Psalm 61
Covenant Confidence
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Pastor Dean VanEvery

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the Psalms are a collection of prayers and songs they circle back over and over to several key themes. They aren't as linear as something like Romans. They take a few big ideas and force you to marinate on them.

Psalm 61 should feel pretty familiar to you by now. Like many Psalms, it is a prayer asking God for help. Here's the basic flow. "I'm in a tight spot. Please deliver me. I know you will deliver me. Because you are faithful to your promises. Therefore (since you will deliver me) I will praise you and walk uprightly." This is the basic structure of this Psalm.

This Psalm, and many others, is trying to expose your ultimate trust. This Psalm is trying to put its finger in your heart and say, "what is your ultimate security? When things start blowing up in your life, where do you look for comfort? Where do you look for help? Where do you look for peace?"

All of us have something that we set our ultimate confidence on, something that we rest our ultimate peace on. We all have something, whether we know it or not, that we could point to and say, "so long as I have *this* I'll be ok." This Psalm is a portrait of what it looks like to rest that ultimate confidence on the Lord. This Psalm is a picture of godly response to hardship that both helps you weather the storm personally, and to glorify God in the middle of it.

Now, I say *ultimate* confidence on purpose. There's a sense of peace that's entirely circumstantial that's not bad to have. The problem with circumstantial peace isn't that it's somehow wrong, but that it is fickle, that its fragile – it's here today and gone tomorrow. You're saving for retirement, you're trying to eat healthy, you're investing time and effort into your family, you're watching the news, and you care about how elections turn out. There's nothing wrong with being invested in how things turn out in your life. The problem isn't being invested in the circumstances of your life, the problem is knowing what to do when things go south. When you lose those circumstantial confidences, do you have anything underneath them?

Clearly, David here is anxious about something. Some aspect of his circumstantial peace has been rather suddenly, perhaps violently taken away. This Psalm is instructive for us not that David says, "My enemies are attacking me and I don't care!" But, "My enemies are attacking me, and I know where to turn for help."

This is what this Psalm is about. It is a model prayer for us to show us what covenant confidence, what the peace of the Lord, looks like in the face of hardship. Put another way, this is how a Christian should respond in the face of hardship.

Isaiah 26:3 says, **"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."**

Psalm 61 is basically Isaiah 26:3 in action. This is what it looks like for God to keep someone in perfect peace because his mind is stayed on God. If Christ is your shepherd through faith, then you can have peace in the face of life's hardships.

Before we jump into the text, I want to give you three reasons that you should want this covenant confidence, three reasons that you should want this perfect peace. We'll see each these in the text, but I think it's helpful to pull them out front.

First, *covenant confidence gives you inner well-being in the face of hardship*. We see this in verse 2, "**My heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.**" There's an inner dimension of what David is asking for. This is probably what you usually think of when you think of the peace of the Lord. Covenant confidence blunts the edge of your anxiety and worry. Apart from Christ, losing your job, or failing a test, or getting a bad diagnosis might be an existential crisis. But in Christ, it's still a blow, but the sting, anxiety, and finality of it is stripped away.

Second, *covenant confidence gives you strength to walk in faithfulness and fruitfulness in the face of hardship.* We see this in the last phrase there at the end, **"As I perform my vows day after day."** If your ultimate confidence is in your circumstances, it can be easy to lose hope and lose motivation when something that matters to you is stripped away. When the future suddenly becomes much more uncertain to you it can be easy to spiral into apathy. Your knees get a little weaker, your arms get a little heavier.

You start to ask, "What's the point?"

"I thought I was going *this* direction. Apparently, I'm not. Why bother with any of this?"

But covenant confidence can look at whatever remains and continue to walk in faithfulness and fruitfulness in that sphere. God has put me here now, in these conditions. This is the task I have been given to do today. I will do it today. Tomorrow can worry about itself.

This, I think, is where a lot of passivity, apathy, and resignation comes from. The peace of Christ doesn't just help you feel better in the face of hardship, but it also helps you keep putting one foot in front of the other even when you aren't sure exactly where you're going – because you know that God does.

Isaiah 30:15 hits this theme well, **"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."**

So then third, *covenant confidence gives you the ability to glorify God in and through your hardship.* This is where it is all going. Verse 8, **"so I will ever sing praises to your name."**

Ultimately, covenant confidence isn't about you feeling a little better in the face of hardship. Ultimately, covenant confidence isn't about you being fruitful in the face of hardship. Ultimately, covenant confidence is about you being able to glorify God in and through your hardship.

Glorifying God in your hardship is the climax of the other two things. You glorify God *by* your peace in the face of hardship, and you glorify God *by* your persistent faithfulness and fruitfulness in the face of hardship.

And the desire to glorify God in your hardship is the secret to the other two things. Peace in the face of hardship flows out of a desire to glorify God that surpasses your desire for things to go your way. Strength in the face of hardship flows out of a desire to glorify God no matter what may come your way.

My hope for you is that whenever God puts some hard thing into your hand that you would see in it an opportunity to make much of the goodness of God. When others see you in this hardship, would they see the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ. Would they see the surpassing goodness and wisdom and love of God. Would this dark cloud in your life magnify God's majesty in theirs. Would this bitter providence in your soul serve to glorify God's gracious goodness in theirs.

Everything you've been given, you have been given that you might glorify God – the good things and the bad. And you will only be able to do that with a robust covenant confidence rooted in the knowledge of the nature of God and of his covenant promises through Jesus Christ.

Before we dig into the details, I want you to notice the basic structure of this Psalm. Notice that little word *Selah* at the end of verse 4. You've probably noticed those in several of the Psalms. There's no real consensus on exactly what those mean, it's probably more or less a note to "pause and reflect." Maybe something like an instrumental break. Sometimes these *Selah's* can give you some hints about the structure of the Psalm.

In this one, the *Selah* divides the Psalm into two main movements. The first four verses are David's plea, and the last four are David's confidence.

Ok, let's zoom in on the passage a bit. There are *three lessons* on covenant confidence that I want to pull out for you.

First, look at verses 1 and 2. **"[1]Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer;**
[2]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."

Here's the first lesson: *Covenant confidence is rooted in the faithfulness of God, not the faith of the believer.*

It can be easy to go into a doom spiral when we try to root our peace in the strength of our own faith. If you've been walking with the Lord for more than a week you know that faith can grow and shrink. It can be stronger one day and weaker the next. It can be tempting for us to let our peace, our covenant confidence scale with the strength of our faith any given moment. We can start to think that when I have weaker faith, then I am somehow less secure in Christ, and when I have stronger faith, then I am more secure in Christ.

Friend, the tiniest faith, if it's a true faith, saves. You are not secured by the strength of your faith but by the strength of your Savior.

This is what we see here. David isn't exactly riding the highs of a robust and mighty faith right now. He's struggling, not just circumstantially, but spiritually. He says, **"from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint."** He's not saying that he's literally far away from Jerusalem, he's saying that he's spiritually far away. He's spiritually in exile. He might have been writing this while he looked at the Temple from his bedroom window. But spiritually, he's a million miles away.

Remember what pastor Michael has been saying about the Temple. In the Old Covenant, the whole religious and spiritual life of God's people revolved around the Temple in Jerusalem. His heart is faint, he's in a spiritual exile, his faith is at a low ebb. And yet, he still prays with covenant confidence. Because he knows, God's covenant promises don't depend on the strength of my faith, but on the strength of God's omnipotence.

This is why he prays, **"lead me to the rock that is higher than I."** This is pretty much the same prayer as the father's prayer in Mark 9, **"I believe, help my unbelief."**

This is the key when we're thinking about the subjective element of covenant confidence. Your hope, your peace cannot rest on the strength of your faith, but on the strength of your savior. **"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I."**

Ok, second lesson, *covenant confidence is guaranteed by God's immutability.* This is the doctrinal note for today. God's immutability is the basic guarantee of his covenant promises. Divine immutability means that God does not change.

We see this in verse 3, **"for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy."** He's saying, "you have rescued me before, and since you don't change, I have every confidence that you will rescue me again."

If God could change, then this verse would be meaningless. "You've saved me before, but who knows what you'll do now."

And, you should note, God's immutability goes a lot deeper than mere human consistency. It's a virtue for people to be consistent, to be reliable, to be good for your word. But God's immutability is in an entirely different category. Consistent people *don't* change in a few respects – but they could. God *can't* change in any respect.

He is infinitely perfect in every way. Any change would imply parts – that part of God could change, and part stay the same. But God is simple and has no parts whatsoever. And any change would either be a change for the better or for the worse – either he isn't perfect before or isn't perfect after. God cannot change in any way.

God explicitly grounds our covenant confidence on his immutability in the prophet Malachi. Malachi 3:6 says, **"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."**

Or Hebrews 13:8, **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."**

This is why it is helpful to keep track of the ways that God has delivered you. Maybe you keep a list or just keep them in mind. Whenever you face some new hard situation, remember the last one. Remember how God delivered you from the last impossible situation.

Next, look at verses 4 and 5. Here's the transition from plea to confidence. I just want to point out the significance of what he's saying here. Essentially, these verses are the Old Testament equivalent to saying something like, "have mercy on me, let me take refuge under the cross of Christ, for you have heard my profession and repentance, and you have given me the blessing of your people." That's basically what he's saying, just without the New Testament clarity.

"Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!" This is a reference to the covenant language in the book of Ruth. Ruth is said to take refuge under God's wings when she returns to Israel with Naomi,[1] and she later asks Boaz to spread his wings over her and redeem her in marriage – redemption through covenant.[2]

Next, look at verses 6 and 7, here's the third lesson. *Covenant confidence rests on God's appointed covenant king, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Listen to this, **"Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!"**

The Psalms often point to David in some fashion. Sometimes he's simply narrating events from his life, sometimes he's recognizing the covenant significance of Israel's king, but sometimes he seems to drift off into saying things that have no business being said about the human king of Israel.

This is one such place. He starts out fine enough. **"Prolong the life of the king."** That's a fine and normal thing to pray for a king. Then he adds, **"may his years endure to all generations."** That's a little ambitious, but I guess there's no harm in asking. Then he adds, **"May he be enthroned forever *before God*."** We're not talking about a merely human king. Now he's moved the throne. He's not talking about a king enthroned in Jerusalem. He's talking about the king enthroned at the right hand of God.

David's covenant confidence doesn't ultimately rest on the human king. David's covenant confidence rests on King Jesus.

This is important. Christian, your confidence in the Lord, your peace in life, isn't just the result of reflection on some theological principles. The ultimate root of your covenant confidence is a person – the man Jesus Christ, fully God, fully man, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried, descended to the grave, risen from the dead, ascended to heaven and enthroned in glory.

And this is important. David here finds confidence in Christ as enthroned in glory. When he looks with the eyes of prophecy to the future, his confidence rests on Jesus Christ, ascended in glory. The Son of God who came in humility, now reigns in glory. The Man who died in frailty now rules in power. The Christ who died in shame, now sits in honor. The one who died for your sins now reigns for your salvation.

This is so important for you to understand. The peace of the Lord isn't merely about the nature and power of God. God is good, God is wise, God is love, God is almighty, God is immutable, God is simple, self-existent, infinite, timelessly eternal, Triune and pervasively omnipresent. But as a sinner all of that is bad news. As a sinner the majesty and holiness of God is a terror to you.

In Christ, through faith in his name, the full omnipotence of God becomes good news to you. In Christ, the immutability of God is good news. As a sinner, apart from Christ, your adversary, the God you rebel against is infinitely powerful, and immutably relentless. But in Christ, your savior and Father is infinitely powerful, and immutably relentless.

Covenant confidence rests squarely on the covenant king, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Romans 8:28–29, **"[28]And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29]For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."**

Romans 8:31–32, **"[31]What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32]He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** Meaning, he gave his Son for us. Christ came for us. He lived for us. He died for us. If he would do that for us, what would he withhold form us? What cost would be too high to pay? Whatever is good for you, God will give to you. God withholds nothing good from his children.

Romans 8:37, **"[37]No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."**

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[1] Ruth 2:12.
[2] Ruth 3:9.

Because your king Jesus came in the flesh - you can hope in God.

Because your king Jesus lived a sinless life - *the* rock is your rock.

Because your king Jesus died for your sins - there is no condemnation left for you.

Because your king Jesus conquered death by resurrection - you can conquer sin by that same resurrection power.

Because your king Jesus ascended to the right hand of God - your faithful savior is the sovereign ruler.

Because your king Jesus reigns from heaven - sorrow and suffering will not have the last word in your life, you can count your trials as joy.

Because your king Jesus sends his Holy Spirit to sanctify you - you don't need to fear when obedience to him costs you something.

Because your king Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead - you don't need to fear those who can kill the body.

Because your king Jesus, by the sword from his mouth, will establish his kingdom, will remake the heavens and the earth, will wipe away every tear, will undo every sickness, and sin will be no more, and death will be no more, and fear will be no more - you can live with hope today, and courage.

He will provide for and care for his people - in this life, and the next.

He will defeat his enemies absolutely - in this life, and the next.

Christian, your confidence in life, true covenant confidence, rests not on your circumstances, but on the resurrection of Christ. He has conquered both life and death.

Application

Ok, how does this apply to us? What do we do with this? Notice the last verse, verse 8, **"so will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day."**

Here we see the practical payoff of this covenant confidence. Covenant confidence causes you not only to endure hardships with a certain sense of inner-peace, but also allows you to continue to glorify God and continue to walk faithfully in your various callings – covenant confidence is covenant strength.

This is the danger here. We live in an age that has an unbiblical approach to hardship. Our culture, the air we breathe, basically sees hardship as an excuse to be self-absorbed, and as something of a justification for bad behavior.

We live in a fatalistic culture. Our world sees our feelings and behavior as the inevitable product of our genetics and upbringing. Meaning, our culture thinks we aren't really responsible for our actions. "I act this way because of my hardships, I act this way because of my trauma." And for the world, this isn't even just an *explanation* of bad behavior, but it's a *justification* of bad behavior. "I'm not really accountable for my sin because of my trauma. I shouldn't be held responsible for my sin because of my hardship."

Psalm 61 is a portrait of what it looks like to respond well to hardship. So, what does this portrait rebuke? And what does it push us toward?

At a high level, it rebukes all of the ways that we respond sinfully to hard circumstances. And it lays out for us a vision for what a godly response should look like.

It looks like (verses 1 and 2) praying to God and being honest with him about where you are – your circumstantial and spiritual needs.

It looks like (verse 3) remembering all the ways that God has delivered you in the past.

It looks like (verses 4 and 5) remembering God's gospel promises in Jesus Christ.

It looks like (verses 6 and 7) praising king Jesus and remembering that he sits on the throne.

And verse 8, it looks like a commitment to walk faithfully and to glorify God in and by whatever may come.

So, let's get a bit more practical. *Men*, when hard circumstances come into your life, how do you tend to respond? One of the major ways that we respond poorly to hardship, that a lot of more specific copes flow out of is passivity. There's a problem that has shown itself in your life, and you just kind of avoid it. Maybe it's watching tv for you, maybe it's scrolling X, maybe it's gaming, maybe it's working on some project in the garage, or whatever it might be, or even just an unwillingness to talk about the problem. Men, the problem will not go away if you ignore it. It will only get worse.

So, what should we do? First, just start noticing the patterns. Notice the ways that you try to avoid taking responsibility and taking action. Then second, turn to Christ. Bring it to him in prayer. Ask him for help and for strength. Stop avoiding the problem. He has redeemed you. He claims you as his own. He is sovereign, and he has put you in this situation to take responsibility.

He knows about the difficulty in your family, and you are the man that he sent to fix it. He knows about the tragedy that struck your family, and you are the man he sent to lead your wife and kids through it. He knows about that tricky situation at work, and you are the one he put there to fight it out. You are his soldier in this fight. He sent you. Fight the fight.

Women, what about you? Again, lots of unique flavors to this, but one of the major pitfalls you need to be on watch against is the opposite of passivity, a kind of excessive and inappropriate responsibility. There are a lot of ways that this can show up. For some, it's a hyperactivity with house chores. You get bad news, or some challenge thrown at you, and you respond to it by cleaning every bathroom in the house, or reorganizing all the kids' closest, or dusting all the shelves. You feel out of control so you grasp for control over something.

Or for some, this looks like gossip and meddling in other people's lives. You feel like you're not in control in your life, so you take responsibility for someone else's. Or, this can look like nagging and nit-picking your husband. I think this is what Solomon is getting at in Proverbs 21:19. He says, **"It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman."** I think that's a suggestive pair. Fretfulness (anxiousness) and quarrelsomeness can tend to go together.

So, women, what should you do? Pretty similar steps. First, notice. Just start taking note. How do you respond to hardship? Do you tend toward excessive responsibility – toward being controlling? What does that look like for you? Then second, you too, turn to Christ. Bring it to him in prayer. Ask him for help and for peace. Stop trying to control every detail. He has redeemed you. He claims you as his own. He is sovereign, and he has put you in this situation not to light fires but to be cool water. He knows about the difficulty and the tragedy facing your family, and he has put you there to be shade, to be water, and sweet refreshing to your family. Take responsibility for the things he's put in front of you to do, be faithful in your calling, and be an oasis of peace to those around you – they need you.

Now, you can imagine that these two opposites for husband and wife can create some interesting dynamics in a marriage when a sudden hardship drops on you. When a man is in passive mode, it can be easy for him to see his wife's very normal suggestions and requests as nagging or quarrelsomeness. And when a woman is in fretful activity mode it can be easy for her to see her husband's very normal "hey that's enough" as passivity. A great deal of humility and self-awareness is needed here.

I want to say this again, this is all-important. All of this flows out of confidence in Christ. Men, you will fight for others only when you see Christ as your victorious king, who fought for you and fights for you. And women, you will be an oasis for those around you only when Christ is your oasis – living water only flows *through* you when it flows *from* him.

This is how you glorify God in your hardship, this is how you "sing praises to his name and perform your vows day after day."

The peace of Christ touches everything. Covenant confidence touches everything. If Christ is your shepherd, you can handle a little uncertainty. If Christ is your shepherd, you can handle not being totally in control. If Christ is your shepherd you can risk, and lead, and do.

Jeremiah 17:7-8, **"blessed is the man who trusts the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."**

Ok, *college students*. Obviously, you are men and women as well, so you might already have your take-away for the day. That's fine. But I'd add one more for your particular season of life. One big umbrella issue for college students, one issue that covenant confidence should speak into is the issue of impatience, or more broadly, discontentment.

College is a funny season because of how future-oriented it is. Everything you are doing turns your mind to the future. In one sense that is right and good. You are taking classes to get a job. You are going to social things to try to meet the right girl, or the right boy. You're looking for internships to get a resume builder to get a good job. Everything you're doing is future oriented.

That's right and good in its place. But left unchecked, that can easily lead to a discontent, impatient, grumbly spirit. It's right and good to be preparing for the future. It's right and good to be working to get a good job. It's right and good to want to find the girl, or to marry the one you found. Praise God. But covenant confidence should prompt you to seek to walk faithfully and to glorify God in this season. And discontent does not glorify God.

Here's what I mean. This college season, this season of waiting without fulfilment, is a kind of low-grade hardship. You are waiting for something good, you are pursuing something good that you are several years, or at least several months away from attaining. So covenant confidence, faith and trust in Jesus, his wisdom and love toward you, his sovereignty over your life and your timeline, should prompt you to seek to be faithful in this season, and to glorify God through patience and contentment.

That means that you need to learn how to notice and repent of discontentment and impatience. You are in the process. You should not be surprised at where you are. God has you where he wants you. It is right and good for you to wait a few more years for that life you want. So, when you find in yourself the thought that "once I finally get the job, or once I finally get married, or once I finally pass this class, then I'll be happy" you need to take that thought captive and reject it. Christ is enough for you in this season. You have everything you need to be content now, and if you can't be content now, you won't be content then either. So, be patient.

Then last, *children*. Everyone who is living in your parents' household. Like the college students, you are in a season of waiting. Really a season of development, of growing, but that usually just feels like waiting. But you are also under authority in a way that the college students aren't. Your time is not your own. You don't get to decide what you wear, what you eat, or where you go. There are all kinds of opportunities for little hardships for you in that situation, and some big ones as well.

So, what does it look like for you to trust Christ in this season? For you it looks like gratitude and obedience. Christ is in control of the world, and he put you in that family. He knows all the difficulties that you have gone through and will go through, and in spite of all that, he put you there for your good.

So first, be thankful, be grateful, for the family that God put you into. Being put into a family that loves the Lord and takes you to church is a massive blessing. Be thankful for all the good things your parents are and do for you. Be thankful for your siblings. Don't focus on the hard things, but at the beginning and end of every day thank God for your family, especially for the work your parents are doing for you to raise you. Trusting Christ looks like trusting his will for your life and thanking him for your blessings.

And second, obey your parents. The Bible says this plainly. Ephesians 6:1, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."** Now, obedience means obedience when you don't agree with your parents. If you only obey your parents when you like what they are saying, that's not really obedience. The Bible says, obey them in the Lord. You might disagree with them, you might not like what they are saying, but God is very clear with what he wants from you. The way that you trust and obey Christ at this stage in life is to trust and obey your parents.

"I will ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day."

Lord hear my cry, hear my prayer, help me to trust in you. You have rescued me time and again, this time will be no different. Protect me, let me take shelter in the shadow of your cross. May Christ be exalted in my life. May he be exalted in my good times, may he be exalted in my hard times. May everything you give me, the good and the bad, be turned to your glory, as I sing of your goodness, and walk in the way of uprightness.

Lord's Supper

We will be celebrating the Lord's Supper today. This is a covenant meal. This meal is meant to strengthen us in our covenant confidence. It looks back to remind us of what Christ did for us to secure this covenant confidence. He lived for us and like the broken bread his body was broken for us. Like the wine his life was poured out for us. His blood is the remission of our sin, and our peace with God.

In this meal Christ also nourishes us by his Spirit, to strengthen us, and give us courage and hope and joy in the Holy Spirit. And this meal points us forward to the sure return of Christ, when every evil will be undone.

So come, take and eat. Take and remember. Take and be strengthened. Take and hope.