

A Psalm of Fear

Psalm 31:1 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.
For the end, a Psalm of David, an utterance of extreme fear.
(LXX)*

In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me!

² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!

³ For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me;

⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

⁶ I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD.

⁷ I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul,

⁸ and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.

⁹ Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also.

¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.

¹¹ Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹² I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

¹³ For I hear the whispering of many-- terror on every side!-- as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴ But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."

¹⁵ My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

¹⁶ Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!

¹⁷ O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol.

¹⁸ Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.

¹⁹ Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!

²⁰ In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues.

²¹ Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city.

²² I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight." But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.

²³ Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.

²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!"

Psalm 31

Extreme Fear

WHAT DO YOU FEAR? THE WEBSITE www.fearof.net has a top 100 list. Here are some that caught my attention in ascending order. Fear of being buried alive (100)—I would put this top ten. Ants (99)—and not that lady married to

your uncle. Zombies (98)—really? The ocean (96). Getting rid of stuff (92). Clowns (88). Wasps (86). The future (85). Technology (84). School (83)—is anyone actually afraid of school or do they just hate it? Getting old (79). Choking (76). Pregnancy (72)—as a man, that terrifies me. Mirrors (70). Mice (69). Ghosts (67). Crime (65). Cotton balls (64)—this is higher than crime? Dolls (58)—especially if they are clowns! Cockroaches (56). The fear of being forgotten (55). Fire (52). And rounding out the bottom 50 ... buttons (50)—not to be confused with the fear of belly buttons (75).

The top 50 fears include bees (49)—higher than wasps? Women (48). Friday the 13th (46). Feet (45)—gross, yes; something to fear? Love (38)—probably many who have the fear of women fear this too. Darkness (35). Balloons (34). [The fear of God](#) (31)—31? Success (30), falling (29), driving (28) and all that come next hit higher than the fear of God? Long words (26)—otherwise known as Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia. Commitment (25). Blood (24). Abandonment (23). People (21). Needles (20). Intimacy (19) and crowds (18)—but hopefully not both. Chickens (17). Failure (15). Being alone (14). Public speaking (13). Death (12). Cancer (11). Holes (10). Flying (9). Germs (8). Small

spaces (7). Lightning (6). Dogs (5). Crowded spaces (4). Heights (3). And rounding out the top 100: Indiana Jones would be happy—snakes (2) and of course spiders (1).

Reading this list will probably make you laugh, cry, and be amazed at the order, the things that are on it, and many things that are not. I'm sure you can find at least one thing on there to relate to. What I found curious is that things I thought would be there weren't. Things like poverty, war, birth-defects, murder, terrorism, a bad economy, all the things we are told we are supposed to fear by the media, and which our politicians tell us we have nothing to fear. "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" (phobophobia wasn't on the list), FDR told us as he began his presidency. "Nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

We've seen "fear" before in the Psalms. Most of it has been fearing God (Ps 2:11; 15:4; 19:9; 25:14). Psalm 31:1 begins, "To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David." However, in the LXX it reads, "For the end, a Psalm of David, an utterance of extreme fear" (Brenton English LXX). We don't know the origins of the superscriptions in either the Hebrew or the Greek. They were added later by scribes. Vs.

13 seems to reflect the thought. “For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.” Obviously, extreme fear would make sense here.

But the word has other connotations. It is not the word *phobia*, but the word *ekstasis*. And while it can certainly mean fear or terror, it can also mean bewilderment, astonishment, or shock (and yes, we get our word ecstasy from it, probably from the sense of a “trance” or “entrancement”). When we combine this with the familiar “for the end,” and understand how the heart of this Psalm is very much in line with Psalm 22 and many years into David’s future, we can begin to see why such an introduction is given to the Psalm. And with it, we can begin to worship as if for the first time.

Structure

As usual, determining **the structure** is the key to unlocking its purpose. There is more than one way to get at this one. Some see six sections:

1. Cry for Deliverance (31:1–5)
2. Confidence in God (31:6–8)

3. The Crisis: Despair (31:9–13)
4. The Resolution: Deliverance (31:14–18)
5. Protection and Presence (31:19–20)
6. Summons to Worship (31:21–24)¹

I think it is a bit simpler than this. Others see **three sections**:

1. Cry for Deliverance (31:1–12)
2. Mental anguish from feeling abandoned (31:12–20)
3. Hymn of thanksgiving for rescue (31:20–25)²

Or more **pastorally** (thinking about it this way can be of great value):

1. When Others Do Evil, Trust God for His Strength (1–8)
2. When Others Cause Pain, Ask God for His Mercy (9–18)
3. When Others See the Victory, Give God the Glory (19–24)³

Yet, I think it can be **even simpler** than this. Most see just two sections:

¹ **Donald Williams** and **Lloyd J. Ogilvie**, *Psalms 1–72*, vol. 13, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1986), 244; Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 527.

² **Mitchell Dahood** S.J., *Psalms I: 1–50: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 16, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 187.

³ **Warren W. Wiersbe**, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., "Be" Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 120–22.

1. Prayer of trust/deliverance (vv. 2-19)
2. Thanksgiving in answer to prayer (vv. 20-25)⁴

The problem now is that it is probably **a bit too simple**, like a first-year art student's sketch of a Michelangelo painting. Therefore, we need to look at it in a different, more familiar way for the Psalms. Some have seen the structure of the prayer as a chiasm, which is always helpful because it shows us the psalmists center of attention:

- A. Prayer (2-6)
- B. Trust (7-9)
- C. Lament (10-14)**
- B¹. Trust (15)
- A¹. Prayer (16-19)⁵

We can see how these parts line up in the repetition of words or ideas in the various sections:

⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 2nd ed., vol. 19, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 258; Mark D. Futato, "The Book of Psalms," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 125. Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Tanner, "Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1-41," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 300 (they see it as vv. 1-8 and 9-25).

⁵ Craigie, 259.

- a. חסה “seek refuge” (vv 2, 20)
- b. בוש “be ashamed” (vv 2, 18)
- c. נצל “rescue, deliver” (vv 3, 16)
- d. ישע “deliver” (vv 3, 17)
- e. יד “hand” (vv 6, 9, 16)
- f. בטח “trust” (vv 7, 15)
- g. רחם “lovingkindness” (vv 8, 17, 22)⁶

What is interesting about these words is that they are the opposite of reacting in extreme fear. In fact, they are **the antidote** to it. They calmly approach the throne of grace, seeking safety and deliverance in a state of trust in God’s lovingkindness. And this tells us something about any kind of fear that we may face, which we will look at in more detail as we go along. And yet, consider that these words repeat even though the central part of the song is a lament.

But we can be more specific still. The psalmist not only brings his requests to the LORD in faith, but he talks about some very specific things, and each of these are answered by God, so in return, David gives thanks. He seeks **refuge (1)**, he is given refuge (**19-20**), and therefore gives thanks. He

⁶ Ibid.

seeks **protection** from conspiracies against him (17), God protects him from them (21), and therefore gives thanks. He asks God to reveal his **lovingkindness** (17), God answers him (22), and therefore gives thanks. He asks to have his **prayer heard** (3). God hears his prayer (23), and therefore gives thanks. And so on. Let's turn now to these themes as they come up in the song.

Refuge

He begins with **a declaration of shelter**. “**In you, O LORD, do I take refuge.**” Refuge is one of those great themes of our hymns, because our fathers in the faith not only knew their Bibles, but lived in days when one of the great fears was being overrun.

God is our refuge and our strength
Our ever present aid
And, therefore, though the earth remove
We will not be afraid

Fear. For the things you are afraid of, you need a Rock in the storm so that you are not buffeted by the winds and

waves and rains. You need a bulwark in the war, so that you can withstand the onslaught of the enemy. You need safety in danger, even if it comes from your own hand or mind, like a phobia—rational or irrational.

This is what God is to his people. He is their refuge, their safe place where nothing can harm them. The experiential reality of this, the fact that it is known to be true, is so important to the psalmist that we can say **the last five verses** in some way discuss it. “**Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you**” (19). Do you hear how he praises God for being his refuge? And not only for him, but for all who fear him.

Fear again. Suddenly, we see the right kind of fear. In the list above, 30 things ranked higher than the fear of God. Yet in the Bible, the only thing we are to fear is Him. But this is not a phobia-fear. It is not irrational. It is a fear of his **omnipotence** and his power to create or destroy; his **sovereignty** and his right to do either one; his **holiness** and our inability in our sin to come anywhere near his presence without turning to ash; his **majesty** and **glory** which shines so brightly upon us that we go blind; his **justice** and the right

he has to punish us for our sins; his **being** and how there is no other like him in all the universe. That is someone to fear.

But **biblical fear** does not result in fighting against him, in scoffing at him, in hiding *from* him. It results in hiding *in* him as your refuge. This is because biblical fear also understands **the grace** he has showered upon us through his Son Jesus and that through him God has made a way possible for us to be forgiven of our sins, to be shown mercy rather than justice, and to be given all of the great benefits of salvation that come from him by grace through faith.

As David continues this thought of God as his refuge, he considers himself in a different refuge: **a besieged city (21)**. As we said, **vv. 19-24** really have God as a refuge as their main theme (the last two verses are more general). Using **a besieged city**, perhaps Jerusalem when Absalom was after him, is a counter of God as a refuge.

His city of refuge was, like any man-made refuge, ultimately not safe for him, even though it was, humanly speaking, supposed to be the safest place he could be. When the city was under siege, David sought the Lord. He had said to himself “**in his alarm**” at what was happening (and you can about imagine it if your own son turned treasonous

murderer on you), “I am cut off from your sight” (22). David felt as if God had abandoned him, that all he had was this city that was falling before his eyes. That’s the problem with trusting in human power and strength, and we are great at doing it.

“But,” the king says, “you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help” (22). In this city under attack, God heard the cry of his saint. And David gives thanks. Working backwards now, “Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city” (21). Why? Because “in the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues” (20). In other words, they sought refuge in the LORD, and he hid and protected them.

What kind of a protection is it? Let’s go forward again. First, it is a public protection. “In the sight of the children of mankind!” (19). God doesn’t hide us in secret. He lets the world know that he is hiding us. He wants the glory in doing so, even from them. He wants them to be amazed at his protection of his saints from their evil plots. He wants them to know that he takes care of his children.

Second, it is a [protection from verbal attacks](#). “[Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.](#)” So say school children. In fact, names do hurt, and they scar, and they leave deep emotional marks on many people. This chant is missing the vital ingredient, which is a God who heals the scars, who gives us a new identity, who gives us new purpose and life in Christ so that what others say does not become who you are or what you obsess over. His is the name we own, and whatever tongues say or plot against him, we know that he prevailed. Since we take refuge in him, we know that he will keep us from the ultimate harm that they cause.

If you have been scared from the strife of tongues, you need to learn that the answer to being healed from their deadly poison is to flee again to the Rock of Refuge. In him, you are sheltered from that strife, because your identity is not wrapped up in their accusations. Like Satan the Accuser, when you sin and he reminds you of it through others, your identity is in Christ. When he prowls like a raging lion and roars in your ears, you can hide safely behind the walls of Christ. The tongues of others do not need to rule your life. You do not need to be in fear of them.

Third, his protection is his steadfast love. “He has wondrously shown his steadfast love when I was in a besieged city” (21). The LORD allows us refuge in him because he loves us. God is love. He knows what it is like in this world better than anyone. And he knows we need to experience his love if we are to have hope in this world. So as he shelters us, he reveals more of who he is in love to our hearts. Anyone who has been freed from the words of others, from their lying or slanderous or accusing tongues, or from their plots to harm and hurt them know what God’s love it like. And you can know this love if you will seek your refuge in Him.

Fourth, it is a protection that hears. “You heard the voice of my pleas for mercy” (22). This means that God answers the prayer of shelter in him. To hear is to answer. God knows when we cry to him, and he answers our prayers for a refuge. Have you, like David, sought refuge in the LORD?

Shame

The song continues with thoughts about shame. “Let me never be put to shame” (1). We looked at shame in some detail in Psalm 25. We defined it as, “A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.” This has a parallel in the Psalm in vv. 17-18. While it does not have David’s sin in mind here, it clearly shows how shame is related to sin. “O LORD, let me not be put to shame” (17). He says virtually the same thing, except that vs. 1 was more general. Let me *never* be put to shame. Now, the general becomes specific. Let me *not* be put to shame.

He gives the justification of such a bold prayer. Not for anything in David. But rather, because “I call upon you” (17). Because he finds refuge in his God, and calls upon his God, it is for this reason that David says don’t let me be put to shame. If he were trusting in himself, his plea would go unheard, for God shames and confounds those who put their refuge in other things and who refuse to call upon his Name. But because he calls upon the LORD, it is the LORD’s honor that is at stake.

Then the circumstance comes into view. “Let the wicked be put to shame” (17). David is praying here exactly

what we just said. Now, for some periods of time, often for long periods, God does not put the wicked to shame. Instead, they flourish in this life, even as they attack God's people. So the parallel comes in: "Let them go silently to Sheol" (17). Sheol is both the place of the dead and the place that later is translated as Hades. It is difficult to know if David is asking God to justly condemn them to hell, or if he is asking for God to make those who seek to be great in the eyes of men become so pitiful that no one will remember when they die. Perhaps it is both.

Sometimes, circumstances make this kind of prayer easy. Perhaps, too easy. "Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt" (18). Here we can see more of what the "strife of tongues" (20) was doing. They were lying, telling untruths, which as anyone who has been a recipient of such things knows are terribly painful and harmful. They were also bragging in their pride as they thought themselves better, and scorning in their contempt as they viewed David as a lowlife.

But this wasn't just directed at David. He has in mind all the righteous who are scorned, spoken against, lied about by insolent, arrogant, wicked people. He asks that God would

shut their mouths and let them go silently down to Sheol. This is called **praying for justice**, and it is not wrong to do so, though I submit it must be tempered also with care and kindness that would hope they would repent. For this is how God is who does not delight in the death of the wicked (**Ezek 18:23; 33:11**).

Deliverance

The song continues in vs. 1 with a prayer **for deliverance**. This is a very common theme throughout the psalms, as the Psalmists are so often in difficult circumstances. “**In your righteousness deliver me!**” (1). As a prayer, this part continues for a few verses. “**Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily**” (2). He doesn’t pray, “**Hey God, if you feel like it and if you get around to it, feel free to rescue me in your timing.**” He is bold. Rescue me, and **do it now!**

How? By returning to the first theme: refuge. “**Be a rock and a refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me**” (2). And yet, deliverance, rescue, and salvation are all the same thought. For the Christian, these things come by being

hidden safely away in Christ. “For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me” (3). This language is the language of Christ. The Rock is Christ. The Name is Christ. It is also the language of Psalm 23, and the prayer to the Good Shepherd, who is Christ. He finishes it out here with “You take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge” (4).

He returns to this theme in vv. 15-16. “My times are in your hand” (15). Here, he acknowledges God’s absolute sovereignty over him. David can do nothing about the day God has ordained for him to meet the Maker. God holds every minute, every hour, every day in his hands.

A man this month was walking dozens of yards away from a busy street on a sidewalk with his girlfriend. Suddenly, he falls over, having been hit in the head by a **stray tire** moving at 40 miles per hour. Though blindsided, he lived. Back in 2004, three people were riding in their car on I-70 heading to the mountains on a lazy Saturday morning when a 40-ton **steel girder** dropped from the freeway overpass right onto their car, killing them instantly. A one in a billion shot. If God wants you to live, you will live. If he wants you to die, you will die. Our times are in his hands,

which is the reason you must listen to what you are hearing now and apply it to yourself, for you do not know how long you will have to do it.

Nevertheless, even after such a confession, he still asks God to **rescue him from the hand of his enemies and persecutors (15)**. Furthermore, he asks him to **“Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love” (16)**! Why would he do these things? Because this is what it means to be in a good relationship, and David is in a good relationship with the LORD.

He has felt God’s hidden face (**Ps 30:7**), and he didn’t like it. He wants his shining face. David doesn’t know the future. He does know that God is capable of saving him, even as he knows that he may not choose to. Nevertheless, because they are friends (**Ps 25:14**), David let’s his heart be known. And this is exactly what God wants. **It is for your good that you honestly tell God what you want.** Even though he knows it already (in fact, because he knows it already and you can’t hide it anyway), it is for your good that you do it. It allows you to let it out. If you don’t, then you aren’t really talking to him, you aren’t really engaging in that friendship

he has given to you, and it is through these things that we are sanctified.

Hating what God Hates

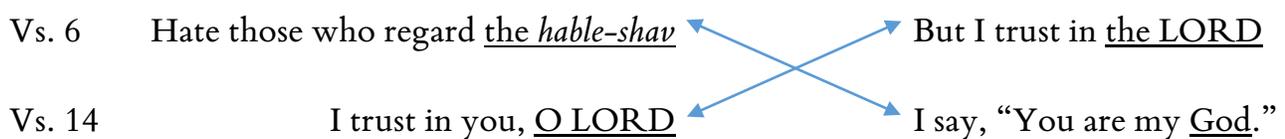
Besides what we've already seen, part of being friends with God, part of fearing him is that **you learn to hate what God hates**. Yes, God hates certain things. He hates sin. He hates rebellion. He hates “worthless idols” *and* those who regard them. Not in an absolute sense, but in the sense of the hatred of abomination. He hates them for loving those things. God is a jealous God. What does that have to do with anything?

David says, “**I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols**” (Ps 31:6). There are **two important words** here. “**Worthless**” (*shav*) is the same word used of taking God's name in “vain” (Ex 20:7). Or of giving “false” witnesses (Ex 23:1; Dt 5:20) or being a “false” man (Job 11:11). So, it is a word that is filled with the meaning of deceit and deception, of lying and that vanity that comes from such sin.

The other word is “**idols**” (*hebel*). This is not the word used in the Second Commandment of those idols (*pesel*). It

doesn't refer to an object used in worship of saints or gods. Moses uses it one time. He says they have made me jealous with what is not God. These are their "idols" or "vanities" or "abominations" or "worthless gods" (Deut 32:21, various translations). The context of Moses' song is of foreign gods (12), strange gods (16), demons/*shedim* (17), rocks that are not the Rock (31). Thus, David is singing about those sons of God from Psalm 29 that ruled the nations whom the Israelites were so tempted to worship.

Again there is a parallel. This time it is vs. 14. "But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.'" This is why he says, "But I trust in Yahweh" (Ps 31:6). He will not turn to Baal or Molech or Asherah for his help, for they are treacherous deceitful liars, and his soul hates them for leading men astray to follow after lies and created things and to worship the creation rather than the Creator.



And thus, the fear of God, the friendship of God, the trust of God is a putting none of those things in anyone else. It is learning to hate what God hates by loving him.

Enemies

We have heard the wicked whispers of men in this Psalm, but next it unfolds the fact that David has enemies. “You have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy” (8). This is parallel to vs. 13, “For I hear the whispering of many.” He has real men and probably women seeking to harm him. He hears their plots echoing down the empty corridors of his palace at night. They are scheming against him (13) in the dark. They are plotting to kill him (13) behind his back. This is why they are his enemy (8). And this is where we learn most directly that this is a psalm of extreme fear—terror on every side (13). I can only imagine. I cannot relate to this kind of terror.

Wasting Away

But then I get to see what it does to him. “My eye is wasted from grief” (9). Probably from crying. Probably also from getting little sleep as he worried he might be killed in the middle of the night. He is speaking quite literally.

“My soul and body also” (9). It is perilous to the body and soul when such things come upon men. The anxiety, fear, apprehension, worry that such a thing would bring to a person is burdensome in the extreme. If enemies don’t kill him, these things might. “For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing” (10). This was not just a day or two, but entire years of the man’s life were spent like this.

But suddenly, and perhaps without realizing it, we are not at the end, but in the center of the poem. The very center is the next words: “My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away” (10). Some men are proud that *they* would never worry, *they* would never feel anxious about anything, nothing could bring about such weakness in *them*. David suddenly confesses his sin. What sin? Presumably the way he is reacting to his enemies. His flesh is wasting away because “in the flesh” he is sinning because of what others are doing to him. Can you see now why he needs a refuge and great deliverance? Can you see just how

terrible his plight is? It is not just without, but within. He needs rescuing from himself! He finds it impossible to respond the way he should, even though he wants to.

Christ

It continues in **vs. 11-12**. “Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.” Beloved, I do not know about you, but I read these words and I no longer think of David.

As many have pointed out, Psalm 31 here has many affinities with Psalm 22 (see chart at end of sermon).⁷ In the words here I am reminded of “**But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people**” (22:6). “**I am poured out like water**” (14). Psalm 22 was a highly Messianic Psalm, perhaps more than any other in

⁷ cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., vol. 19, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 263; Rebekah Eklund, *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus’ Laments in the New Testament* (New York: Bloomsbury Pub., 2015), 46-47.

terms of the sheer volume of verses directly about our Lord in the NT.

That means, we have seen how the psalmist can suddenly become someone else. The language here is some of that resemblance. “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger” (Lam 1:12). Thus sings Jeremiah. Thus we sing in *The Messiah*. David sings about affliction and sorrow, but does it compare to Jesus Christ?

Do we forget the scorn he became to all those around him? They mocked. They ridiculed. They spat. They gave him a crown of thorns. They dared him to call judgment down on them. The Romans. The Jews. The leaders. The people. His own disciples. Forgotten. Left for dead. A broken vessel. Terror on every side. Psalm 31 is a psalm for The End. The end of the old covenant. The end of our Lord’s life in the mortal body.

“But,” you say, “David sings of his sin.” His sin caused him to waste away. But beloved, was it not because of sin that our Lord became a reproach, that he became the Man of Sorrows, that his strength gave out as he died on the

cross? No, **not for his own. But for yours.** For **mine.** For your sin, the Lord Jesus in body and soul wasted away on the cross and became a reproach even to his own Father who forsook him there and left him for dead. He did this willingly.

Perhaps the most revealing part of this psalm is its ending to the first part of the cry for deliverance, which we looked at earlier. We saw **vv. 1-4**, but what about verse **5**. David sing, **“Into your hand I commit my spirit”** (**Ps 31:5**). What do these words mean? David seems to be saying that even if he should die, he will trust in the LORD.

But David was inspired by the Holy Spirit. And these are the word of **Messiah on the cross**. In fact, they are the last words he spoke on the earth prior to death. John tells us he cried out **“It is finished”** (**John 19:30**). Matthew and Mark tell us he cried out **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** from **Psalm 22:1**; cf. **Matt 27:46**; **Mark 15:34**. Luke tells us he cried out **Psalm 31:5**, **“Into your hands I commit my spirit,”** and then as the KJV puts it, **“he gave up the ghost”** (**Luke 23:46**). In elder days, “ghost” meant “spirit” (Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit). So in giving up his

spirit, Jesus was committing himself into the hands of the Father as he died.

Two things are particularly amazing about this in light of Psalm 31. First, He died. This deliverance actually resulted in physical death. But here, Jesus is showing that although he has been mistreated by all men, he nevertheless chooses when he will die.⁸ David has to pray for deliverance. Jesus willingly chooses not to be delivered. David commits his spirit into the hands of the LORD passively, accepting whatever destiny the Father chooses for him. Jesus commits his spirit into the hands of the Father actively, fulfilling his own destiny planned out in eternity past by the triune God. No man takes his life from him, but he willingly gives it up of his own accord for our sake.

Second, let us return to the opening theme of **extreme fear**. Certainly, David was fearful of many things, and he has had to confess his sin in the middle of the song, sin that is obviously contextualized as arising from the onslaught of others against him. Clearly, if ever there was a moment to

⁸ cf. François Bovon, [*Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*](#), ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 327; Norval Geldenhuys, [*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*](#), The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 612.

be fearful, anxious, worried, nervous, panicky, frightened, alarmed, scared, or terrified it would have been on that night and morning of our Lord's Good Friday. But as others have noted, Luke—in only citing this verse from Psalm 31—is ingeniously showing that, “**There is nothing here of anger or doubt or thrashing about in the throes of death. Rather, Luke writes of serenity, acceptance, and trust.**”⁹ Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of Psalm 31. He embodies perfect trust in the Lord.

Faith (Committing Your Spirit/Thanksgiving)

Therefore, beloved of God, as you consider this psalm of extreme fear, as you consider your fears, as you think about the worries of your life—some perhaps justified, others not, as you think on the things in this life that are out of your control, of enemies both personal and impersonal, as you think about how David composed his song and prayed to God for refuge and deliverance, as you think about his trust that was nevertheless tainted with sin, as you think about yourself as like unto David, **consider the Lord Jesus.**

⁹ **Fred B. Craddock**, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 275.

Think on what he did for you in committing his spirit to the Father and dying on the cross. He became a substitute for you that you might not die. Think of how he overcame it willingly, deliberately, calmly, collectedly, without sin, without worry. Yes, he was a man and what he experienced as a man was horrible and he did not want to do it. Yet, as God he did it for you so that in him you might have a Rock and a Refuge and a Deliverer who will keep your spirit safe even if your body should fail, and will also do so as one who understands exactly what tempts you, and yet he does so without sin so that he might be your God to bring you safely through.

Therefore, what else is there to do but worship? The Psalm concludes, “Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD” (Ps 31:23-24). Yes. Yes. And Amen.

Appendix 1

In the sermon, as we were looking at the parallels to things like “refuge,” “shame,” “deliverance,” and so on, I took us through the following chiasm:

Psa 31 chiastic structure:

- 1a) [Psa 31:1a](#), In You, O LORD, have I taken refuge;
- 1b) [Psa 31:1b](#), Let me never be ashamed;
- 1c) [Psa 31:1c-5](#), Deliver me in Your righteousness, for into Your hand I commit my spirit:
- 1d) [Psa 31:6a](#), I hate them that regard lying vanities;
- 1e) [Psa 31:6b](#), But I trust in the LORD;
- 1f) [Psa 31:7-9a](#), I rejoice in Your lovingkindness/ You have not given me over to my enemies:
 - 1g) [Psa 31:9b-10a](#), My eye is consumed, even my soul + body, for my life is spent in sorrow + sighing {n};
central axis) [Psa 31:10b](#), My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones are wasted away;
 - 2g) [Psa 31:11-12](#), Because of my adversaries I have become a reproach + dread {n}, I am forgotten + broken;
 - 2f) [Psa 31:13](#), I have heard the whisperings: terror on every side: {n}/ While my enemies took counsel against me;
 - 2e) [Psa 31:14a](#), But as for me, I have trusted in You, O LORD;
 - 2d) [Psa 31:14b](#), I have said, You are my God;
 - 2c) [Psa 31:15-16](#), My times are in Your hand: deliver me from my enemies in Your lovingkindness;
 - 2b) [Psa 31:17-18](#), Let me not be ashamed:
- 2a) [Psa 31:19-24](#), The fate of those who take refuge in the LORD:

Psalms 22 and 31 in Parallel

Psalm 22	Psalm 31
<p>"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. ³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you <u>delivered</u> them. ⁵ To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to <u>shame</u>.</p> <p>⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" ⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. ¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. ¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. ¹² Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. ¹⁴ <u>I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;</u> ¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet-- ¹⁷ I can count all my bones-- they stare and gloat over me;</p> <p>¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. ¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! ²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! ²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! ²² I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: ²³ You who fear the LORD, <u>praise him!</u> All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred the <u>affliction</u> of the <u>afflicted</u>, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. ²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. ²⁸ For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. ³⁰ Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; ³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.</p>	<p>²² I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight." ²³ Love the LORD, all you his saints! ¹ "In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to <u>shame</u>; in your righteousness <u>deliver</u> me! ² Incline your ear to me; <u>rescue</u> me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ¹⁴ But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁷ O LORD, let me not be put to <u>shame</u>, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol. ¹¹ Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.</p> <p>¹³ For I hear the whispering of many-- terror on every side!-- as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. ¹² I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become <u>like a broken vessel</u>.</p> <p>⁹ Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. ¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.</p> <p>⁴ take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ¹⁵ My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. ⁷ I will <u>rejoice</u> and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my <u>affliction</u>; you have known the distress of my soul,</p> <p>²³ Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. ²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!" ¹⁹ Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!</p>