

“Thou Hast Given a Banner”

Psalm 60

The is the last of what are called the “Michtam” psalms, named that because of the word in the superscription. There are five other psalms with that in the superscription: 16, 56-59. I made this observation when we studied Psalm 16: “It is not clear what the title means – the King James’ translators marginal note translates the word as “a golden psalm,” as is the view of numerous other scholars of Hebrew. I will take the view that it is dealing with a matter too deep for us to know completely, yet precious as gold to us, as much as we do understand. It is considered by some to refer to prayer and meditation, which is a key to understanding the psalms that bear this name.

This has one of the longest historical comments of any of the psalms and it refers to an occasion recorded in 2 Samuel 8 (vs. 3-14) and 1 Chronicles 18:12-13. When you compare the superscription with 2 Samuel 8 and 1 Chronicles 18, you’ll see the same battles reported but with slightly different emphases. One text attributes the victory to David as king, another to Abishai who led the charge, and this psalm to Joab, the army’s commander. Each account highlights a different role in the victory, but all agree that it was God who gave it. Even the numbers – 12,000 here and 18,000 in the historical books – can be understood as two stages of the conflict or as the way ancient writers rounded figures differently. The main point is clear: Israel was in crisis, but God delivered them.

In Bible times, a “banner” wasn’t a flag as we know it today. It was a standard lifted high so that soldiers could rally around it in the midst of battle. It marked identity so they knew where their side was, gave direction when commands could not be heard, and reminded the army of the cause for which they were fighting. In this psalm, David says that God Himself has *given* such a banner to His

people. It wasn't their strength (and it's not ours today) that they rallied to, but God's truth raised before them. David is saying that when everything around him seemed broken, God's banner reminded them that He was still their rallying point and their hope.

Just as Israel rallied around the banner God lifted up for them, so today we rally around Christ lifted up on the cross. In John 12:32 Jesus said, *'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.'* The cross is our rallying point – the banner of God's truth and love raised high for the world to see. Under that banner we find our identity, our unity, and our victory.

I. THE BANNER OF RELIANCE – vs. 1-4

A. Seven sorrows allowed by God – vs. 1-3

1. The phrase "thou hast" is repeated 7 times and underscores God's sovereignty over everything, and in this case in particular, over hardship.
2. Sorrows may come as discipline (Heb. 12:6-7) or what may be considered as refining (Job 23:10).

Hebrews 12:6-7

⁶ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. ⁷ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Job 23:10

¹⁰ But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

3. Even bitter and harsh experiences are not outside God's hand.

B. One “standard” given by God – vs. 4

1. In contrast to the seven sorrows, God gives one banner – His truth lifted high.

- a) The truth of His Word – God’s promises are certain.

Psalm 119:160

¹⁶⁰ Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever.

John 17:17

¹⁷ Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

- b) The truth of His character – God Himself is faithful and cannot lie.

Numbers 23:19

¹⁹ God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Deuteronomy 32:4

⁴ *He is* the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he.

Titus 1:2

² In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

- c) The truth of His Son – as we saw in the introduction, Christ is the “rallying point” as the banner lifted up for us.

Isaiah 11:10

¹⁰ And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people;

to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus saith unto him, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

d) Truth as certainty and assurance

Proverbs 22:21 [vs. 17-21]

²¹ That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?

2 Corinthians 1:20

²⁰ For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

2. The banner is His provision, not man's achievement.

C. The lesson of reliance on God

1. The sorrows are God's doing – these aren't random calamities; they are experienced as God's hand against His people.
2. The prayer that flows from those sorrows

a) "O turn thyself to us again" (vs. 1)

- (1) David is begging God to turn back to His people in mercy.
- (2) They feel abandoned, and the prayer is for restored fellowship.

Lamentations 3:31-32

³¹ For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

³² But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

b) "Heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh" (vs. 2)

(1) The picture is of a wall broken and crumbling. Their defenses are shattered.

(2) David prays for God to repair the damage, because the nation is quaking under the weight of His discipline.

(3) God had promised to be their fortress, but now He has torn down their walls (cf. Ps. 80:12, "Why hast thou then broken down her hedges?").

3. The connection between the sorrows and prayer

The sorrows of verses 1-3 are not there to drive God's people to despair – they're there to drive them to prayer. The prayer recognizes two things:

a) Only God caused the shaking.

b) Only God can heal it.

4. God does provide hope in the banner, but the hope only makes sense after the people have come to terms with their utter dependence on Him, often times through sorrows and trial.

II. THE BANNER OF REJOICING – VS. 5-8

A. Rejoicing because of God's deliverance – vs. 5

1. David is asking for deliverance so God's "beloved" may rejoice in His salvation.

The word translated “beloved” here (יְדִיד) is one that means “cherished one, dear one.” God calls His people His beloved (it’s actually in the plural as used in this psalm), not because they are worthy, but because they are His. That’s the assurance in this verse: even though they felt cast off (vs. 1), they are still His beloved. That’s why they can rejoice in His deliverance.

Deuteronomy 33:12

¹² *And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.*

Psalms 127:2

² *It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*

2. Joy flows from knowing we are the “beloved” of God – not because we deserve it, but simply because we are His.

Romans 1:7

⁷ *To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Colossians 3:12

¹² *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*

B. Rejoicing because of God’s declaration – vs. 6a

1. “God hath spoken in His holiness” – His word is unchanging, His promises sure.

When God speaks, it is a promise, and when He speaks “in His holiness,” it is backed by His very character. God cannot lie and He cannot fail. That means everything that follows in this psalm – Israel’s land, the nations subdued, the hope of deliverance – rests not on David’s strength, but on God’s holy word. And because God has spoken in holiness, we can rejoice in certainty.

Hebrews 6:17-18

¹⁷ Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: ¹⁸ That by two immutable things, in which *it* was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

I’ve often said that the holiness of God is the foundational attribute upon which all others are built. By that I mean this: His love is a holy love, His justice is a holy justice, His mercy is a holy mercy, etc. Holiness is not one trait among many – it is the attribute that colors and completes them all. That’s why when God speaks in His holiness (Ps. 60:6), we can be certain His word is true. He cannot lie, because He is holy.

2. Our rejoicing is not in circumstances that cause us happiness but in what God has said.

C. Rejoicing in God’s dominion – vs. 6b-8 (Ps. 108:6-13)

Some consider David speaking in response to God’s word in these verses, but the stronger case is that these are God’s own words, because the psalm introduces them with, “God has spoken in

His holiness,” and the language of ownership fits His voice better than that of David’s. The change from speaker changes abruptly in vs. 9-12, where we find David responding in prayer, relying on what God has said. Psalm 108 repeats these same words, and again they read best as spoken by God. The lesson for us, however, is simple: God speaks His promises, and His people answer in faith and prayer.

1. God declares ownership over Israel (Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, etc.) – vs. 6b-7
2. God declares authority over the nations (Moab = washpot, Edom = cast out my shoe, Philistia = triumph) – vs. 8
3. The cause for rejoicing: the world and its powers are already under God’s feet.

III. THE BANNER OF RESCUE – VS. 9-12

A. The realization of helplessness (vs. 9-10)

1. “Who will bring me...? Wilt not thou, O God...?”
2. David realized, as we need to today, that no victory comes apart from God.

B. The vanity of human help (vs. 11)

1. “Vain is the help of man.”
2. This is seen contrasting trusting in man (in the case of this psalm, in the armies of man) and that of trusting God.

C. The assurance of God’s deliverance (vs. 12)

1. "Through God we shall do valiantly" – because of God's help and strength, His children can are able to act confidently, courageously, and bravely in the face of sorrow and conflict.
2. God Himself treads down the enemy.

Romans 8:31

³¹ What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who *can* be against us?

Conclusion:

This psalm began in sorrow, yet in their lament, they confessed that everything came from the hand of God. With seven sorrows, God gave one standard – *a banner of truth* for His people to rally around.

This banner, as seen in this psalm, showed us three things: we rely on God when the ground shakes beneath us. We rejoice because His word is sure and His rule is certain. And we rest in His rescue, because through God we shall do valiantly.

For Israel, the banner was God's truth in their battle. For us today, the banner is Christ lifted up for the world to see. At the cross, we learn reliance because our strength is not in ourselves. At the cross, we rejoice because His promises are sure. At the cross, we find rescue because He has already conquered the greatest enemy.

Whatever sorrow or trial we face, we can rely on the fact that God has "given us a banner."