

The Song of an Exhausted Heart

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, today I'd like us to turn back together to Psalm 61, and I'd actually like us to spend this Sunday morning and next Sunday morning looking together at this Psalm.

It's always good to come back to the Psalms because the Psalms play such a key role in our lives as followers of Jesus. And one of the reasons why we sing Psalms at every service is because we need them.

They are incredibly helpful. And one of the reasons why they're so helpful is because they are so powerful. And that makes perfect sense because songs are powerful.

That's two still today, even though we live in a really technologically advanced society, even though we've been through the enlightenment and the modern period and all these different things, even though the world has changed so much in the last two or 300 years.

Still, we need songs. And in many ways today, the place of songs in our culture and our experience is bigger than ever.

[1 : 05] If you think about a scientist or an economist or a politician, have you ever heard of one of them going on a world tour? Could they ever sell out Murray Field or Wembley or Madison Square Garden?

No, they couldn't, but a person who sings songs can. And songs still have a massive role in our lives. And one of the reasons they're so powerful is because they resonate without experience. So whether it's joy or sorrow, romance, heartbreak, we can all think of songs that connect with these moments. And the Psalms do exactly the same thing.

These songs frequently hit notes that harmonize with what you and I are experiencing in our lives and what we'll experience this week. And often that is with astonishing accuracy, even though the Psalms are about 3,000 years old.

So in that way, Psalms are like all other songs. They resonate with our experience. They capture something in a really powerful way. But at the same time, there's another way in which Psalms are like no other songs because they don't just resonate with the experiences that life gives us.

[2 : 21] They also connect us to the person who gives us life. Because the ultimate songwriter of the Psalms is God. And in these Psalms, as we read Psalm 61 or any of the other ones, we are encountering God, our Creator, as He reveals Himself to us.

And we're also encountering God, our Savior, as He promises us eternal life through His Son. And it's always good to remember that when you read a Psalm, often they are pointing backwards. They'll point back to the creation of the universe, to the fact that God is our Creator, that He's the explanation for everything that exists. But at the same time, the Psalms will very often point forward. They're looking ahead to the coming of Jesus. And whilst they do that, all the time, they're resonating with the experience that we have in our lives.

Another way to look at it is to say that in many ways, the Psalms are all verses that connect with our lives. They are verses that connect with our lives.

[3 : 32] But in one sense, it's important to remember that Psalms are only ever verses because the chorus doesn't come until Jesus arrives.

And it's in the coming of Jesus that so much of the teaching of the Psalms finds its full explanation. So whenever we read the Psalms, all of that means that it's important for us to think about how the Psalm connects with us.

And it's important to think about how it connects to Jesus. And I want us to look at those two categories this week and next week. So this week, we'll focus more on how it connects to us. Next week, more on how it connects to Jesus. And in it all, we'll see that Psalm 61 is a beautiful Psalm. And it connects very powerfully with an experience that I think every single one of us

encounters from time to time.

And it's captured in these opening verses. Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth, I call to you when my heart is faint, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

[4 : 43] These words are speaking from the experience of your heart being faint. And that word faint that we've got before us there can mean weak.

It can mean flagging. It can mean tired. And all of that means that Psalm 61 is the song of an exhausted heart.

And that's something that we all experience from time to time. And maybe that's exactly what you're experiencing as you sit and listen today. And I think exhaustion of the heart is the hardest exhaustion of all.

Sometimes life will tire us physically. But often that can be very satisfying. My legs are sore after that awful children's talk that I did. But there's something quite satisfying about having done exercise.

And that's part of the reason why we enjoy exercise. It leaves us physically tired, but very often it'll leave us mentally satisfied. So even though your legs are sore, your heart feels refreshed.

[5 : 57] But tiredness of the heart is never refreshing. It's utterly draining. And it can come from lots of different sources.

It can come from physical illness. And that's one of the things that makes physical illness so difficult. When you have a chronic physical condition, it might leave you in physical pain, but it's also frustrating.

And it's demoralizing. And it feels so cruel to have to deal with this day in, day out. But all of those things, frustration, demoralization, feeling as though it's cruel, all of those things are felt in your heart.

It's your heart that gets exhausted. But that exhaustion of the heart can also happen even when we're physically well. The bruises of life, the pain of regret, the struggles with inadequacy, that we have, the agony of loss, none of those things are physical.

But they all leave you with an exhausted heart. And so I want us to think about that together. And as I said, this week we'll focus a little bit more on how it connects with our experience.

[7 : 19] Next week we'll look in more detail at how the Psalm connects with Jesus. As we think about how the Psalm connects with us, it's really important to remember that the Psalms are songs.

And that means that as you're reading a Psalm like Psalm 61, you are reading poetry. Now, the key thing you need to remember with poetry is that even if you sing it fast, you have to always read it slowly.

Poetry is something that you need to read and read again and again and take time to think about what it says and to try and get deeper into what's being conveyed by the poem.

And that's definitely true when it comes to the Psalms. We need to take our time and to think and reflect and meditate on the words that are being written.

And that, just to say, is also a really important thing to remember when you're reading your Bible and praying every day. We would always encourage people to read your Bible and to pray every day.

[8 : 16] If you can do that maybe in the morning or in the evening or at any time that's convenient to you. If you can take 10 or 15 minutes to pray and read, it's a really healthy and important thing to do in your life as a disciple.

But it's easy to think that that involves two things, that it involves reading and it involves praying. But really, it needs to involve three things. It needs to involve reading, praying, and thinking.

And even if you can take maybe 10 minutes to make sure that you do those three things each day and make sure that, you know what I say this because so often in my life I've just rushed through it. Pray, read, go is my general pattern. But it needs to be pray, read, think, and then go. And so I want us just to think a wee bit more about what this Psalm says.

And for a wee while I want to highlight some key words that are used by David when he wrote this Psalm. And those key words fall into two sets of three. And so I want you to think of them a little bit like a musical chord.

[9 : 21] So those of you who play guitar or piano will know that a musical chord is made up of three notes. And so we're gonna think about these in terms of chords. And I want to suggest that we can think about them in terms of a major chord and a minor chord.

So in terms of music, that's the two big categories that chords fall into. You have a major chord and a minor chord. And there's only one note that's different, but the sound difference is huge because a major chord will sound happy and a minor chord will sound somber or sad.

And so when you hear a song that's upbeat and triumphant and cheerful, that's in the key, a major key, it's major chords. When you hear a song that's not so, that's more, that's got a sadder tone, it's in a minor key, it's using minor chords.

So I want us to think in terms of these two categories as we look at this Psalm. Look at a minor chord and look at a major chord. The first is the minor. And it's captured in three words that David uses to make requests of God in the first two verses.

You see it here, here, listen, lead. That's the three words I want to highlight. And all of these arise from David's distress.

[10:36] He says his heart is faint. He feels like he's at the ends of the earth. He's isolated, adrift and alone. And he wants God to hear him.

And that's, and part of the reason why he makes that please because David is just like you. There's times when he felt as though God wasn't hearing him.

He wants God to listen to him. And that word listen is a really interesting word because it conveys the idea of giving something attention. And some Bible translations will just use the word, the phrase give attention.

And David doesn't just want God to hear his cry. He wants God to turn and focus and give him attention and respond.

And in that sense of desperation, David longs for God to lead him. He feels disorientated.

[11:37] He needs direction. He's looking for a path to follow. He's saying to God, hear my cry, listen to my prayer, lead me.

And the key point I want us to see is that an exhausted heart craves all three of these things. When our hearts are exhausted, we want to be heard.

We want attention and we want to be led. But the massive danger and the mistake that so many people in our community and in our society today is making is that we go looking for these things in the wrong place.

And so when our hearts are exhausted, we want to be heard. So we go looking for people who will agree with us. And so we seek out someone who's gonna hear our frustration and they're gonna tune their response to the same key as our complaint.

And the technical term for that type of song is a rant. And we crave it. We want, you know, when we're frustrated, we just want to be able to just rant.

[12:53] We just want someone to hear our moan and we want them to agree that everybody else is stupid and that they're the problem. When our hearts are exhausted, we want the attention of people who impress us.

So often an exhausted heart will look for refuge in something bigger, someone you look up to, someone whose attention is gonna make you feel special. So if that's a colleague or if it's your boss at work, then your exhausted heart is gonna try and work harder and harder.

If that's a group of peers around you in school or the people you maybe go out with at the weekends or whatever, or if it's a guy or a girl that you like, then your exhausted heart is gonna try and try and try to look good and look strong and to be impressive to that person.

Or if that's social media where you want to go for attention, then your exhausted heart is gonna set out on a relentless quest to be noticed, to be liked, to generate a response, to be appreciated.

And our exhausted hearts want to be led to something that's gonna soothe us. Sometimes that's the call of the shops, we think I'm just gonna buy some stuff that will make me feel better, that'll soothe my exhausted heart.

[14:19] Sometimes we're responding to the call of alcohol to go and just have a few drinks, to bring some refreshment. Sometimes we follow the call of bitterness that says, you know, draw lines between you and the person that's hurt you, and then you'll find comfort.

And we all do this when our hearts are exhausted because in those moments we long to be heard, we long to get attention, we long to be led to a better place, and as we do that, we fall asleep.

We fall into a better place, and as we do that, we fall straight into the traps that the devil places in front of all these pathways. And I don't need to tell you that these alternatives don't work.

They don't work because they're also exhausting. If your exhausted heart is trying to impress your boss at work or your friends at school or whatever, that's just even more exhausting.

And it's the same with all the other things. Ranting just feeds the exhaustion because it's fueling the fire that's weighing you down. Acceptance from people that we admire is always hanging by a thread, and that fear of being rejected is just another pressure that's gonna exhaust our hearts.

[15 : 41] And soothing might come for a moment from one of these things, one of these alternatives, but it never lasts as long as we need it to, and often it just leaves us thirsting for more.

All of these come together to make a minor chord that plays the melody of an exhausted, worn-out heart.

So what do we need? Well, we need to play a different chord. And that chord's right here in the words of the Psalm, and it's in the words that the Psalm uses to describe God.

You see it in verses one to four. God is described as the rock that is higher than him. His refuge, the strong tower that brings protection.

These are the major chord. This is the positive note of triumph and confidence, and these are everything that an exhausted heart needs, because all of them are describing something that's bigger and stronger than we are.

[16 : 58] All of these, a rock, a refuge, a strong tower, they're all places where you can hide. They're places where you can rest. They're all places where you are safe.

And at the heart of the gospel is the fact that this is exactly what God is offering you. This is exactly what God wants to give you. He is the immovable rock that is never gonna change, it's never gonna shift, never gonna wobble.

He's the refuge where we can stop running, where we can lie down and we can find shelter. And he's the tower that protects us on every side.

He's behind us, he's before us, with his arms around us, we are safe forever. It's all pointing us to the fact that it's in him that we find security and peace, and that's why this is where the psalmist wants to be.

In verse four, he says, let me dwell in your tent forever. Let me take refuge under the shadow of his wing. I love that imagery, the shadow of his wing. I think I've used this illustration before, but I always think of that in terms of just pulling the duvet up in the middle of the night when a storm is raging outside and you're safe and warm and protected.

[18 : 20] All of this is what God wants to offer you. It's what he wants to give you. And it's so important that we see the difference that it makes because when our hearts are exhausted, when we just feel worn down and bruised and weary with life, very often we feel tempted to put barriers up around ourselves.

So we do that in lots of different ways. We want to put on a good outward impression. How many times have you been asked the question, how are you? And you respond by saying, I'm fine. How many times has that answer actually not been the truth?

Very, very often. But we just want to put a good outward impression. We also don't want to let anyone get too close. That's something that is very, very common in our culture here. We don't let people get too close.

And we want to make sure that we protect ourselves from getting any more bruises. And so we do this. We put barriers up around ourselves. But do you see what you're doing when you do that? You're building your own tower. And all around us, people are building these towers around themselves that are intended to look impressive and are intended to protect an exhausted heart.

[19 : 41] Usually it involves a perfect outward appearance. And one key feature of these towers is that there are absolutely no windows so that nobody can see just what's going on so that nobody can see your weaknesses and struggles.

And I want to say something that I hope doesn't sound too controversial. I have to say it because it's true. The Isle of Lewis is full of these towers.

Absolutely full of them. People building up a tower around themselves to give a good outward impression and to make sure nobody gets too close to see what's really going on.

Often the tower can be your house. And many, many people live in a house where it has to be kept absolutely safe.

Where it has to be kept absolutely immaculate so that the only thing people ever see is perfection. If you're in school, that tower might be your grades where you think I have got to always be at the top,

always got to be at the head of the game.

[21 : 09] Or you might not, maybe you don't care less about your grades and it's all about fitting in with your peers. And that involves lots of things. You can involve wearing the right clothes, saying the right things, having the right phone, all about making sure that you fit in with them.

It can happen in our jobs, in the things that we achieve in life, in the amount of money that we're earning, in the things that we're able to spend, and having the right car. It's so interesting. Over the years, I've watched the car to have changes at different periods. I remember 20 years ago, it was an Audi A4. That was the car to have. Everybody got one.

Then for a wee while, it was a Honda Accord. That didn't last too long. More recently, it's a 4x4. That's the car to have. You see it. Everybody goes for it because it gives the right impression. And in recent years, one of the biggest barriers that we put up is our social media profile, where people will give an impression on social media of a life that's just perfect.

[22 : 13] Parents can be very good at doing this, taking a photo of three angelic children sitting neat for literally less than five seconds when they then go and destroy everything again.

But the photo makes it look like they're angels, because it's just adding another layer to the tower that makes you look good. And maybe for some people, the tower is just having a good weekend, going out, fitting in, having that experience that everybody expects you to have.

And in it all, the key thing is that there's no windows, that no one can see our weakness. We are all building towers around ourselves.

We're all holding up barriers that we think are going to protect us. But if you are holding up a barrier around your life, it might look as though it's protecting you.

In reality, it's doing something different. It's exhausting you. Holding up a barrier like that is utterly exhausting.

[23 : 35] And so many people's hearts are hanging by a thread, because they're trying to hold up a tower around them that makes it look as though everything is fine. And the amazing thing about the gospel, the amazing thing about God is that he's saying to us all, you don't need to do that anymore.

You don't need to do that. Because instead of building our own tower around us, our own tower around us, he is the tower.

He is the refuge. He is the one who will surround us with everything that we need. And that's why when we understand the gospel more clearly, we understand what God wants to be for us.

And the amazing thing about that is that when we come into his tower, we can let down our own. We can drop our guard. We can stop holding up our own fragile tower.

And instead, your exhausted heart can rest in him. Let me give you three examples of what I mean. And they're all ways in which my own heart gets exhausted.

[25 : 02] One of the things that exhausts my heart is decisions. I can barely cope with the menu at HS1 trying to pick what I want. And so making decisions is something that I always find very, very difficult.

And the bigger decision, the bigger the decision it is, the harder it is. And sometimes decisions don't go that well. Sometimes you think, you know, this is the right path, I'll do it.

And then it doesn't work out the way you expected. And that just makes you more tense for the next time you have to make a big decision. And in my own little tower, I often think I need to put up the impression that gives the idea that I always get my decisions right.

That makes it look as though I've never really got things wrong. Actually, I was right all along. Or you can put up the tower that wants to kind of blame something else or blame circumstances for mistakes that I've made.

In God's tower, I don't need to do any of that. Because my life is in His hands. And that's where we remember that He's not just the songwriter of the Psalm.

[26 : 08] He's the songwriter of my life and of your life. He's got a plan and a purpose that will have ups and downs, joys and sorrows, successes and failures from your perspective.

But it's all part of His plan that is beautiful and trustworthy. And the minute I remember that, my exhausted heart finds rest.

Another thing that exhausts my heart is the desire to achieve. I always want to achieve whatever I'm doing. I want to do it well. I'm very driven in that sense. And that can be a good thing.

It can motivate me to work hard. But it can also leave me feeling jealous of other people who I feel are achieving more than I am or who are doing things better than I am.

And sometimes when you feel like you're not achieving, it leaves you crippled with a sense of failure where you think you've not done what you should have done or what you hope to do. So in my tower, it's all about me achieving stuff.

[27 : 11] In God's tower, I'm an instrument in His hands. And there I can instantly rest because you discover that you're not alone in God's tower.

We're side by side as brothers and sisters. We're working together. We're actually on the same team. And God is working out His purposes through us all. In God's tower, life stops being a relentless competition.

And instead, it becomes a beautiful collaboration where together, we serve side by side, hand in hand. On our own and in day-to-day life, we're all like buskers on the street.

We're all doing our own thing and we're all competing for the same meager rewards. Together as a church, we're an orchestra, able to serve together, able to play our part, each contributing to something amazing.

Another thing that exhausts my heart is feeling like I am a letdown. And it's so easy to do that. You compare yourself to others. We compare ourselves to our own expectations.

[28 : 24] And so often, we come up short and we feel inadequate. In my tower, I am putting up a good outward impression to hide my own sense of failure.

In God's tower, I am worth dying for. And so are you.

And so, yes, our sin has left us falling short of the glory of God, and that sin has brought us to a place that God never wanted us to be. And in the gospel, he sent his son to reach us, to rescue us, to restore us.

Sometimes, when our hearts are exhausted, we feel like saying to God, I can't do it. I keep letting you down. I keep making mistakes. I can't do it.

Do you know that God has God and I can't do it as well? God also has that phrase.

[29 : 34] But his I can't do it is not like ours. Ours looks at what we wish we were. It looks at what all that we hoped we would be. It looks at all the things that, you know, we feel we should be achieving.

And we say, I can't do it. God is different. God looks at the prospect of losing you.

And he says, I can't do it. I can't let that happen. And I will give my son to die on the cross so that it will not happen.

For every single person here whose heart is exhausted, God is the rock, the refuge and the tower that your heart desperately needs.

And all of that is because of Jesus. And we're going to look into that a little bit more in a little bit more detail next week. The key point I want to highlight just now is that, you know, if you're asking that question, if you're here with an exhausted heart and asking the question, well, how do I find God?

[30 : 44] How do I find this comfort? The answer is that it is only through Jesus. It's only through coming to Him, only through trusting in Him that we come under the shelter of the rock, that we find refuge.

It's through Jesus that we come into the tower. And the reason that is possible, the reason we can come into the shelter that Jesus provides, is because He was willing to be exposed for you.

He came out of the perfect tower of heaven to be crushed so that you could be saved.

And this is where we see something astonishing, which is the last thing I'm going to say. So often the exhaustion of our hearts leaves us hurt.

And when our hearts are hurt, it can often leave our hearts cold and harsh and bitter.

[31 : 52] So our hearts are faint but hard. And that's really important to remember. If you meet somebody and you think, oh man, they've got a really hard heart.

I am 99.9% certain the reason their heart is hard is because their heart has been hurt at some point in their lives.

Our hearts are faint but hard. God's heart is the exact opposite. His heart is immovable but tender. His heart is invincible but it's soft. That means that God's heart for you is never ever exhausted.

He's never tired of you. He's never fed up of you. You cannot wear him down. You cannot make his love run dry. His heart is immovable. It's invincible.

[33 : 04] He's never tired of you. God's heart for you is never exhausted. It also means that God's heart for you is never hard.

His heart for you is always tender. Always tender. And maybe you're here today and you just feel like, I don't know, maybe you feel like you lost your chance with God years ago.

Maybe you feel like you've wandered too far away. Maybe you feel like you've stuffed up too many times. Maybe you feel like you don't know enough. All of that doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter. Because God's heart for you never stops being soft and warm and tender. And he's holding out his arms to you again today.

And he says, look, if you've got an exhausted heart, come to me because you've got a place in my heart forever.

[34 : 07] And I hope that we can all see that today. Amen. Let's pray.