

ENCOURAGEMENT & EXHORTATION

PSALM 62:9-12 APRIL 4, 2018

We'll begin at Psalm 62, verse 9 this evening.

Top Chef is a TV cooking competition show where a tournament of chefs contend in increasingly difficult challenges under nearly impossible conditions and time constraints. The latest season of the show took place in Colorado, and in one of the final challenges the last 3 chefs were brought to a river, where they had to catch their own fish and then prepare a dish with whatever they caught for 2 judges within 40 minutes. The contestants somehow pulled the feat off. One of them who was short on time utilized a *raw* preparation for her dish. When the two judges came around, the one who was a local expert gave some encouragement to them all for a job well done. When he came around to the raw dish he commented on the presentation and the technique, but then said, gravely, "What do bears do in the woods?" He then proceeded to explain how the water at that particular elevation was tainted and therefore made the fish unsafe to eat unless it's cooked all the way through. The other judge, who had been about to take a bite, turned to him and said, "So...I shouldn't eat this?" "Absolutely not."¹ The dish lost by default. It was an interesting scene of encouragement, information, instruction and warning all rolled together.

As we wrap up Psalm 62 this evening, David will deliver to us words of comfort *and* instruction, with a few healthy warnings along the way. So far in the Psalm, the most prominent theme has been the salvation of God and how stable and secure it is. David spoke, also, about the wicked men who were conspiring to pull him off the throne so that they could seize power for themselves.

Now, in the final third of the song, David will look at these two themes again: The *power* of God and the *plots* of men. The four verses we have this evening are split into two parts, first speaking not just *wicked* men but *all* men. And then the last two verses speak of God. And as David brings this great song to a close, he will not only *encourage* us, but he will *exhort* us. Having given us true knowledge, he expects us to do something with that information and make choices accordingly. He expects us to respond to what has been revealed and to make a choice between God's way and man's.

So, as we move through these final lines, we should be encouraged, but having been shown the truth, we should not leave unchanged. No, David points these words at us and demands that we do something with them.

We begin in verse 9.

Psalm 62:9 - ⁹Surely men of low degree *are* a vapor, Men of high degree *are* a lie; If they are weighed on the scales, They *are* altogether *lighter* than vapor.

Unlike in stanza 1, he isn't just talking about a small band of traitors, but extends his field of view to *all* men *everywhere*. Whether they are people of high estate or low, the haves or the have-nots, the privileged or the oppressed, *all* of them get the same grade in the end: Surely, they are a *vapor*. Now, we took a look at this idea back in Psalm 39, the first song dedicated to Jeduthun. But here David expands the idea to include all of humanity.

¹ <http://www.grubstreet.com/2018/03/top-chef-colorado-episode-13-recap.html>

He says if you piled up all the people, great and not-so-great, all their accomplishments, all their strength, all their genius, all their wealth, if you lumped it all together and got it on the scales of heaven, they don't even register. There's nothing that mankind can individually or collectively do to make a mark on eternity, apart from the intervention of God.

We're reminded of God's message to Belshazzar in Daniel 5. They saw the writing on the wall and here's what the Lord said:

Daniel 5:27 - ²⁷ You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

He hadn't measured up. The man who had more power and more wealth and more prominence than maybe anyone else on earth at the time, got a big red X as far as heaven was concerned.

Now, in this verse we find encouragement *and* exhortation. First, we should be encouraged that the purpose of life is not to see who gets the most stuff or who claws their way to the top of the heap or who is more 'important' than who in the eyes of the world. God doesn't think less of you if you don't have a certain number of friends on Facebook. That's a very freeing thought.

But we should also be *exhorted* by this verse. If we are putting our trust and our hope in human beings and human structures to assure us and take care of us, no matter *who* that human is, we're going to be disappointed. It would be like tying yourself down to a puff of smoke. A ship, using a bit of mist as an anchor in a typhoon. Men are not our hope.

But then there's a secondary exhortation here. Remember who is speaking: David. The man on the throne. As he wrote these words I'm guessing it made him chuckle a little, because *he* was the one man of highest degree in the whole nation. And he's reminded by God that, "Hey, your life on earth is a *vapor*." So, the exhortation for us is to take an audit of how we're expending this life. Are we busy with lots of plans and pursuits that have no eternal significance? Or are we living life in such a way that we can be actively investing and participating in God's Kingdom right now?

Think of it this way: Can you tell me who the wealthiest person of the first century was? Or the colonial era? The 1800's? Probably not. But if I asked, you to start naming significant servants of Christ from those bygone eras, we all could start naming people. That illustrates the truth that David is describing in this song.

Psalm 62:10 - ¹⁰Do not trust in oppression, Nor vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, Do not set *your heart on them*.

Talking to oppressors and thieves, Paul's not really preaching to the choir here at first. More like preaching to the chain gang. But I do love to catch glimpses of his gracious heart. He's talking to the very cheats who were trying to find a way to steal his throne. And here, David calls out to them and says, "Guys, that's *not* the way for you to get to a meaningful, satisfied life!"

There's that old familiar trope in movies and TV shows: The career criminal wants to get out of the racket and join regular society so he can live out a normal life with his loved ones. Of course, he'll just have to do this *one last job* and then they'll be set. Of course, that job is going to go completely sideways. In fact, if you're watching something and a character says, "this one last job," I'd say there's a 90% chance that person will be dead before the credits roll. And we watch and shake our heads, "You shouldn't have done it! It wasn't worth it!"

But you know, it's easy for us to do little versions of that in our own heads and in our own lives. Little compromises. Things we know don't lead us closer to God, but, we think, it'll be ok. We'll work through the system and get ourselves right back on track by way of this little short cut. David would tell us tonight that doesn't work.

Another way we might phrase what he's saying here is this: Living life at the expense of others is not God's way. He's talking about robbery and oppression. Those are sever things. But let's take the idea to a further degree: Taking advantage of people, manipulating people, always *taking* and never *giving*. Those behaviors may not be as violent as out and out robbery, but they flow from the same place. And David says very clearly, that is *not* the way to live life.

But he actually then goes a big step further. It's pretty easy to mentally separate ourselves from oppression or robbery. But notice the back half of the verse: "If riches increase, do not set your heart on them." Here, David isn't talking about cheating or stealing. Maybe your wealth has increased honestly. His encouragement to us is: Material things are *still* not trustworthy! We must not build our lives on the foundation of financial security. Because, as history has proven so many times, we could wake up tomorrow and half our wealth be gone. Or *all* our wealth be gone.

The problem is: Money is attractive to our human nature. It makes so many promises and seems like it can solve any problem. But it's not true. That's what David is saying here. It's not a trustworthy foundation to build our lives upon. Useful, yes. A sure refuge? No. David is pointing out, as Derek Kidner writes, "*absorption with riches...[is] no less perilous than a life of crime.*"² And so, when wealth entices us, we want to remember what David said so that we won't be tricked by treasure. Another translation puts it this way: "If wealth overflows, do not hand over [your] heart." It's a warning and an instruction for us. This idea is carried on into the New Testament, both in the teaching of Jesus and in the epistles.

We're reminded in verses 9 and 10 that the flow of life begins in the trust of the heart. And what we set our trust upon is going to determine the type of life we build and, ultimately, how significant those lives are going to be. In the first 2 stanzas it's been made abundantly clear that a life founded on the Rock of Jesus Christ will be safe and secure and that a life *not* fastened there is vanity.

Now in the last 2 verses, David turns from evaluating men to looking again at God.

Psalm 62:11 - ¹¹God has spoken once, Twice I have heard this: That power *belongs* to God.

David wants to get our attention on two very simple, but all-important truths. The first is: Power belongs to God.

Notice: This is a truth that was *directly spoken by God Himself*. And it's something He wants us to still be mindful of. Remember when the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray"? How does it end? *Yours* is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. *Power belongs to God*.

This should be a constant encouragement for us. God is in charge. Those in positions of power on the earth are allowed those positions by God. Those situations we face that frighten us or discourage us or weigh us down are not outside the reach of His mighty hand. God is able. He is able to make you stand and to perform what He has promised and to raise you up from the dead. He

² Derek Kidner *Psalms 1-72*

is able “to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work.”

But not only does all power belong to God, David gives us part 2 of what he’s heard in verse 12:

Psalm 62:12a - ¹²Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy;

This God of limitless power is also the God of lovingkindness and mercy and affection toward His people. Imagine how powerful God is to spin the cosmos into existence and to perform all the acts of creation and all the miracles and to have the depths of the earth in His hands. Now hear David: His mercy is as great as His power. He is so powerful He can give eternal weight to the nothing vapor of a human life and He is so *merciful* that He accepts people like us who deserve death, yet are granted life through the power and love of God.

The mercy David is talking about here is specifically God’s covenant love. Meaning it is reserved for those who are in relationship with Him. David had a covenant with God, and we do too. Jesus gave us the *new* covenant, in His blood, shed for us. A better covenant established on better promises Hebrews says.

These two great attributes of power and mercy are wonderfully tangled up together. J. J. Stewart Perowne wrote: “*Power without love is brutality, and love without power is weakness. Power is the strong foundation of love and love is the beauty and the crown of power.*”³

And then, after that lovely encouragement, David gives us one more exhortation to think about.

Psalm 62:12b - For You render to each one according to his work.

The song closes with the reminder that we are called to live this life according to a certain standard and purpose, and it’s the standard and purpose God has revealed to us through His word. Now, clearly, this isn’t talking about how to gain *salvation*. We know from earlier that David did not earn his way into the refuge. No, he was led there and God, by His mercy, allowed David, an unworthy sinner, to receive salvation freely.

But the Bible makes it clear that God repays people for what they do. He says to His enemies, “Vengeance is Mine, I *will* repay.” But the Bible also says that God plans to *reward* His people for the things they do in service to Him. Paul talks a lot about it in his letters. And we think about passages like the Parable of the Talents. We receive a lot of encouragement and instruction on how to live life in such a way that will be rewarded by God in eternity.

So, as the Psalm ends, we are encouraged and exhorted. In these 3 stanzas we’ve seen that there is a God of infinite power and lovingkindness who is ready to not only rescue us, but to sustain us *and* to make something beautiful and meaningful out of the little wisps of our lives. Apart from this God there is no hope. But with Him is more than we could ever ask or imagine. We’re warned not to be distracted by the fleeting lies of this fallen world, but instead we must train ourselves to trust in the Lord, hope in the Lord, wait on the Lord and, along the way, we can tend to our lives so that they are growing according to His purposes, and enjoy the supply, the security and the salvation found *only* in our Lord, Jesus Christ, our Rock and Fortress, a Refuge for us, who is coming quickly with His reward in His hand.

³ Perowne *Commentary On The Psalms*