

*Betrayed*  
Text: Psalm 55:1-23  
Series: Psalms [#6]  
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Theme: **God Always Sustains Those Who Trust Him.**

## Introduction

*Betrayed.* Bad things happen. Bad things happen to all people, even God's people. We see this in the Psalms. The Psalms were written as expressions to God of prayer, praise, confession, sorrow, seeking Him, questions and trust. The collection of Psalms served as the hymnal for the Jewish people individually and collectively. It also is a prayer book.

Psalm 55 has several features: it is a prayer of sorrow, of reaching out to God, a prayer for judgment on king David's betrayer and enemies, and an expression of his trust in God. David does not identify the time in which these events took place nor his betrayer and enemies. His once friend and now enemy hurt him deeply.

We can understand that. We too have known people breaking trust, being disloyal and turning against us. As well, there may have been times when we have been the one breaking trust and turning against someone.

How do you respond, what do you do when you are betrayed? Let's walk through what happened, how king David felt and how he responded. As we do this, a bedrock truth comes to the surface—*God always sustains those who trust Him.*

## What Happened.

As we consider what happened to David, we begin with the betrayer's actions. King David's prayer describes the betrayal as an attack as well as breaking trust. The betrayer was joined by others, "many" others according to verse 18.

Look at some of his descriptions. Verse 3, "the voice of the enemy." They were speaking to others against him, spreading their criticisms. All of us have been hurt a times by "the voice" of others, their careless and/or deliberately sharp words. Look back at Psalm 52, verse 2. "Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit." Now look ahead to Psalm 57:4 where David described his attackers as "... men, whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword."

We know how others' words hurt us. We don't always think about how our words can hurt others. Jesus said, "I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). The apostle Paul wrote,

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only  
such a word as is good for edification according to the need of

the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”  
(Ephesians 4:29)

The king’s betrayer and those who joined him didn’t stop with words. Verse 3 continues, speaking of “...the pressure of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me and in anger they bear a grudge against me.” They upped the ante, kept the pressure on David. They orchestrated and brought this trouble to center stage. They hung on to a grudge, an axe they kept grinding and then wielding against him. At the end of verse 18 David tells us “they are many who strive with me.” This group intensified the attack and kept it going.

In Psalm 109 David said that his enemies “...surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without cause. In return for my love they act as my accusers...” (verses 3b-4a). And in opening lines of Psalm 56 he cried out,

“Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me; fighting all day long he oppresses me. My foes have trampled upon me all day long, for they are many who fight proudly against me.” (verses 1-2)

Let’s move from the betrayer’s actions to his character. A number of the king’s descriptions show us something of the betrayer’s character. He, and those with him, created a climate, verses 9-11 tell us, of violence, strife, iniquity, mischief, destruction, oppression and deceit. The last verse describes them as “men *of* [or, men *characterized by*] bloodshed and deceit” (23).

And then there is the very sober comment at the end of verse 19, “with whom there is no change, and who do not fear God.” Despite having gone with David to worship God, the betrayer now does not revere and honor God at all. And, the king notes, there is no prospect that this rejection of God and His anointed king will change.

This character, or established condition of the heart, is the reason for and the source of the attacks on David. It was so disturbing and sad. The consequences not only flooded over David and his loyal friends, but would be everlasting for each one who lived and died without truly reverencing God. In Psalm 64 David again complained to God about enemies. He described them as “holding fast to an evil purpose” and secretly setting traps, thinking they never would be found out (verse 5). Again, the words and other attacks flowed from deceitful hearts, from a character of deceit.

As I mentioned earlier, king David did not name this betrayer. Some have zeroed their sights in on a few suspects based on historical accounts earlier in the Old Testament, but none of those suspects really fit. However, David does give us a picture of this man. The central description begins at verse 12.

“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; we who had

sweet fellowship together walked in the house of God in the throng.” (12-14)

The betrayer was not a foreign foe nor an Israelite who the king knew was opposed to him. Shockingly, the man was one of the David’s closest companions and friends. They had shared good times of fellowship and worship.

Earlier, in Psalm 41:9, king David wrote in a similar way, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” We know, as David did, that the closer the relationship and the deeper the trust, the deeper the wound and the more agonizing the pain.

### **How He Felt.**

*God always sustains those who trust Him.* We’ve read the Psalm, we know our own experiences, and so realize that while God always sustains His trusting people, the feelings in those times can go beyond description. Even so, let’s observe some of how king David felt during this ordeal.

Without doubt, this solid rock, warrior king had become unsettled by this betrayal and the attacks. Look at the second part of verse 2. “I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted.” He is telling us, “I’m lost, confused, unable to focus, wandering around in a fog without direction.”

I remember being in a meeting where an idea that had been forwarded to us was being discussed. One person was quiet and had a puzzled look on his face. I could see he was struggling to make sense of this. The idea came to us from someone he knew, liked and respected. He finally said, “This doesn’t sound like him. It doesn’t make sense. How can it be?” He was, for a time, unsettled by what he saw as a radical change and betrayal of trust.

King David was unsettled. But more than that, a deadly terror descended on him. Go to verse 4. “My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.” “Terrors of death” is the literal reading. So David may be saying he was afraid he would be killed by the betrayer and his fellow rebels. Or he may be speaking metaphorically to express the numbing, chilling to the core, deadly terror. He may well be speaking of both. He was gripped by fear and terror.

The king used similar language in Psalm 18 to describe his feelings when Saul sent people to kill him.

“The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me.” (4-5)

This describes both the literal fear of death and the more general emotional deadly terror that gripped him.

If all this were not already too much, it progresses another step to overwhelming horror. Verse 5. “Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me.” The word *horror* originally had the idea of shaking or trembling. For example, in Job 9:6 we read that God “shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars *tremble*.” So then it was used to refer to shocking, shaking, overwhelming intense fear and pain—*horror*. We see a description of this in Isaiah 21:4. “My mind reels, *horror* overwhelms me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling.”

This transparent self-revelation here in Psalm 55 comes from the same man who wrote,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,  
they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

Also,

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The  
LORD is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread? ... Though  
a host encamp against me, my heart will not fear; though war  
arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident.”  
(Psalm 27:1, 3)

Yes, even strong, godly king David, who stared down his enemies and death in battle, was overwhelmed by horror when his close friend betrayed him.

It is not surprising then that all of this exploded with a tidal wave of desire to run away. Look at verse 6.

“I said, ‘Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and  
be at rest. Behold, I would wander far away, I would lodge in  
the wilderness. I would hasten to my place of refuge from the  
stormy wind and tempest.’” (6-8)

You may be able to identify with this feeling. Just to fly up, over, out of the unsettled, deadly, terrifying, horrifying storm to a place of calm and rest. To be far away from it, and from everyone. To quickly speed away to a place of refuge. This is how king David felt when this disaster of betrayal struck. But he didn’t get stuck there. The Psalm also tells us...

### **How He Responded.**

The key for David, the reason he was not destroyed by this devastating betrayal was that he moved from the shock, through the pain crying out to, placing his trust in God in this horrifying nightmare. Think about how he turned to God for himself. The king did not bottle this up and keep it within himself. He reached out, cried out to God. Go back to the first verse. “Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Give heed to me and answer me” (1-2a).

He was determined to keep on bringing himself and his situation to God until God answered. So, in verse 16, “I *shall* call upon God, and the LORD will save me.” He fills out the meaning with the next lines, “Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice” (17).

He did what Job did long before him. He kept coming to God, talking with God, pleading his case with God. He did not say, “God promised me He would protect and establish me and the generations after me, but now He has allowed this! So much for God! Now I’m on my own!” No. When the days as well as the nights are dark, when it feels like God has abandoned You, when His silence is deafening, keep reaching out, crying out to Him.

The key line in David’s response is the last line of the Psalm, “But I will trust in You [God].” In another time of trouble David told God

“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?” (Psalm 56:3-4)

David was resourceful and powerful, but he had learned long before this not to trust in himself or what he had. Young David did what king Saul and his army would not do, stand up to the Philistine champion Goliath. When Goliath mocked him, David boldly said

“This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands ... the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD’S and He will give you into our hands.”  
(1 Samuel 17:46, 47)

David’s trust in God was based first on God’s word and then also on his experience with God. He had no illusion that God would roll the clock back and undo all the terrible things that happened, nor did he hang his hope of being reconciled with or the just judgment of his former friend. No. His hope was *in God* as the eternal, sovereign, faithful God, based on the truth of God’s word. What was key for David is key for us as well.

King David turned to God for himself and also for his enemies. God preserved his prayer about them in this Psalm. Drop down to verse 15. “Let death come deceitfully upon them; let them go down alive to Sheol, for evil is in their dwelling, in their midst.” Now verse 23. “But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction; men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days” (23a-b).

God did not soften these words and so we cannot. What is going on? Is this angry, self-centered revenge? This is not the only time David prayed like this.

- In Psalm 35 he called on God to fight against those who fought against him, to humiliate them, to bring destruction on them quickly by catching them in their own traps (1-8).
- In Psalm 59 he prayed “Destroy them in wrath, destroy them that they may be no more; that men may know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth” (13).

- In Psalm 109 he called on God to make his enemy’s children fatherless and wife a widow, to let the creditor seize all he has, to see that no one shows him or his fatherless children lovingkindness, that his family line be blotted out (6-13).

We cannot go into this in detail today, but note a couple of things that help us understand what is going on here. First, the *imprecatory* lines or Psalms—imprecatory meaning praying for God’s judgment on someone—are tied to people attacking king David as God’s anointed ruler, not just as a man or person of faith. Back in Psalm 2 we saw that God considered an attack on His anointed king as an attack on Himself. So these calls for judgment are not just cries for personal revenge.

Then too, if you follow this type of Psalm through you will see the threads of sin against God and God’s honor and sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> They are calls to God for Him to display that He is the sovereign, that He does punish those who reject Him, attack Him and His people.

Finally, Jesus declared some strong judgments on the hypocrites of the day, those who cause children to stumble, as well as Judas who betrayed Him.<sup>2</sup> He also told us that God will “bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night.”<sup>3</sup> Then the apostles Paul and John also called for and declared judgment on those who rejected God and distorted His truth.<sup>4</sup> And, one more. When Christ breaks the fifth seal of judgment, as recorded in Revelation 6, the martyrs in heaven will call for holy God to judge and avenge their blood on their killers.<sup>5</sup> So, while we can pray for God to execute justice, it must always be tied to His honor, holiness and name, not a desire to avenge ourselves.

There is one more point of king David’s response to focus on in this Psalm—having traveled this path, looking back, he now responds to others who are going through difficulties. This is the heart of the Psalm’s message to us. Look at verse 22.

“Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”

Yes, *God always sustains those who trust Him.*

God gives us this truth repeatedly through David in the Psalms. It comes not as isolated revelation, but embedded in the fabric of David’s experience.

- Psalm 15 tells us the one who trusts God, who walks in integrity “will never be shaken” (5c).
- In Psalm 37 David encourages us to “Commit [our] way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it” (5).
- And then there is his striking, beautiful testimony in Psalm 62.

“My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of

my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”  
(5-8)

Yes, God *will* sustain you. God will sustain you as you trust Him in the things that are disturbing you, tearing you apart. God will sustain you even though shattered dreams and relationships are not put back together. God will sustain you throughout every moment of your life. Psalm 48 opens by praising the greatness of God. It moves on to praise God for Jerusalem and the defeat of her enemies. It calls on the people, then, to praise and trust God. “For,” the Psalm closes, “such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death” (14). *God always sustains those who trust Him.*

### **Conclusion.**

The hymn *Be Still My Soul* was originally penned in German by a woman in the Pietistic movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was a favorite hymn of Eric Liddell, who is perhaps best known for competing in the 1924 Olympics, but refusing to run on Sunday. Later, as a missionary in China, he was captured during World War II. He taught this song to his fellow prisoners to encourage them to trust in God each and every day so they would not be shaken in that terrible time, to know that God would sustain them until they who had placed their faith in Jesus were with Him in heaven. Whether your path is filled with beautiful flowers or thorny weeds, trust Him. God *will* sustain you.

Enter God’s presence now, thanking Him that He is the sovereign God who is in control, who loves you, who has and will sustain you because you are His child by His grace in Jesus Christ. Confess any situations in which you have not been trusting Him. Bring yourself, your greatest fears and joys, and ask Him to give you peace, to continue to sustain you moment by moment until you see Him face to face.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Psalms 7, 35, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Matthew 18:3-6; 23:13-33; 26:23-25.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Luke 18:7.

<sup>4</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:8-9; 3 John 9-11.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Revelation 6:9-11.

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