. He had thrown a javelin at him, more than once, when David was there just to lead him -- do some worship to calm his troubled soul. He had raided his house with soldiers looking for him. He had plotted to kill him more often than he could count. He had destroyed and murdered an entire city. I suspect there was few people that David would have taken more pleasure in just dropping. David was pumped. His friends were shouting amen, hallelujah, praise the Lord. Answer to prayer.

But David stopped. And the only thing that was disagreeing with the scenario was his conscience. I can't do this. His motive: Vengeance. I want to get even. I want to pay him back. But to pay him back suggested he would have to sacrifice the very thing he had been teaching these 600 men that look up to him for months now. Trust the Lord. We got to trust the Lord. We did it on our own once. You remember how I felt and what we learned. I've got to usurp God's authority, who had put Saul on the throne. I didn't put him there, God did. I can't take him away. God has to. Can't do it. It meant forgetting all that he had learned of God's provision, of God's guidance, of God's promises, and then misleading these men who he had sought to raise up in

faith. So passion flowing in his veins, his heart racing, David puts on the brakes in this hidden cave, with this great opportunity to answer the question, who's fighting your battles, you or God?

There's a good lesson in that story to be had as far as interpreting circumstances correctly. And there's a couple of things you should always factor in. Number one is the heart of God. David knew it. His men only knew the promises of God, but yet not the ways in which God would work. Second of all, your motives can certainly clear up for you whether it is the Lord that is leading you or not. Had David listened to his men, he would have done the wrong thing, but he moved upon a thorough understanding of God's character. Paul will write to the Romans in chapter 12, "Repay no one evil for evil. 'I will repay. Vengeance is Mine, not yours.'" David factored that in and somehow that didn't fit with what he was about to do. In chapter 5 of Matthew in the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus said, "Love your enemies, pray for those who curse you, do good to those who do spitefully use you, or hate you, persecute you." And David, though those verses weren't yet written, the heart of God had certainly revealed that God would take care of you. Don't you try to take care of yourself in these matters. And David is training men that are learning, and yet David himself has to now wait upon God's timing.

It's always wise to look at your motives when you are looking to determine the will of God. If it's vengeance, I don't care what the opportunity is, it's not the Lord. If it's ambition or impatience or selfishness, it's not the Lord. I think it was Isaiah who wrote in chapter 2, "Those who believe in the Lord will not make haste." And I watch David put on the brakes and I have to believe that this had to be one of the hardest decisions he'd ever had to make, because it did look like this could be it. It was just that one thing: God put him there. God had to take him away. I can't do it. It's hard when you --most of the time we can just say, "Well, we trust the Lord," and then we say even louder when we're completely in control, "Well, whatever the Lord wants to do," because we're in complete control -- until you're absolutely out of control, and now you got to trust the Lord.

David is a great leader. He puts on the brakes, he turns to his men there in that chapter and he says, "The Lord

forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, in stretching out my hand against him." And David restrained his servants by those words. He wouldn't allow them to lay a hand on Saul. And then they waited for Saul to wake up. They just sat and stared at this guy. "Come on, David. I'll do it. You don't have to. I didn't hear that from the Lord. I'm willing."

Eventually Saul gets up and he goes outside, and outside is a huge army that outnumbers David's men five to one. As Saul leaves -- and if you've been to Engedi, you can literally go down in a valley and up the other side, and though you're a mile away, you can feel like you could still talk because of the way the mountains and the passes are. David waited for Saul to get far enough away before he stepped out publicly, and he cried after Saul, "My lord, the king." Bowed down on the grass. And Saul was startled, and they looked at each other face to face, and he said to Saul, "Why do you believe the men that tell you that I'm out to get you? That I'm out to seek your harm? Look, today God put you in our place. We had 600 guys in that cave with you. You didn't stand a chance. If that's what we wanted to do, we could have laid our hands on you. And I should tell you there were plenty of them who encouraged me to take you out. But I realized that I couldn't lay my hand or stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. Now, father," he says endearing terms, "Father, look at the robe that's in my hand. This is from the back of your robe. You were asleep. I cut these off, so that you might know that it was in my hand, but I wouldn't sin against the Lord. So may the Lord judge between me and you, and may the Lord avenge me for what you've desired to do to me." And then he said, "There's a proverb, Saul. Maybe you know it. 'Wickedness comes forth from the wicked.' Well, my hand is not against you and I'm going to let the Lord fight my battles."

Saul was moved. I'm going to let God stand between us. And realizing how close to death he had become, he begins to weep. He says to David, "You're more righteous than I am. I know that one day you're going to be the king over Israel. You could have killed me. You didn't. What man lets his enemy go when he's got him in that kind of a spot? So, David, when you become king, swear to me you won't hurt my family." And David said, "I won't." And Saul turned then and walked away and David went back to running. He asked for clemency for his family, David

promises it to him. II Samuel 9 and 21 I think are two places that David deals -- in fact, he fed Saul's family at his own expense for years.

Here Saul for the first time publicly admits that David was going to be king. But he didn't really submit to it. In fact, if he really believed that, he could have just handed over the coat and said, here, there's just one piece missing. You wear it now. But he went back to a palace that he should have been vacating, and he went back eventually to a hatred for David that seemed to have gotten worse rather than better.

So David turns back to run. And he runs for the next seven and a half years. And you want to think at least through the fact that as he meets with his guys at night, that someone in the group didn't say four years later, dude, I told you. Four years ago, five years ago, six years ago, but nooooo, the Lord spoke to me. And yet it's the lesson of letting God work it out, even though it's much harder to let Him be the Lord than for you to be in charge. Who fights your battles?

Which brings us to this Psalm. And it's an easy Psalm to understand. There are two stanzas. They are separated by two choruses. Verse 5 and verse 11 are the same. It is the song of being exalted, Lord, above the heavens. Let your glory be seen above the earth. Praise you, Lord. The first four verses in the first stanza, David lays his cares before the Lord. In the last five he thanks the Lord for his deliverance from the traps and snares of someone who wanted to kill him. In the process, 11 verses, David uses personal pronouns for God 21 times. It says clearly, he and the Lord are pretty close right now. He has come through this. I won't act like an idiot again and I'm going to do things Your way. And he got delivered, having done the right thing, rather than, oh, man, what a dumb move I did letting him walk out. No, no. He's sure that he's right where the Lord wants him to be, and so he prays in verse 1, "Be merciful to me, God. Be merciful to me."

I think I've said to you often, and if not, I will remind you again, whenever in these poetic books you find repetition, it isn't that the man stutters or forgets what he's writing. Hebrew repetition means emphasis. So when you see things repeated or escalated -- five things, no, six things, no, seven things -- those are two

practices poetically in Hebrew to add emphasis. Or if you want, it would be like you put an exclamation point behind what you're saying. So you see it here in verse 1. You see it again in verse 7, where David repeats himself out of emphasis. "God, I need your mercy. My soul has trusted in you. In the shadow of your wings I'm going to make my refuge until these calamities have passed. And I cry to you, God most high, to God who performs all of these things. He shall send from heaven and save me; reproaching the one who would swallow me up. God shall send forth mercy and His truth." And then the chorus after verse 4. Hide me, Lord. Help me, Lord. Hear me, Lord. I love this little picture that you can hide under the shadow of His wings.

In the New Testament, by the way, when the Lord speaks to His church, He tells us that our lives are hidden in Christ. I know something maybe you've read over, but that's pretty powerful.

We had a bully that I used to have to walk by his house when I was like six or seven years old, and I wanted to kill that kid, but this kid was way too big. So I'd run by his house and we'd plot to get around him. There was no way I could stand up to him. I just bled, so I didn't. But sometimes my dad would walk me to school, and then I would make faces at this kid. And do one of these (indicating) and some hand signs, I believe, just to tell him what I thought of him. But it was because my dad, I was hiding in the shadow of dad. It's kind of like that here. David -- David is being chased by a powerful guy who rules the nation, and he says to the Lord, "I just want to hide behind You. I just want to stand in the shadow of Your wings." To do harm or threat to you, they are going to have to get by Him. And David knew that. He learned that. That's a pretty important thing to understand if you're going to trust the Lord for things that you could probably mess with and fix yourself, or mess up yourself, but to let go of them like David and go, "All right, Lord. You're better at this than I am."

You might remember on Palm Sunday on the road that leads down to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, it was Jesus with outstretched hands and arms and tears in His eyes that said, "How often I would have gathered you together, as a hen would gather her brood under her wings, but you weren't willing." God would rather you just hide behind

His shadow.

David's lesson is etched in his heart. While we hide our cares in Him and refuse to give up, he'll bring deliverance when He sees fit. In fact, the word "performs" in verse 2 is the Hebrew word "gamar," and "gamar" means to bring to an end or to finish. God, You are going bring an end to this. This thing with Saul, I could have taken him out, would have been wrong, but one day You're going to bring an end to it. You're going to bring me to a place where the God most high will take these calamities and deal with my enemy. Mercy for me, truth for them. And David wisely puts God between himself and the distress.

He prays in verse 4, "My soul's among the lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues like sharp swords. O God, be exalted above the heavens and Your glory above the earth." Imagine being in that cave with David, you and the 600, and one guy has to sneeze, or gets a tickle in his throat, or maybe just sighs a little too loud. It would have been curtains for you. These people that were chasing David were animals. They had no reason to be there except that the hatred of Saul for David had been instilled in his servants. And David prays, "Lord, while I'm living in the midst of these animals, You be exalted. You be exalted above the earth." And David concludes that God would fight his battles. He lets Saul go. He does so against the advice of his mighty men that were learning, and he realizes not by might or power, it's by the Lord I'm going to get out of here. So that was his prayer.

Verse 6 through the end of the chapter is just worship, His worship. Verse 6, "They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down; they've dug a pit before me; but into the midst of it they've fallen themselves." 3,000 guys encircling Engedi, planning to trap David, and look what happened -- they stepped in it themselves. Lord, You're awesome. And thank You, Lord, for your deliverance. I have some breathing room now.

What a lesson it must have been to David's men to let their enemy walk out alive because they've chosen to live by faith and not their own strength. Just see how that applies to your own life, how often you mess with stuff, and then say, oh, the Lord told me to do it. Did He?

Verse 7, "My heart is steadfast, Lord, my heart is steadfast; so I'm going to sing and give you praise. And awake my glory to the lute and to the harp! I'm going to awaken the dawn." David is so happy now that he has walked away and saw God's deliverance that he has a renewed sense of God's presence with him, and he says it twice in verse 7, my heart is steadfast. I can't be moved from this position now. I've proven that God is right, that he's my strength. He's sure of it now more than ever. Now, he is going to doubt it again down the road in the historical books, but for now you couldn't have gotten off this if you thought that you could. "I'm going to awaken the dawn with worship." It's almost like saying-- like the rooster takes credit for the sunrise. I'm going to get up early and sing and the day's going to come because you're going to come.

Look, by the time this Psalm is over, Saul still sits on the throne in Israel in the palace, David is still sleeping on rocks in caves, and he will be there for years. But he couldn't have been happier doing the right thing.

Who does fight your battles? And how do you determine whether God is in something or not? The men with David missed it only because they were new. They didn't know the heart of God. They knew the Word of God. They misapplied it. And David, knowing the Lord, properly applies what God had said. He knew it was wise to leave the battle in the Lord's hands, to look for a door that He would open that no man could shut.

But it really begs the question, who's the Lord of your life? I know we use the word "Lord" constantly, but is He? You can either be Saul, who pushes and shoves, knowing the will of God, you can have it your way; or you can be David's men, you have God's Word, you're just not applying it based upon what you know about Him; or you can be David, where you risk the very things that matter to you by leaving them in the hands of God, and you don't meddle with it, you let God clearly provide a way. And then you can answer the question who fights your battles. You can say, well, the Lord fights mine and here's how I know. It's the same way that you got saved. At some point you got saved because you decided you couldn't save yourself, and you changed sides.