

## The Bottler of Tears

Psalm 56

Studies in the Psalms #57

**W**E turn to another Psalm of David tonight that is characterized as a psalm of lament or a psalm of confidence by various writers. In fact, it contains both. It's a Psalm full of his fears as he laments but it's also a Psalm full of his faith as he expresses confidence. This is probably not the most familiar Psalm to you but it contains one of the most precious promises in all the Scriptures in verse 8: **You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?** God is THE BOTTLER OF TEARS. Isn't that a precious thought? We'll come to it in a moment so let's see how we get there.

### HIS FEAR (vv. 1–2, 5–7)

David opens by expressing the lament aspect of this Psalm at the opening: **be gracious to me, O God** (v. 1). He acknowledges his need for help. Why? He's lamenting his enemies and expressing HIS FEAR. Look at how he describes his enemies: **man**, the singular *'enosh*. He calls this man **an attacker**, again, using a singular (v. 1). Then David switches to plurals: **my enemies...many** (v. 2). He had *an* enemy but now he has enemies. His enemy hated David but then gathered others to join against David. Children, who does that kind of thing? Bullies!

Look at how he describes what his enemies do to him: **tramples on me** (v. 1). The word can mean **tramples** or *pants*; the New Living Translation tries to bring both of these together with *hounding*. His enemy **oppresses** (v. 1). His enemy **attack[s]...proudly** (v. 2). His enemy **injure[s] my cause and all their thoughts are against me for evil** (v. 5). His enemy **stir[s] up strife...lurk[s]...watch[es] my steps, as they have waited for my life** (v. 6). David's being spied on, surveiled, and plotted against **all day long** (vv. 2, 5).

He ends his lament with an imprecation, a calling down of judgment: **for their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples ('ammim), O God!** (v. 7) I've often explained to you that these Old Testament prayers are applied to us by *not* praying against individuals but against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Let me also explain them in another way: they express being exasperated with life. Brothers and sisters, when you pray, cry out for the help of God's grace in all your fears, even expressing your exasperation.

### HIS FAITH (vv. 3–11)

Then notice in verses 3–11 David's fear and frustration is mixed with HIS FAITH. It's not like he prays one minute in fear, then another in frustration, before finally moving on to faith and living happily ever after. No! David exemplified the Christian life that the same saved person feels afraid *and*

expressed faith; feels exasperated *and* confident in the Lord. Listen to faith:  
**when I am afraid, I put my trust in you** (v. 3). He says this with a poetic  
refrain:

*In God, whose word I praise,  
In God I trust;  
I shall not be afraid.  
What can flesh (basar) do to me?*

Look at how he goes on to reiterate this later in the Psalm. Because he trusts in God he says, **then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call**, reminding us of the imprecation in verse 7. But this prayer of frustration is not just about his enemies; it's about him: **this I know, that God is for me** (v. 9).

So he prays out his poetic refrain again in verses 10–11:

*In God, whose word I praise,  
[Then he adds:]  
In the LORD, whose word I praise,  
In God I trust;  
I shall not be afraid.  
What can man ('adam) do to me?*

This summer when we were in Las Vegas Caiden and I went up to the top of the Stratosphere Hotel, 869 up in the air! Talk about faith! I was trusting that engineers and architects really knew what they were doing when they built it! Where's David's faith, children? **In God** the Creator of all things...**in the LORD** who saved from Egypt. There's no better trust than that! We know

this kind of confidence, too. Remember Romans 8. Paul is so confident that he can ask: “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (v. 35)

Who is this **God**, this **LORD** in whom David and we can be so full of faith and confidence? Look especially at verse 8 and that precious promise I mentioned earlier: **You have kept count of my tossings or wanderings; put** (imperative tense) **my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?** Our faith in the midst of our fears is that our God is *the Bottler of Tears*.

Notice *there’s a count of your troubles*. It’s not just that does *keep* count but that he *has kept* (a perfect tense verb) count of them. One writer said, “Many a tear may the godly shed before their trial be ended, when once it is begun, and many uncouth paths may they tread who are forced to fly the cruelty of persecutors, before they find rest.”<sup>1</sup>

Notice *God is he who keeps count*. What’s your trouble tonight? Know the Lord knows and cares. Again, a writer has said:

God hath so great compassion on his servants in trouble that he reckoneth even the steps of their wanderings and pilgrimage, and numbereth all their tears, and keepeth the count thereto, as it were in a register; and therefore every troubled servant of God, when he looks upon his sufferings, **should look upon God also taking as particular notice of his troubles as he himself can do.**<sup>2</sup>

Because of this, we can pray in the imperative tense **put my tears in your bottle**. The image is of a water or wineskin.

## HIS THANKS (vv. 12–13)

What a God! The God who knows our fears, hears our frustrations, and elicits from us faith in his name as the Bottler of Tears also causes us to give THANKS: **I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you** (v. 12). In fact, we give thanks because or **for *you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling*** (v. 13). This is a rhetorical perfect tense, which is used for something that is so certain to take place that you and I can speak of it as if it's already happened.<sup>3</sup> Isn't that why we give thanks for Jesus Christ? He's also accomplished our redemption by his death and we know he'll consummate it in the resurrection!

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Dickson, *Psalms*, 337.

<sup>2</sup> Dickson, *Psalms*, 337.

<sup>3</sup> Futato, 195.