



# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry

**Psalm 56** *To the choirmaster: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. A Miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.* Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me;<sup>2</sup> my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.<sup>3</sup> When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.<sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?<sup>5</sup> All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil.<sup>6</sup> They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.<sup>7</sup> For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!<sup>8</sup> You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?<sup>9</sup> Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.<sup>10</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise,<sup>11</sup> in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?<sup>12</sup> I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you.<sup>13</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

According to a study done by the American Psychological Association, an infant will cry, on average, for about two and a quarter hours per day. Of course, as an infant gets older, the time spent in tears is cut back greatly because the baby grows and matures and also learns to hide the tears. But we all know that even adults still cry. The same study showed that the average woman will cry emotional tears anywhere from 30 to 64 times a year, and the average man will cry emotional tears anywhere from 5 to 17 times per year. So statistically speaking, even though we only have a few infants in the congregation, we have just over one hundred members that have cried over the past couple of months.

But maybe, when we've done that crying, the majority of us probably did it in secret. Afterall, many people like to cry only when no one's looking, and if there are people around a quick brush of the hand will usually try to cover up any evidence. That's sort of how many of us are conditioned as we grow up; crying in public can make other people uncomfortable, it can make you look weak, so do it in secret. But that sure is a lonely thing, isn't it? Crying all by yourself with no one there to empathize, no one there to offer you their shoulder to cry on. Because of this, maybe no one even knows what you're going through. Maybe even those closest to you don't understand your struggles or your fears.

If you feel like I could be describing you this morning, I've got some good news. You were never alone. There's an old song that I'm sure most of you know that goes like this: "*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Nobody knows but Jesus.*" Those words aren't from the Bible of course, but they do carry a message from the Bible. Even if no one else knows your troubles or your fears or your tears, God does know. He keeps track of those things. In our Psalm today, David is all alone. He's crying out to God from the agony of his heart, surrounded by enemies, drowning in his tears. And yet the Lord was with Him, and the Lord comforted him. If you have felt alone in sorrow lately, surrounded by enemies of various kinds, you might be able to relate to David's words here, and my prayer is that you will find the comfort that David found. The theme we'll be considering this morning is:

## **Nobody Knows but Jesus**

- I. He knows the torment of your enemies
- II. He knows the torrent of your tears

At the beginning of many of the Psalms we find a superscript section included that details the author and the tune and maybe a few other pieces of information, and when I copy and paste the Psalms into our bulletins, usually I just leave those out. But you probably noticed that I included it today, and it's because this one carries some particularly important information for us. Let's read the superscript again: "***To the choirmaster: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths.***" So that was the tune that David would have written this to, if you were alive in that era you likely would have known exactly how "The Dove on Far-off Terebinths" sounded. "***A Miktam of David.***" The author is identified, it's King David! The great king of Israel and ancestor of Jesus. But then there's that little word "***Miktam,***" and we actually don't know what that means. But that doesn't really matter, because the next phrase provides us all the context we need behind this Psalm. The occasion for writing was "***When the Philistines seized him in Gath.***"

This is referring to a time period in David's life recorded for us in 1 Samuel 21. If you remember from your Old Testament history, God had anointed Saul as the first king of Israel, but he did evil before the Lord and departed from God in all his ways, and so God sent the Prophet Samuel to the young shepherd boy David and had him anointed as king over Israel. Saul remained king in spite of this. As the years went on, David became a mighty warrior of Israel and a very popular figure because of it, a folk hero of sorts. First, he very famously struck down the champion of the Philistines, the giant Goliath, then he continued to battle against all of the armies of Philistia, and he was a thorn in their side. David grew to be so popular and well-renowned that the book of 1 Samuel tells us that there was a popular song that the people sang, that went, "***Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten-thousands.***" (1 Samuel 18:7) Not exactly King Saul's favorite song as you can imagine, so King Saul became blood thirsty and obsessed with his goal of killing his rival David.

Well, in 1 Samuel 21, that's the situation David finds himself in. In his homeland he is not safe, because his own king and the king's armies are trying to hunt David down and kill him. A man without a country, David takes the quickest path out of Israel that he can, and that leads him right into the hands of the only people who hated him as much as Saul did: the Philistines. And when they saw him, they knew exactly who he was. He was so well known for his conquests against the Philistines and his slaying of their champion Goliath, that even in this age before the internet or photography or mass print media, when they saw him, they said, "***Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?***" (1 Samuel 21:11)

Wherever he turned, David was surrounded by enemies. This is his current situation as he's writing this, so you can understand then why he says what he does in our text, as we read, "***Man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.***" And then a few verses later, "***All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.***" He is literally surrounded by enemies and has nowhere to turn. And so David in faith calls out to God in prayer, it's in verse 3: "***When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.***"

Perhaps the past number of months the enemies in your life have seemed to increase. Some of us have been furloughed or out of work, which doesn't mean that you have an enemy per se, but it sure seems like things are working against you at least. Then we have the invisible enemy, the novel coronavirus, which has certainly been a common enemy of all the people of the world. There are the rival nations of our country that certainly pose a threat to our security here, but even in our own country we seem to

be surrounded by enemies. As Christians, we've seen a fair number of shots aimed against us, people using this virus as an opportunity to make light of our faith, claiming that "*if there was a God, He's clearly not as powerful as this virus.*" So not the same type of enemies that David was facing, but we can all relate in some way. And so, let's take a note from David here, and follow in his footsteps.

In the midst of his very real enemies and threats against his life, David rightly proclaims, "***In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?***" He knew it to be true, that even if Saul found him and captured him and killed him, even if the Philistines paraded him through the streets and crucified him, that was a very small thing. It's just as Jesus later would tell His disciples, "***I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!***" (Luke 12:4-5)

COVID-19, loss of income, unemployment, unbelieving antagonists; these are all the things that can't really touch you. Yes, they can harm you in some temporary way, but even if they take your life, they really haven't taken much from the believer in Christ. Because after that, there's nothing more they can do, because life after death is in the hands of God. And we know anyways from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians that our real enemies aren't any of these things of the flesh. Paul writes, "***For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.***" (Ephesians 6:12) Our real enemies are the devil, our sin, and our sinful flesh. And Jesus knows all about these enemies that torment you. But even these, Jesus had an answer for. He wrestled against them; against the devil, against temptation, against the weight of your sin. And He triumphed over them all on the cross, and now your enemies have become a footstool for His feet. (Psalm 110:1)

And so we can cry out with David, "***When I am afraid, I put my trust in You.***" And this isn't some nebulous god; some far off vague illusion of a source of security that we put some hope in. This is the God who reveals Himself to us as the one who is aware of our enemies and who is more powerful. He is the one who according to Paul "***disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***" (Colossians 2:15 NIV) And as the victor, He proclaims to you that you are in His hand. Jesus says, "***I give [you] eternal life, and [you] will never perish, and no one will snatch [you] out of my hand. My Father, who has given [you] to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch [you] out of the Father's hand.***" (John 10:28-29) You may feel like you have enemies lurking at your gates, and Jesus knows of their torment. But He's already taken care of them. There's nothing that they can do to you.

But even so, you may still feel like crying sometimes. There David was, surrounded by enemies on multiple fronts, he put his trust in God, but these things still kept him awake at night. But then he gives this wonderful, intimate confession of God's grace. "***You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?***" Wherever you are tonight or tomorrow, not only does God count the hairs of your head as we know, He even keeps track of every time you wake up and roll over in the night. Those hours spent staring at the ceiling when it feels like your life is falling apart around you, when it's easy to think that God isn't there because you aren't having that restful sleep, God promises to be right there with you. Just as not a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing (Matthew 10:29), so also there's not a moment spent without sleep that God doesn't know.

David asks that his tears be put into God's bottle, so that God could keep track of every last one of them. And so God does; He knows the torrent of your tears. Your sorrows are not your sorrows alone, because they have been claimed by God and taken up into Christ for you. He's counted and kept track of every last sorrow, not one tear is shed in vain. And God made the plan to deliver you from these things as He promised to the Apostle John in Revelation 21, "***He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.***" (Revelation 21:5) Heaven will be the place that finally is without fear, without anxiety, without enemies, without tears, and without sleepless nights.

It is with the knowledge of this deliverance that David proclaims, "***Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.***" Well, easy for David to say, "***This I know, that God is for me.***" Clearly God was for him, He'd helped him defeat the giant Goliath! He'd been with David as a youth when David killed a lion with his own hands as it threatened the flock that he was shepherding. Clearly God was for David! He'd sent Samuel the man of God to tell David that He had been hand-selected by God to be the next king over God's people Israel. Of course God was for David, this is obvious to anyone who was paying attention. Can we make the same claim? That "***God is for me?***" We can, and we should.

Notice in the last verse of our text, David praises God because, as he confesses, "***You have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.***" In what situation is David writing these things? He is still in Philistia, still surrounded by enemies, still unable to go home because of King Saul and his armies. And yet he says, "***You HAVE delivered my soul from death.***" He hadn't been delivered from anything yet! But he knows that God is his deliverer, that God will rescue him, so he can speak of his future deliverance in past-tense. And so can we speak of our rescue in Christ in the past tense, that God HAS delivered us already into His kingdom. Even if the enemies of the flesh do the very worst they can do and take our lives, yet we have been delivered from sin and death by Christ Jesus. The full and free forgiveness which He won for you on the cross has set you free from the eternal chains of death and instead given you eternal life. There's nothing to fear.

You can also say, "***God is for me.***" David could only say that because God had called him. Because God had said very clearly that David was to be King and ancestor of the Savior, so no matter what it looked like, God was for him. God's called you too. Paul says to the Ephesians that "***God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.***" (Ephesians 1:4) He called you and adopted you through baptism into His family. You can go home and pull out your baptismal certificates and point to them as the proof that "***God is for me.***" There God spoke very clearly that you are His child, and He does not turn back on His word. For your baptism transports you back to Christ Jesus on the cross, where, as He paid for all of your sins, it was as if He was saying, "***I am for you.***"

Keep these things on your heart and minds as you are tormented by enemies, as you lie sleeplessly awake at night, as you drown your face in a torrent of tears. Remember, when you are afraid, you can put your trust in God. What can flesh do to you? God is for you! He has delivered you from the hands of death and the clutches of Satan. He's removed your guilt forever. Maybe you could sing, "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen," but you can also sing, "Nobody knows but Jesus." He knows. He's taken care of them. Amen. "***And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***" (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

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