

# Have You Covenanted to Trust God?

## Psalm 56

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church  
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**For the choir director: according to “A Silent Dove Far Away.” A Davidic Miktam. When the Philistines seized him in Gath.**

**Comment:** Before we read the text I want to remind you that the headings of the Psalms are part of the ancient Hebrew manuscripts themselves. These are not scholarly guesses about the context or meaning of the psalms. They accompanied the psalms from the beginning, and so it is important to note what they say. In this case the heading refers to a time “when the Philistines seized [David] in Gath.” You can read about it in I Sam. 21:10-15.

What happened was that King Saul became insanely jealous because God had anointed David to serve as king after him. Saul repeatedly tried to kill David, forcing the younger man to run for his life. David fled to the Philistine city of Gath, thinking that he could hide among Israel’s enemies, but he soon discovered that even there it was known that he would someday succeed Saul to the throne. The king of Gath was considering killing him on the spot to prevent his rise to power.

David became afraid and decided the only way he could escape was to pretend to be mad (crazy). He pounded his head on the gate, according to one translation (or maybe he just drummed on the gate), he foamed at the mouth and let his spittle drip down his face. I love how King Achish of Gath reacted to David’s fake insanity: “Look! You can see the man is crazy,” Achish said to his servants. “Why did you bring him to me? Do I have such a shortage of crazy people that you brought this one to act crazy around me?” (I Sam. 21:14-15) David escaped and hid in the cave of Adullam, where he wrote the following psalm.

### Today’s text

Psalm 56:1 Be gracious to me, God, for man tramples me; he fights and oppresses me all day long. 2 My adversaries trample me all day, for many arrogantly fight against me. 3 When I am afraid, I will trust in You. 4 In God, *whose word I praise*, in God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

5 They twist my words all day long; all their thoughts against me are evil. 6 They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps while they wait to take my life. 7 Will they escape in spite of such sin? God, bring down the nations in wrath.

8 You Yourself have recorded my wanderings. Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your records? 9 Then my enemies will retreat on the day when I call. This I know: God is for me. 10 In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, 11 in God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me? 12 I am obligated by vows to You, God; I will make my thank offerings to You. 13 For You delivered me from death, even my feet from stumbling, to walk before God in the light of life.

## **David's State of Affairs**

If ever a historical person had an excuse to ask, "God, where are you?" that person was David. He was anointed to be king, but it appeared he would never live long enough to be crowned. For ten years and more he was an outcast, a fugitive, running from Saul on the one hand, and from the Philistines on the other.

But although David never hesitated to remind God of his state of affairs ("man tramples me," "many arrogantly fight against me," "they twist my words," "they stir up strife," "they wait to take my life"), he never doubted God's presence, He never doubted God's faithfulness, nor His love ("You have recorded my wanderings," "Are not [my tears] in Your records?" "This I know, God is for me").

## **The key to David's faith**

Why David's faith never failed is simple, really; he was determined to take God at His word. If God said he would be someday be king, then David knew he would someday be king. He believed all of God's promises, those made to him personally, and those God had made to Abraham and all his descendants.

## **The keys to triumphant faith**

1. The key to dealing with fear is to distinguish between flesh life and spirit life. Fear is a natural human reaction when a person's life is threatened. But there is more to a human being than mere instinctive reaction, especially if you are a born again child of God. What matters is how you react to your reaction. When Jesus was threatened with the cross He cried out to God, "Father, if possible let this cup pass from me." That was a natural, human reaction. But then he reacted to his reaction and said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

When David's life was threatened, first by King Saul, and then by King Achish, his natural reaction was fear. But in reaction to his fear David determined to trust in God. This is where the believer should be distinguished from the unbeliever. Both can be made to fear, but the believer rises above his fear and deliberately trusts in God. He takes himself in hand. He talks to himself (that is what David is doing in this psalm). He tells himself he can trust in God, that he can trust God's Word. He reminds himself that God's Word has never failed, that God has never failed and that he does not need to fear. By talking to himself that way he continues to believe and continues to be faithful to the God Who is always faithful to him.

2. But down in verse 12 there is one more thing we need to see. "I am obligated by my vows to You, God," David says. "I will make my thank offerings to you."
3. Do you see from this verse that one of the reasons David held firm in his faith is that he had made a series of special vows to God that he would believe God's Word without regard to personal feelings or inconvenient circumstances. Before his God David had determined to be the kind of man who stands upon the Word of God, even to the point of death.
4. Let's spend a few minutes talking about the nature of a Biblical vow.

- a. A vow is a matter of voluntary obligation: a vow goes beyond mere duty or obedience to God's commands. This is a man or woman of faith promising God something special, oftentimes something specific, out of gratitude for answered prayer, or as gratitude just for Who God is. In David's case, if you look down at verse 13 you will see that he vowed to believe God in all circumstances simply because by God's gracious work in his life he had been born again.
- b. God takes our vows seriously and holds us accountable for them, whether we're talking about marriage, church membership or any other vow we might make.

### Examples of vows

I Sam. 1:10 Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the Lord and wept with many tears. 11 Making a vow, she pleaded, "Lord of Hosts, if You will take notice of Your servant's affliction, remember and not forget me, and give Your servant a son, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut."

And just to show you that vows can also be a New Testament thing, here's Paul making a vow. We don't know what the vow was, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that vows are a New Testament thing.

Acts 18:18 So Paul, having stayed on for many days, said good-bye to the brothers and sailed away to Syria. Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He shaved his head at Cenchreae because he had taken a vow (a Nazirite vow, see Numbers 6).

- c. In summary, then, vows can be attached to a request from God, a challenge to God, even, but mostly they are expressions of gratitude to God in response to something specific. More importantly, vows can be a means of publicly committing ourselves to a deeper level of obedience to God. We recognize the flesh is weak and so to shore it up we make a public vow to do certain things for God, or to be a certain kind of person for God's sake.

### Application

If ever there was a time when Christians needed to lash themselves to God and His cause as tightly as possible, that time is now.

1. On this Remembrance Day weekend it is ironic that Canada is now confronted with the most insidious and dangerous enemy it has ever faced—ever! For the first time in history our governments and public institutions are openly attacking the faith upon which this nation was founded, seeking with all their power to eliminate all meaningful expressions of Christianity, but especially any influence it may yet have over the education of our children. (See insert on TWU)
  - a. Alberta
    - i. Bill 10, which mandated so-called gay/straight alliances in any school where a student asked for one. After the NDP government was elected this was followed by guidelines

that forced schools, among other things to embrace new levels of secrecy and permitted students to live as transgendered students without parental knowledge.

- ii. Bill 24, a new bill which, as you know, takes Bill 10 several steps further, enforcing greater secrecy and withholding information from parents, essentially removing parental influence from their child's moral education, even down to the tender ages of five and six.

In addition Premier Rachel Notley has sworn to eliminate everything Christian from Catholic moral education in their schools. Notice in the following quote that from her perspective Christian morality is evil. "Nowhere do the rights of religious freedom extend to that person's right to somehow attack or hurt others — and that's what's happening here," Notley said Tuesday. "We will not use public dollars to have sexual health programs that deny science, that deny evidence, and that deny human rights" (Calgary Herald, Oct. 24, 2017).

b. Federal Government

- i. Through Bill C-51 the Federal liberals tried, but failed, to remove Section 176 of the Criminal Code, the only provision that protects ministers and churches from attempts to interrupt or stop public worship services.
- ii. But back in June of this year the Federal government did succeed in passing Bill C-16, which means Canadians who deny gender theory could be charged with hate crimes, fined, jailed, and compelled to undergo anti-bias training.
- iii. And we haven't even mentioned the Supreme Court's role in legalizing homosexual marriage and assisted suicide.

c. Parents of the land

- i. None of this should be surprising when you consider that Christian people are giving up on "the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all" (Jude 1:3).
- ii. Without going into detail I will just say that when organizations such as Faith Beyond Belief take a stand for Biblical truth in the Christian schools, some of the strongest pushback comes from allegedly Christian parents. I've read letters from Christian School parents who take issue with FBB's statement on Biblical marriage which reads:

"Biblical marriage consists only of a faithful, heterosexual union between one genetic male and one genetic female, and biblical marriage is the only legitimate and acceptable context for a sexual relationship."

- iii. Not only do some Christian parents reject this stand, they do so in such a way that shows they fundamentally agree with Premier Notley's idea that secular morality is superior.

2. Our response:
  - a. I want to suggest that it is time for us, individually and as the Body of Christ, to renew our vows, perhaps to Covenant together to believe all of God's Word, including those awkward parts that describe God's view of sexual holiness. (Covenant in the simple sense, a solemn, public agreement)
    - i. We cannot pray with power if we are actively denying portions of God's Word.
    - ii. We must ask God to help us see where doubt has crept in and weakened us.
  - b. We must accept that we cannot pray effectively unless we agree (1) that we live in the midst of a spiritual battle with eternal consequences for every soul on planet Earth, (2) that we must openly choose sides and join with the God of the Scriptures, and (3) that in prayer we must openly confess God's judgment on those who oppose the reign of Christ. (More on this over the next two weeks)
  - c. When we do this, if we do this, I believe God will move in response to the faithful, believing prayers of His people. He still saves souls and He is still in the business of casting down the wicked from their places of power.

**Conclusion:** I know it's hard to believe that God still answers prayers so directly and dramatically. Some of you are even thinking, Pastor, we've spent a lot of time today in the Old Testament. I don't think God works that way anymore. Well, here's a New Testament exhortation for you.

James 5:16 The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit.

How is it with you today? What do you think would happen if God's people vowed to believe everything taught in His word and then asked him to shake Canada for the glory of His gospel and His Kingdom. Do you think He would answer such a prayer?