

My Soul in Silence Waits for God

Psalm 62

This past Friday was the funeral service for John Dickey, who passed away prematurely from cancer at age 50. Norma, Julie, Jessica and I attended the service at First Baptist Church, Milford. There were probably 250 in attendance. We were greatly heartened to hear a strong emphasis on Christ and the gospel.

Norma and I fondly remember John's bringing carloads of students from Hillsdale College to our church in Lansing every week back in the early 90s. Our family would have the young people over for dinner afterward. We would have great fellowship and entertain lots of questions about the Reformed faith. Once or twice all the students joined us for the October Lansing Life Chain along Grand River in East Lansing. John Dickey's enthusiastic witness for Christ had a great influence on many of his fellow students. He and our son Jeff became very good friends and kept in close contact over the years. After John married, he and Robin would come to our house to visit Jeff and Ghada. In summer 2020 John was the official photographer at the 50th anniversary party for Norma and me.

John was an enthusiastic Christian. Jeff reminisced that "his life was characterized by living out God's calling, whether that meant standing firm on theological issues, running a business in a principled manner, or spending time teaching children God's Word in AWANA programs."

John was profoundly influenced by the writings of the Reformer Martin Luther. A couple years ago John presented Norma and me with the book *What Luther Says*, a collection of excerpts from Luther's extensive writing. As John, knowing that he was dying of cancer, prepared the order of service for his funeral, he chose Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" to be the concluding hymn. The officiating minister at the funeral chose Psalm 62 as his text because it uses (in the ESV) the words "mighty" and "fortress"—God "alone is my rock and my salvation, my *fortress*" (v. 2); later, verse 7 says, "my *mighty* rock, my refuge is God." (Other translations use different words.)

This afternoon we are going to take a look at Psalm 62. This will not be the same sermon I heard the other day. I will, however, borrow one of his points at the end.

There are two repeated words in this Psalm which reveal points of emphasis; these are the words "salvation" and "alone." *Salvation* occurs four times (vss. 1, 2, 6, 7). *Alone* occurs three times in NKJV, but the Hebrew word it translates actually occurs six times in the Psalm.

1. Salvation

I'll have more to say about *alone* later, but first, consider the word *salvation*. As I said, there are four occurrences of this word. Let's look at them.

Verses 1 and 2 go together. “Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.” Here, *salvation* means “defense.” The word *defense* comes from a verb meaning *to be high*. The New King James Version gives the alternate translation *strong tower*. In battle, height is an advantage. An opposing army has to overcome gravity as it attempts to scale the fortress. Also, the defenders have a vantage point from which to see the enemy’s advance. For Christians, God is our strong tower. He is our defense.

The hymn “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” has the line “Sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.” Surely this reflects the teaching of the Bible. Do we believe it? When we face the problems and difficulties of this life, do we despair, or do we trust that God is our defense—our high tower. Martin Luther’s famous hymn begins with the words “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.” Do we believe that? Do we believe that our defense is sure and that God is a bulwark never failing? Do we believe that our Father in heaven is our helper “amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing”? Yes, in this life we will surely face mortal ills. The devil is like a roaring lion walking about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). He is a deadly enemy; he surely has the capability of devouring his opponents at will. But God is stronger! “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Yes, Christ’s kingdom and the devil’s kingdom are engaged in mortal combat—a fight to the death. At the end of time one will be victorious and one will be vanquished.

Many Christians have a pessimistic view of the end times. Before Christ comes to personally usher in his kingdom, the devil’s kingdom will be victorious. The influential amillennialist Anthony Hoekema expects the “culmination of apostasy and tribulation” in an Antichrist figure.¹ According to the amillennial position, evil triumphs in time, and victory awaits eternity. But the Psalmist says, “He only is . . . my defense; I shall not be greatly moved. Like the battle in Rephidim in Exodus 17, where Israel fought against Amalek, when Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill, and when Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed, so Satan might win individual battles, but in the end, Christ will win. He is our defense; we shall not be greatly moved. As Joshua defeated Amalek with the edge of the sword, so in the end the church will be victorious. God is our defense; we shall not be greatly moved.

The other sense in which God is our salvation is that he is our “refuge” (v. 7). The Hebrew word meaning *refuge* is used in Scripture as refuge from rain and

¹ https://americanvision.org/posts/eschatology-precudes-everything/?_kx=9V13myZJldlys8Av4G49Ylcy_i19Tzz6TG4nD2hzBwk%3D.Psh6Fs

storms, and from danger.² The English word *refuge* means *shelter or protection from danger or distress*. In a fallen world there are many dangers. Like the disciples on the Sea of Galilee we might be pummeled by violent storms. On one particular trip, as the disciples sailed, Christ fell asleep, “and a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm” (Luke 8:23–24). Even today, the One who stilled weather-storms in Bible times has the power to grant us refuge from the attacks of Satan. Our Savior who died and rose again now sits at the Father’s right hand, and nothing—absolutely nothing—can separate us from the Savior’s love. The believing Christian can say in truth, “Be still, my soul, the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.”³

2. My salvation

In Psalm 62 the word “salvation” occurs four times; it is an important theme. The word for salvation is *יְשׁוּעָה*. The Hebrew word for “Jesus” is *יְשׁוּעַ* which sounds pretty much the same. *Jesus* means *Jehovah is salvation* or *Yahweh is salvation*. Salvation is deliverance from the power and effects of sin. The precise form of this word in Psalm 62 is “*my salvation*” (four occurrences). “From Him comes my salvation.” “He only is my rock and my salvation.” “He only is my rock and my salvation.” “In God is my salvation and my glory.”⁴ This teaches us something. The only way to experience salvation from sin is to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not enough that he is *salvation*; you must be able to say, “*my salvation*” if you want to have eternal life. As fallen sons and daughters of Adam we are estranged from God. It is only as we receive him, that is, believe on his name, that we are given power to become the sons of God (John 14:6). We who once were afar off are brought nigh by the blood of Christ. We who formerly were enemies are made friends through the gospel. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14).

3. Only

That word is the little adverb *אֵל* (6x: the first word of vss. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9⁵). This word can mean *surely* or *only*, depending on the context. The NKJV translators rendered the word *אֵל* three times as *only* but also as *alone*; it also

² Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon, *מִחָסֶה* (root: *חָסָה*)

³ “Be Still, My Soul,” *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* 532

⁴ This is essentially a chiasm

⁵ Using English verse numbers

rendered it *truly* and *surely* (*only* and *alone* are synonyms; *truly* and *surely* are synonyms). If 𐌹𐌸 were translated consistently as *only* or *alone*, it would stress the doctrine that was emphasized at the time of the Reformation.

Translating 𐌹𐌸 consistently as *alone* would render our text “My soul silently waits for God *alone* ... He *alone* is my rock, my salvation and my defense ... My soul, wait silently for God *alone* ... he *alone* is my rock and my salvation.” What this boils down to is: God *alone* is my salvation; my soul waits for God *alone*. The Christian’s trust is in no other! This surely is consistent with the five *solas* of the Reformation (*sola* means *alone*): Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, to God alone be glory.

In the words of hymnwriter Charles Wesley, “*Other refuge have I none*, hangs my helpless soul on thee.” There is no other refuge (salvation) than Christ.

Oh, that we Christians truly believed this! We trust in Christ alone for our salvation. He is our only hope of heaven. He is the one alone we worship. He alone is the one to whom we pray. And he is the only one we can trust in this life, too. Sometimes professing Christians look for solutions to their problems in politics, in psychiatry, in medicine. These all have their place, but only Christ can give true peace that passes understanding.

4. The enemy

In verse three the Psalmist speaks to the enemy—ultimately Satan, the enemy of our souls. This is a figure of speech known as *apostrophe*. In it a speaker directly addresses someone or something that is not present. The word *apostrophe* comes from an ancient Greek word meaning *turning away*, because the speaker turns away, as it were, to address an absent entity.⁶

In 1 Peter 5 our adversary is unmasked. Peter instructs us to “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith ...” Yes, the devil is our adversary. His end is “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). The devil will never be converted. He will never be saved. He will never be reconciled to God by the blood of his Son. The eternal Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, became man, took on the nature of man in order to save his people. He did not take on the nature of angels. There is no salvation for fallen angels. There can never be peace or friendship between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. There is only antagonism, only enmity.

The Christian is not to play around with sin—he is to *flee* from sin. He is to “resist” Satan—“Resist him, steadfast in the faith.” We must take the shield of faith, with which we will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph. 6:16).

⁶ <https://www.litcharts.com/literary-devices-and-terms/apostrophe>

The Psalmist addresses the devil: “How long will you attack a man?” The book of Revelation has the answer: “The devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:12).

5. The fortress

Instead of the NKJV’s “He is my *defense*” (v. 6) the ESV has “He only is . . . my *fortress*; I shall not be shaken.” A *fortress* is a fortified place, a stronghold, a large and permanent fortification fit for a large garrison. A garrison, in turn, refers to the troops stationed in a fortress or town to defend it.

At the funeral the other day the minister made the point that there are two positions—and only two—with regard to a fortress: either you are *in* it, or *out of* it. If you are *in* it, you are safe, protected not only by the construction of the fortress—its location, its walls, its towers, its turrets, its moat and drawbridge—but also by the soldiers stationed within it—armed men trained and ready for battle. Christ the King is the strong man who keeps his palace; therefore, his goods are safe (Luke 11:21). He, our Savior, never slumbers nor sleeps. The eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death (Ps. 33:18ff.). Christian, your Savior has dedicated himself to protect you; none of those the Father has given to him are lost. But if you are *out* of the fortress, you are in the place of danger. The guns within the turrets are pointed at you.

So where are you—*in* the fortress or *outside* the fortress? Are you enlisted in the army of the King, or are you among the rebels, under the control and command of Satan? If so, you may be enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, but the day of reckoning is coming. Your fate will be like theirs in Christ’s parable who said, “ ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.” Jesus asked, “Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and *destroy* the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others” (Mark 12:7–9).

So where are you—*in* the fortress or *outside* the fortress? Will you be destroyed, or will you be safe? Your greatest need—bar none—is to be in Christ. There, you are safe. Amen.