

PSALLO

Psalm 57:1–11

The Psalm you have before you is called a song of lament, or plaintive Psalm. Truly, there is a lamentable case set forth by the author, as he is closely pursued by his enemies, who seek his life. The title itself presents several details for our use. First, there is musical direction included in the designation, “To the Chief Musician.” In other words, this Psalm was placed in the hands of the Levitical Choirmaster, **לְמַנְצֵחַ**, *Lammantseach*, probably by David himself, for use in the Levitical Choirs in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:22–27). Second, the designation **אַל־תִּשְׁחַת**, *Al-taschith* (“Do not destroy”) has been understood as expressive of the lament of the Psalmist unto the Lord, that he himself would be preserved. Another possibility advanced by many is that this is the Psalm that was written upon the command of David to “destroy not” the King, Saul, when he came into the cave where David was, to “cover his feet” (1 Sam. 24:1–8). These same Hebrew words were certainly used by David in another, similar instance when, in 1 Samuel 26:9, David said to Abishai his Lieutenant, “Destroy him not” when they came into the camp of Saul stealthily by night; and were it not for David’s command, Abishai would have slain Saul in the midst of his protection detail. Third, the word **מִיְכַתֵּם**, *Michtam*, has been variously handled, but many faithful commentators see it as derived from the word for gold, designating these as “golden psalms,” speaking of the great worth of the thoughts contained in them (Ps. 16:15–60). Fourth, we note the Davidic authorship of the Psalm itself; and fifth, we add certain historical detail to the time of its authorship, when David fled from Saul in the cave. Hear William S. Plumer on the witness of the titles: “The titles of the several Psalms (Hengstenberg calls them superscriptions; others, inscriptions) are as old as the Psalms themselves, being always found in the Hebrew. They were doubtless put there by divine authority.”¹ Allow also this from J.A. Alexander: “This is not a mere inscription, but a part of the text and inseparable from it, so far as we can trace its history. It was an ancient usage, both among classical and oriental writers, for the author to introduce his own name into the first sentence of his composition. The titles of the psalms ought, therefore, not to have been printed in a different type, or as something added to the text, which has led some editors to omit them altogether. In all Hebrew manuscripts they bear the same re-

lation to the body of the psalm, that the inscriptions in the prophet’s or in Paul’s epistles bear to the substance of the composition. In the case before us, as in every other, the inscription is in perfect keeping with the psalm itself, as well as with the parallel history.”²

In the metrical translation you have before you, a few notes will be of interest. Although the Authorized Version (AV) translates the first petition of the Psalmist as “be merciful,” the word used has more the idea of grace. It is the same word from which we derive the name Johanan, or “God be gracious.” This is reflected in the metrical translation. Also in the first verse we have departed from the AV in bringing the same Hebrew word for taking refuge together in the ideas of shelter and refuge, rather than the AV’s trusting and refuge. In the third verse we have moved away from the AV’s “swallow me up,” translating it instead as “strive with me,” seeing that the original uses a word that speaks of a wild beast panting after a prey. In verse four the Psalmist speaks of “them that are set of fire” (AV). The Hebrew word used here brings out an interesting connection between swords, fire, and devouring. To the ancient mind, a sword would devour, but so also would a flame. In fact, we might note the resemblance in some ways that a sword has to a flame in appearance. So the word used here is the word for devouring, or consuming, either by sword or flame. Hence, the AV translates this word as “men who are set on fire” picturing very vividly their propensity to destroy, or to devour. See also Psalm 83:15, 97:3, and 106:18, and note that while the fire in these instances is kindled, that it is for the purpose of the destruction of others. So these men who are “set on fire” in the Psalm before us seek to devour the Psalmist as fire. The word translated as “fixed” in verse seven we have not changed, because it renders the sense of the original and its wide semantic range to be sure, steadfast, prepared, trustworthy, etc. When the Psalmist declares that his heart is fixed he is communicating that no matter what persecution, affliction, or other worldly trial that comes, his heart remains steadfast, trusting in the Lord, such that he cannot be moved from off of that mooring. Truly, this is a supernatural faith he describes, being a gift from God. (Eph. 2:8–10)

It was the aim in this, our tenth Psallo offering, to look at a Psalm with a decidedly devotional aspect. Psalm 57 presents to us a man who is pursued by his enemy, an enemy that has all the resources of a king at his disposal, and is not at all hesitant

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1. William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1867) 19.

2. J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852) 21.

of the church is not the answer to the social transformation approach to ecclesial ministry, though some have made this argument. For example, PCA Pastor Charles Dunahoo writes,

The marks of the true church are not seen in the starting of hospitals, or running shelters for the homeless, or picketing or lobbying for social justice. While those may be things that Christians should do and support, that does not equate with defining the mission of the church. Proclamation, witness, and disciple making best define the church's mission. Those must have priority and if some of the other things suggested above are included in the church's life, referring to the institutional church, they must be justified as supporting its primary mission of disciple-making ... The challenge for church leadership ... is to keep the main thing the church's main thing, and what is that? Making disciples, preaching Christ and him crucified, equipping the saints for their work in ministry both in and out of the church.⁴⁴

Again, *leitourgia* is strangely missing from these remarks as it is in Redeemer's mission statement. Surely, no church in the PCA has eliminated *leitourgia* from its understanding of ministry, yet there are some who centralize or absolutize some other form of ministry (such as mercy ministry or evangelism), and this will ultimately reorient them away from their primary calling.

By exploring the liturgical nature of the church, the liturgical nature of the office of believer and the liturgical nature of pastoral ministry, we have demonstrated that all ecclesial ministry is *leitourgia*. Worship is the foundation of all ministry and the fount from which all ministry flows. We have further demonstrated the inseparable relationship between ecclesiology and ministry. What the church *is* determines what the church *does*. Ecclesiology and ministry are mutually formative. Hence, the ministry of the church must have the same nature and orientation as the church itself. A liturgically oriented theology of ministry is entirely consistent with Reformed ecclesiology. It is a ministry that is in keeping with the true nature of the church as a covenantal and eschatological entity. For a church to be truly Reformed, it needs a theology of ministry that is explicitly and undeniably consistent with Reformed ecclesiology. It must have a ministry that is inherently and pervasively *leitourgia*, for the chief end of the church and of every act of ministry is to glorify God.■

44. <http://www.pcacdm.org/what-is-the-mission-of-the-church-making-sense-of-social-justice-shalom-and-the-great-commission/>

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different episodes (for instance, the revolutionary war) when Presbyterians were following the culture rather than leading. And that may be the besetting sin of mainline Presbyterianism—namely, haunted by the fear of engaging in sectarian or intolerant modes of Christian expression, they suppressed the ideal of faithfulness for the strategy of having a place at American culture's table. Longfield suggests that this strategy was ultimately a failure. However, he also backs away from calling it such. For that reason, his book on Presbyterians and American culture will console mainline Presbyterians about the good old days of cultural prominence and remind confessional Presbyterians of worldliness' dangers.■

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to make use of those resources, bending them all in service of David's destruction. David is keenly aware, as he told Jonathan his confidant, that "...truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." (1 Sam. 20:3) He has been hotly pursued by Saul, and certainly this was not his expectation when Samuel poured the anointing oil upon him, by the Word of the Lord, anointing him to be the next king, in the room of Saul. He has dwelt in forests, caves, in the land of the enemies of Israel, and away from the public worship of God, which as the 10th generation from Pharez was a special grief to him (Deut. 23:2; Ruth 4:18–22), which is seen in many of David's Psalms (e.g. Pss. 26:8, 27:4, 63:1–3, 68:24, to reverence but a few). But in the midst of all of this David remains fixed upon God and His promises, steadfast and unmoved. He declares that he will take refuge in God until these afflictions are over. Note that he has an unshakeable hope—that wonderful word "until"! There is an end to affliction, and there is a refuge during affliction. The refuge is established so that we might be able to bear up under the affliction, and the end of the affliction is declared so that we might continue in hope, fixed and steadfast upon the promises and Covenant of God Himself, and in Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea, and amen (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:20). This is no mental sleight-of-hand, no pretense, and no eastern-mystical paradox that good is really bad, and bad is really good, etc. This is a very human difficulty, and a very human response, from one who has a heart of faith, and looks to Christ for salvation.

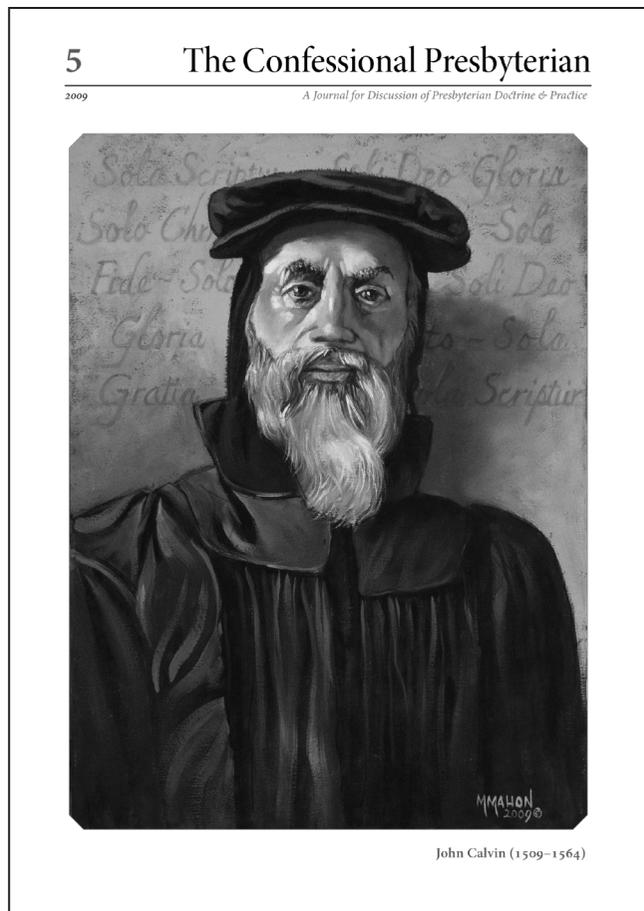
As such, it is an example to all sufferers in the Lord. Note David's confidence: God shall send forth his mercy and truth (vv 3; 10). "Mercy and Truth" is a shorthand Old Testament phrase denoting the saints' understanding of the Gospel itself. The mercy is that covenant fidelity, faithfulness of God to all His promises in Christ Jesus. The truth spoken of is the truth of His Word, the proclamations of what God will do for His people in forgiveness, mercy, favor, grace, provision,

etc. The truth of God is that He will not pretend—He knows intimately the failing and sin of His people, and will always deal with them according to His truth. They need a Savior, He will provide one. They need forgiveness; He will provide that forgiveness in Christ. David’s confidence extends also to protection from his enemies, and to their final destruction as God rises up to defend His anointed, by causing them who lay snares for his people to catch only themselves.

Finally, we have the faithful response of David: “I will sing and give praise.” Several times in this Psalm David declares, under the inspiration of God’s Spirit, that he will sing, give

praise, and exalt the Lord, using all the lawful tools at his disposal. What an encouragement to the people of God of all ages to give their strength in the praise of their God! We too are the objects of the enemy, and of his propensity to devour. We too have taken refuge under the shadow of the wings of Christ, in the shadow of His cross. We too are often the objects of the spears and arrows of the tongue of the wicked. Let us then, with David, use all means to affix our hearts, to open our mouths in strength to praise Him, and in these and other ways, to take our “refuge, until these calamities be over-past.”

Todd L. RUDELL ■



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Psalm 57:1-11

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David,
when he fled from Saul in the cave.

Kha'Neini Elohim

Todd L. Ruddell

¹ To me God be gra - cious, gra - cious un - to me be,
² I will un - to God cry - out un - to God most High
 God His lov - ing - kind - ness and His Truth shall send forth;
⁵ Be Thou lift - ed up O God a - bove the heav - ens
⁷ Fix - ed is my heart O God my heart is fix - ed
⁹ Lord I'll praise thee 'mong the peo - ples and the tribes, ¹⁰ for

This be - cause, my soul doth ref - uge take in Thee:
 For He doth bring to pass *all things* un - to me
⁴ Li - ons with my soul dwells pros - trate I'm be - fore
 And Thy glo - ry be high o - ver all the earth
 I will sing, I will praise. ⁸ Glo - ry - mine a - wake
 Great's thy mer - cy and truth a - bove clouds and skies

Yea un - der the shel - ter of thy *great* wings I will
³ He shall send from heav'n and help send un - to me; from
 Sons of men de - vour - ing spears and ar - rows they, their
⁶ For my steps a net they've set; my soul's bow'd down; they've
 Wake up Psal - ter - y and rous - ed be the harp; and
¹¹ Thou shalt a - bove heav'ns be ex - alt - ed O God, ad -

Safe - ly rest un - til these dan - gers are pass'd by.
 The re - proach, of the one who would strive with me.
 Teeth have made, and their tongues as sharp swords wield they.
 A pit digg'd 'fore me in - to which they've fall'n down.
 I my - self shall be rais'd when the day doth start.
 vanc - ed be Thy glo - ry 'bove all earth a - broad.