

Psalm 55. A Messianic psalm that is also about how to confront our thoughts and passions.

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Whether David knew it or not when he wrote this Psalm, this is a Messianic Psalm. The psalm is Christ speaking about His troubles in life and how He would be delivered, and His deliverance becomes our deliverance. We are not required to only interpret the Psalm the literal way according to its exegesis. We also glean spiritually profitable things, through a spiritual interpretation that references ourselves, and applies directly to our own life.

When I read things, I read in a way that is practical. By “practical”, I mean I read them in a way that will help me to change, to get better. If I learn what happened to David and how Christ saves me, it is of no use whatsoever unless I apply it to my life.

What is the hardest thing that we deal with in life? Absolutely, positively, it is our thoughts. As we think, so we are. We can go through great difficulties in life, but if we have good thoughts, we are at peace. I think one can, for spiritual edification purposes, interpret these words as a sort of dialogue of the soul with its passions and the attacks of the evil one.

There are many times when our thoughts are very dark, and they cause us great distress. When Christ, through David, speaks of literal men who have “trodden me down all the day”, these are like our thoughts which also try to dominate us all day long. Our noxious thoughts (grief, shame, struggles with passions, anxiety, etc.) oppose our struggle for virtue, and may be likened to be exactly as the men who opposed Christ, of which He said: “All the day long they detested my words”. Thoughts are very difficult things; controlling them can be trying to like catch the wind, but the One who created us can teach us to control our thoughts. What must our primary response be? The fathers teach us not to engage noxious thoughts or reason with them. Instead, we must make the words of Christ our words: “By day I shall not fear; but as for me, I will hope in Thee.”

I see a progression in this Psalm, and so I also see a progression in my life controlling my thoughts. By “progression”, I mean the gradual improvement that happens in the human soul who pursues God and godliness. It is like an army which is generally winning the war, but there are still battles that are lost. If we always know deeply in our heart, in a way that resonates in our heart, that God will save us and will help us and that no matter how difficult our life is, no matter how hard our thoughts are, no matter how depressed we are, or despondent, or how much we are giving way to a passion, even a terrible one such as a sexual passion or drug addiction or deep anxiety or something else - God is with us and God will deliver us.



The way to be able to have clear thoughts without any disturbance in the soul is to truly know God. That's a tricky thing. It's simple but not easy. We make it hard because of our passions and because of our human weaknesses. I just recently, in fact today, had an experience that was frightening. I was all by myself, and the noxious thought was sudden, like an ambush.

I love my grandsons very much. It is the highlight of my week that I take care of each one of them, each once a week. I lost a son two and a half years ago (+Daniel 06/11/2017 ns, Sunday of All Saints). It was sudden and it was terrible. Somehow, the losing of him is not as difficult as the memory of the revelation of that news. That was deeply painful. I remember that for at least 50 days I wept every day.

I also know that I was much busier than your average person who loses a son. I was busy praying for many other people who have lost sons and daughters, and praying for anyone I knew was praying for my son, and I was praying for my son every day, I was serving 40 liturgies which actually turned out to be, I think 43 liturgies in a row, I was still going to prisons regularly, and even on the day after my son's burial, I travelled to prison to tell an inmate, whom I had baptized, that his son died suddenly in a terrible way, and I took his pain upon myself as well. I have done all those things, and that made dealing with the loss easier. But the memory of what it felt like to hear about the loss is a very painful memory.

I remember sitting on the couch just after I finished my prayers and was drinking my coffee and my wife called, and she was crying and she told me straight up, with no introduction, "Daniel is dead". I thought that she was telling me a bad joke. My wife does not tell bad jokes. I was angry at her. Then I understood the truth of the matter. All I wanted to do was get to the church. My son-in-law Matthias and my daughter Natalie came to the house and they didn't want me to leave because they were afraid I wouldn't drive safely but I refused. I had to go to the church and serve a panikhida, even by myself. Matthias followed behind me, and of course I made it there safely. I served three panikhidas that day, and then liturgy the next day, and then went to Germany with Marina and my daughter Christina. I've never ceased being active in confronting my grief.

Because I love my grandsons so much, sometimes I have a stray thought come in: "What would happen if one of them died". I was looking at something today and it was a picture of monster man from a recent monster movie I made. The thought came in like some sort of assassin, and I started crying. The crying and the sadness was merely because of the possibility that monster, or axe man, (Noah and Owen Daniel) could die, just as any other human being could die at any time. It was just the idea, the possibility, and that linked with my remembrance of how deeply painful it was to learn of my son's death.

But I am fortunate, and I have some skills. I'm a sinful man, but I have learned how to pray, even if it is poorly. Therefore, the spiritual, personal meaning of this psalm is in my heart. Even in difficult times I know God is there. It is one thing to say it, but it's another thing to experience it.

I have seen people who have suffered grief who have never gotten over their grief. Their faces are a mask of deep pain. My face is not a mask of the pain. I rarely feel deep pain. When I do, it hurts. But I know that God delivers. That's what this psalm is saying to me. I will still have moments when I'm deeply afraid that one of my grandsons might die in an accident, and that I would not be able to watch them play or tease me or learn new words

or smile at me, or be part of my axe man and monster man movies. If that happens, the pain will be severe, and my anxiety tells me I can't take it, but I will be able to. That's what this Psalm is saying to me.

It is cowardice to ask God to take away our pain. I don't want to offend anyone by these words. If that's what you do, then that's where you are right now (but please, try to get somewhere else!). The only way for pain to go away is for it to be replaced by energy. That is the energy of God working in the soul. This is why I tell people incessantly to read the psalter. The psalter describes every problem in life, and the solution for that problem. Learn to read it spiritually, with expectation, with a desire to be healed and strengthened. And you will be healed and strengthened.

I am fortunate in that when I have anxious thoughts, they go away quickly. I'm aware that some people live with daily anxiety and that is hell. Those of you who have anxiety, no matter what other means you use to be healed, learn to think spiritually and live spiritually. Learn to have the feeling of this psalm resonate in your soul. Read the psalter, pray for others, don't indulge yourself, keep the fast, love your brother, love your enemy, go to church, confess regularly and commune regularly. Those people that I have known who have had some terrible grief (or anxiety, or sexual attraction or addiction, etc., etc.) and have not gotten over it, without exception are people that don't know how to pray or go to church regularly. You can't get over great pain without pushing that pain out with the energy of God. If you're going to do that, you must know that God will come in when you start to push the pain out. That's what this psalm is saying, in a spiritual way.

## Psalm 55

***For the End: Concerning the People Distant from the Holies. By David, for a Pillar Inscription. When the Foreigners Took Him in Geth.***

(1) Have mercy on me, O God, for man hath trodden me down all the day long; making war, he hath afflicted me. (2) Mine enemies have trodden me down all the day long, for many are they that war against me from on high. (3) By day I shall not fear; but as for me, I will hope in Thee. (4) In God will I commend my words, in God I have set my hope; I will not fear what flesh shall do to me. (5) All the day long they detested my words, all their thoughts were against me for evil. (6) They will dwell near and will hide themselves; they will watch where I set my heel, even as they have waited for my soul. (7) On no account wilt Thou save them, in wrath wilt Thou bring down the peoples, O God. (8) My life have I declared unto Thee; Thou hast set my tears before Thee. Even as in Thy promise, (9) mine enemies shall be turned back. In what day soever I shall call upon Thee, behold, I know that Thou art God. (10) In God will I praise His word, in the Lord will I praise His speech; (11) in God have I put my hope, I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (12) In me, O God, there be vows, which I will render in praise of Thee. (13) For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from sliding, that I may be well-pleasing before the Lord in the light of the living.