

Psalm 56: The Bottle & The Book

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn to that psalm that we read, Psalm 56. Psalm 56, and if we read again at verse 3.

Psalm 56 at verse 3, where David says, When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise, in God I trust, I shall not be afraid.

What can flesh do to me? All day long they injure my cause. All their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk, they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life.

For their crime will they escape. In wrath cast down the peoples, O God. You have kept count of my tossings. Put my tears in your bottle.

Are they not in your book? And particularly verse 8, where David says, You have kept count of my tossings. Put my tears in your bottle.

[1 : 02] Are they not in your book? I'm sure you've heard of the phrase, message in a bottle. Or you've maybe heard of the 1970s song by the police that was called, message in a bottle.

Or maybe even when you were younger, you wrote a message and you rolled it up and you placed it inside a bottle and you threw it out to sea in the hope that someone on the other side of the world would find your message in a bottle.

In fact, that's what one of our elders did when he was proposing to his girlfriend, who is now his wife. He wrote her this romantic and poetic poem, which was a proposal.

And it was a little message in a bottle for his girlfriend, or now his wife, to accidentally find on the beach. And she found it and they read it and they got engaged and got married and the rest is history.

But you know, in many ways, well, who said that romance is dead? But also in the Guinness World Records, the oldest message in a bottle is said to be 132 years old.

[2 : 13] And it was an old gin bottle that was thrown overboard on a German ship, a ship that was sailing in the Indian Ocean. It was thrown overboard on the 12th of June, 1886.

And then it wasn't found until the 21st of January, 2018, on the coast of Western Australia. And the message in the bottle was neatly rolled up like a cigarette with a string neatly wrapped around it.

And written on the message was just the date, the coordinates of the ship, the name of the ship and the name of the captain. And the message then said, it requested that whoever found their little message in a bottle, that they were to get in touch with them.

But of course, after 132 years, it was a bit too late. But apparently it was part of a research project into currents and shipping routes that this message in a bottle was thrown into the sea in the first place.

And so we've heard of a message in a bottle. But you know, have you ever considered your tears to be a message in a bottle? That's what David says here in Psalm 56, that your tears are a message in a bottle to God.

[3 : 31] Because as David confirms there in verse 8, the Lord retains your tears in his bottle and he records your tears in his book. The Lord retains your tears in his bottle and the Lord records your tears in his book.

Now the context to Psalm 56 is that David was on the run from King Saul. Because Saul knew that David had been anointed as the next king of Israel. While Saul was still on the throne in Israel. And David, he ran for his life and he ran, and that's mentioned in many of the Psalms. He ran for his life as far as the territory of the Philistines. And as the title of the Psalm suggests, David was captured by the Philistines in Gath.

And so the context of Psalm 56 is that everything seems to be going wrong in David's life. Because he's hated by the king. He's on the run from the king.

He's then captured by the enemy, the Philistines. And his life is now in danger. Everything is going wrong in David's life. And as you would expect, David is wondering why the Lord was allowing these things to happen.

[4 : 43] David was wondering what purpose it had for David's life. And David was also wondering how the Lord was going to ever bring good out of this. And in Psalm 56, David is crying to the Lord for help and for healing.

In fact, like many of the Psalms that David wrote, there's this threefold pattern to the Psalm. There's a threefold pattern. Because there's David's problem, prayer and praise.

David's problem, prayer and praise. Where David, he often begins a Psalm by stating his problem. And then he brings it to the Lord in prayer. And then he praises the Lord for the Lord's rescue and relief.

There's often this threefold pattern to David's Psalms. There's the problem, the prayer and then praise. But this morning, I want us to narrow our focus just to verse 8.

And I want us to think about this wonderful thought that our tears are a message in a bottle to God. And that the Lord retains our tears in his bottle and records our tears in his book.

[5 : 56] The Lord retains our tears in his book. And so I'd like us just to consider very simply the bottle and the book.

The bottle and the book. So if we look first of all at the bottle. The bottle. We'll read again at verse 8. As you know, crying is a natural response to our circumstances and situations.

Because the first thing we do when we enter this world is cry. And when someone we know and love leaves this world, we respond by crying.

Crying is a natural response to our circumstances and situations. Because as humans, we have a range of emotions. And so it's not unusual to cry.

Although it's said that on average, women cry twice as much as men. But what's interesting is that animals don't have tears of emotion. Animals have tears, but they don't have tears of emotion.

[7 : 10] Which only highlights what we know already. That we're not descendants of monkeys. But that we're fearfully and wonderfully made in the image and likeness of our creator.

In fact, tears serve many purposes. Because there's more than one type of tear. And our eyes produce tears all the time. It's said that our eyes produce 15 to 30 gallons of tears each year.

Because there are three types of tear. There are what we call basal tears, which help to nourish and protect our eyes every time we blink. There are also reflex tears, which are formed when our eyes need to wash something away.

That's something that's irritating them, like smoke or even the smell of onions. And then, of course, there are emotional tears, which are produced in response to our situations and circumstances.

And our tears, they're essential not only to protect our eyes, but also to express our emotions. But, you know, when we often talk about crying, we're usually referring to emotional tears.

[8 : 20] Tears that express our emotions. And as you know, we have so many emotions. We have so many emotions and we express all these emotions in different ways.

That's why our mobile phones have all these emojis. They have all these different emojis that express our emotions. And they even have an emoji for crying with laughter or crying with sorrow.

Because our tears express our emotions. Now, for the most part, men want to suppress their tears. And they want to hide their emotions because, well, they see crying as a sign of weakness.

But it's actually said that crying is good for you. And that there's benefits to crying. Because crying tears of emotion, it actually releases toxins in our body, which has this soothing effect upon us.

Whereby it relieves stress, it reduces pain, it raises our mood, and it helps us to relax and even sleep. And so there are actually benefits to crying.

[9 : 26] And, you know, the psalmist David, he was no stranger to tears of emotion. Because throughout his life, we'll repeatedly find David crying and weeping.

And David, he shed many tears. There were tears of sin, tears of salvation, tears of sadness, tears of sickness, and tears of sorrow. But in Psalm 56, David gives to us this beautiful reminder that throughout our life, the Lord retains our tears in his bottle and records our tears in his book.

The Lord retains our tears in his bottle and records our tears in his book. But this thought that David has, it actually isn't something that he came up with himself.

It was a common practice in the ancient Eastern culture to actually have a tear bottle. A tear bottle that wasn't made of glass, but made of skin, animal skins.

And it was a common practice that if you were ill or upset, friends would come round to your house and comfort and console you. And as the tears would roll down your face, your friends would seek to catch these tears in a bottle.

[10:43] And they would seal and store these tears as a memorial to the event in your life. But you know, as David wept in Psalm 56, he wasn't longing for his friends to come and comfort and console him.

He was longing for the Lord to comfort and console him. David was longing for the Lord to retain his tears in his bottle and record his tears in his book.

And as we said, throughout his life, David shed tears of sin, tears of salvation, tears of sadness, tears of sickness and tears of sorrow. David, you'll remember, he shed tears of sin when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband Uriah.

David shed tears of salvation when he came to confess the Lord as his shepherd. David shed tears of sadness when he had to run from King Saul and leave his best friend Jonathan behind.

That's what Psalm 56 is all about. David also shed tears of sickness when his weak old son was dying. And even when there were 70 men, 70,000 men in Israel who died because of a pandemic.

[12:00] And David shed tears of sorrow. He shed tears of sorrow when his son Absalom died. David wept on his bed crying, O my son Absalom, O my son, my son Absalom.

Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son. And so you see, my friend, throughout his life, David shed tears of sin, salvation, sadness, sickness and sorrow.

And you know, I'm sure that you can relate to David's experience. Where that you can say today that there have been times in your life where you too have shed tears of sin, salvation, sadness, sickness and sorrow.

There have been times in your life where your tears have been a message in a bottle to God. Because with all that you've been through and all that you've experienced, your tears, they were often accompanied by prayer.

And you know, the Bible, it beautifully affirms this truth to us, doesn't it? In Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8, as you know, it's a chapter all about the hope of the Christian.

[13:13] And where there's no condemnation and no separation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But also in Romans 8, Paul says that all the silent sighs and sorrows of our heart, all the weeping without words, all the tears and all the groanings which cannot be uttered.

Paul says, they're all heard in heaven. They're all heard in heaven. Because my friend, the wonderful thing about prayer is that you don't even need to use words.

You don't even need to use words. The Lord knows our heart. The Lord hears our cries. The Lord sees our tears. And like he did for David, the Lord retains our tears in his bottle.

And he records our tears in his book. And whether these tears have been tears of sin, salvation, sadness, sickness or sorrow, the Lord knows them all.

The Lord knows them all. He knows our tears of sin. The Lord knows when we've cried to him for mercy. He knows when we've pleaded for him to create within us a clean heart.

[14:23] The Lord knows when we've shed tears over the state of our sin. He knows when we've wept bitterly like Peter because we denied the Lord publicly. My friend, the Lord knows our tears of sin.

And he retains them in his bottle and records them in his book. But he also knows our tears of salvation. He knows the joy we felt and the peace we received when we knew forgiveness of sin. Because at that moment, our mourning, it was turned to dancing. And we rejoiced with tears. We rejoiced to know God as our Father. To know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

And to know the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. We rejoiced with tears of salvation. And you know, I don't think there's anyone who shed tears of salvation like the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears.

And wiped them with her hair. You know, her joy was so deep. And her thankfulness was so great. That she wept at the feet of Jesus.

[15:32] And she wept because she had met with her Saviour. She had been freed from her sin. And she had received forgiveness. She had tears of salvation because her sins, which were many, had been forgiven.

And the Gospels remind us that she loved much. She wept much because she loved much. In fact, one commentator said about this woman that her tears were more precious to Christ than the

sweet-smelling ointment she poured on his feet.

And you know, being true to his word, Jesus retained her tears in his bottle and recorded them in his book.

Because Jesus said to that woman, you'll remember, Jesus said to her, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world, what you have done will be told in memory of you.

But you know, when we speak about tears of salvation, it's an experience which is very bittersweet. Because when you commit your life to Jesus Christ, you lose a burden of sin, but you gain a burden of souls.

[16:54] You lose a burden of sin, but you gain a burden of souls. Because when you're converted, you begin to have this care and concern for others who are still lost in their sin and still have yet not come to have peace and experience the promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

And your tears of salvation, my friend, they very quickly become tears of sadness as you plead with the Lord. And you plead with the Lord, praying for your husband who's still out of Christ.

Or your wife that's still a stranger to grace and to God. Or your parents who are nearing eternity. Or your children who are on the broad road to destruction.

Or your family that knows you so well. Or your neighbours who live so close to you and yet they're so far from the kingdom. Or even your what colleagues who witness your joy, but they don't know your Jesus.

My friend, is it not the case that when you become a Christian, you lose a burden of sin, but you gain a burden of souls? You lose a burden of sin, but you gain a burden of souls.

[18:02] And yet, you know, what this psalm is assuring us is that our tears of sadness over lost souls, they are all being retained in a bottle and recorded in a book.

So my friend, I want to say to you this morning, don't stop pleading. Don't stop praying. Don't stop shedding your tears for those whom you know and love.

Keep sowing. Keep sowing in tears so that you may weep in joy. But as you know, our tears of sadness, they are not only because of souls that we know, they're also because of situations that we face.

Because our tears of sadness can be caused by the breakup of marriages, or the breakdown of relationships, or the burden of finance, or the bullying of others, or the beating of a spouse.

And even Hannah in the Old Testament, she had tears of sadness when she thought that she would be barren and couldn't have children. And yet the Lord, the wonderful thing is the Lord retained all these tears.

[19:18] He retains our tears in his bottle, and he records them in his book. But there are also tears of sickness.

Because when we're given bad news and our worst fears are confirmed, that our health or the health of a loved one has changed, there's that care and concern about cancer.

And these things, as you may know only too well, these things can steal our sleep. They can exhaust our emotions.

Because there's the natural worry about tumours and treatment and even time. And you know, like it was for Hezekiah, when we're given bad news and we're told in many ways to set our house in order, because death is no longer this distant discussion, but a painful possibility.

And yet, as the Lord said to Hezekiah, I have seen your tears. I have seen your tears. And that's what the Lord says to us, my friend. I have seen your tears, and I have retained them in my bottle, and I have recorded them in my book.

[20:33] I have retained them in my bottle, and recorded them in my book. But then there are tears of sorrow. And they're the tears that we're all too familiar with in our homes and in our families.

Tears of sorrow. Do you know, my friend, tears of sorrow were found in the first family home of Adam and Eve. And they've been found in every family home since.

Because, as you know, and maybe only too well, the wages of sin is death. And death, it is the last enemy. It's a powerful enemy.

It's a great enemy. And it's the great separator. It separates families. It separates friends. It separates foes. It separates soul and body. And for those left behind, it brings tears of sorrow.

And you know, there's one thing the Bible never shies away from. And that's the sorrows of this life. It's a recurring theme. And it's repeatedly witnessed in the lives of both sinners and saints.

[21 : 38] Because it's a reality. Sorrow is a reality. And the tears of sorrow are never far away. The tears of sorrow are never far away.

My friend, the Lord knows all our tears. Our tears of sin, salvation, sadness, sickness, and sorrow. And the Lord retains our tears in his bottle. And he records them in his book.

But you know, what I find most comforting is that it's not only our tears that are retained in the bottle and recorded in the book.

You know, the tears of Jesus are also retained in the bottle and recorded in the book. All our tears, my friend, they are mixed and mingled with the tears of Jesus.

Because as our Bible affirms to us, this Jesus, this Jesus whom we are to come to and find rest in, this Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

[22 : 46] And Jesus, he became like us in order to bear our griefs and to carry our sorrows. My friend, the tears of Jesus are retained in the bottle and recorded in the book.

And our tears are mixed and mingled with his tears. Because you know, the tears of Jesus are just like ours. The tears of Jesus were also tears of sin, sickness.

Sin, salvation, sadness, sickness, and sorrow. You know, Jesus, he also shed tears of sin. Not for his own sin, but for your sin and for my sin.

Jesus shed tears of sin. Hebrews 5, verse 7 tells us that during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.

Jesus shed tears of sin for your sin and for my sin. But he also shed tears of salvation. Jesus shed tears to bring us salvation.

[23 : 52] Is that not what the hymn writer said? Man of sorrows, what a name. For the son of man who came, ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah, what a saviour.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude. In my place condemned he stood. Sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah, what a saviour.

And you know, my friend, we can echo those words because Jesus shed tears of salvation as he cried from the cross, it is finished. It is finished.

Jesus shed tears of sin, tears of salvation, but he also shed tears of sadness because he was despised and rejected by men. Jesus came to his own people, but his own people would not receive him.

And you know, when Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem, we're told that he wept. He wept. Jesus shed tears of sadness at the hardness of people's hearts.

[24 : 55] And Jesus cried, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

But you were not willing. You were not willing. Jesus shed tears of sin, salvation, sadness, but he also shed tears of sickness.

Because Jesus, you know, he moved with compassion. And when Jesus moved with compassion, the blind could see, the lame walked, the deaf heard, lepers were cleansed, the dead were raised to life, and the poor had the gospel preached to them.

My friend, Jesus shed tears of sickness when he moved with compassion. But Jesus also shed tears of sorrow. And you know, it's no accident that the shortest verse in our Bible is in John 11, verse 35.

Jesus wept. Jesus wept. And Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus because he loved sinners. But he also saw what sin had done to us.

[26 : 19] And Jesus wept. He had tears of sorrow. But the tears of Jesus, they were retained in the bottle and recorded in the book.

And our tears, my friend, they have been mixed and mingled with the tears of Jesus because the tears of Jesus were just like our tears. They were tears of sin, salvation, sadness, sickness, and sorrow.

But you know, my unconverted friend, there's one other type of tear that Jesus winsomely warns you not to have. And that is tears of suffering.

Because you know, the tears of suffering, they will not be experienced in this life. The tears of suffering, as Jesus often said, they will be experienced in the weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell.

And Jesus, that's why he winsomely warns you not to have tears of suffering. That's why the gospel is urgent. That's why you must come to this Jesus with your tears.

[27 : 36] You must come to him now. Come to him while there is time. Come to him whilst you're on mercy's ground because he promises to meet with you and to retain your tears in his bottle and record your tears in his book.

Come to this Jesus, my friend. Come to him because he promises to retain your tears in his bottle and record your tears in his book.

But what about this book? Because if the Lord retains our tears in his bottle, why does he record them in his book?

And that's what I want us to see secondly and very briefly. The book, the bottle and the book. The bottle and the book. Looking at verse 8, you have kept count of my tossings.

Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? In Psalm 56, David says that the Lord retains our tears in his bottle and records them in his book.

[28 : 42] But what book is David referring to? Well, I want to suggest that it's the same book that David refers to in Psalm 139. Psalm 139, it's a wonderful psalm about the Lord's sovereignty, how the Lord knows everything about us.

He knows our rising up and our sitting down. He knows all our thoughts. He knows what we're going to say before we even speak. And it's in Psalm 139 that David acknowledges that before he was even formed in his mother's womb, every day of his life was written in this book.

And my friend, this book that David refers to is the Lord's book of providence. The Lord's book of providence where the Lord has seen everything take place in our life before it has even happened.

And it's all written there in the Lord's book of providence where every circumstance and every situation in our lives is written and recorded in the Lord's book of providence.

But you know what's also written and recorded in the Lord's book of providence? is our tears. Our tears of sin, our tears of salvation, our tears of sadness, our tears of sickness, and our tears of sorrow.

[30 : 03] They're all written and they're all recorded and they're all written and recorded with the explanation as to why they are there at all. You know, we might not understand why.

We don't know why we have these tears of sin and salvation and sickness and sadness and sorrow. But you know, through every tear, every tear that we shed, David is reminding us that the Lord is teaching us.

The Lord is teaching us because he's the one who has written the story of our lives. and the amazing thing is that he's written the story of our lives in his book of providence and he turns the pages in our providence.

And even though we might be on a page today that is a very difficult page to be on, he knows our tears. And there might even be tears in your life that you may never find the answer for.

You might not understand why they're there. And these pages of providence they've been written into the story of your life that you might never know why. But my friend, in all that we go through in our lives, we have been called to trust in the Lord.

[31 : 21] We're being called to trust that his way is perfect. We're being called to trust that he knows the way that we take and that when he has tried us we will come forth as gold.

My friend, we're being called to trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not upon our own understanding but in all our ways and even with our tears to acknowledge that he knows and directs our paths.

And you know, that's what David repeatedly emphasizes here in Psalm 56 that when he's afraid he'll trust in the Lord. He says that in verse 3, when I'm afraid I put my trust in you.

In God whose word I praise in God I trust I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? And then again in verse 10 he says In God whose word I praise in the Lord whose word I praise in God I trust I shall not be afraid.

What can man do to me? My friend, we're to trust the Lord and we're to keep trusting the Lord. We're to keep trusting the Lord until the bottle and the book are opened.

[32 : 33] We're to keep trusting the Lord until the bottle and the book are opened. And you know, that's the image we're given right at the end of our Bible.

We're given that image in the book of Revelation that when this world is done and the role is finally called up yonder we're told there that the Lord will open the bottle and he'll open the book.

He will open the bottle and pour out our tears. He'll open the book and reveal why everything was written, why it had to be this way and why these were our tears and why this was our path.

The Lord will open the bottle and the book in which he retained and recorded our tears of sin, salvation, sadness, sickness and sorrow. And as the book of Revelation tells us he will wipe away every tear and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more.

Why? For the former things will have passed away. My friend is that your hope?

[33 : 49] Is that your hope this morning? Do you know the Lord? Are you trusting in the Lord with all your heart?

Are you trusting the Lord with your tears? Are you trusting the Lord with your tears? Because he promises today and every day he promises to retain your tears in his bottle and record your tears in his book.

So my friend David is reminding us this morning that you must come to the Lord. You must trust in the Lord. You must bring all your tears.

Your tears of sin, your tears of salvation, your tears of sadness, sickness and sorrow. You must bring all your tears to the Lord because he promises to retain your tears in his bottle and record your tears in his book.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee this morning that we are able to bring every tear to thee in prayer.

[35 : 06] We give thanks, Lord, that even all our tears of sin and salvation, our tears of sadness, sickness and sorrow, they are all seen by thee.

They are all heard in heaven. And Lord, we give thanks that thou art one who retains our tears in his bottle and records our tears in his book.

And even though we may not understand why they are there or why we have to go through this experience, help us, Lord, we pray, to trust thee in it, to trust thee in the darkness because even the darkness is as light to thee.

All, Lord, we give thanks for thy faithfulness that despite all that we go through in life, all the ups and the downs, the trials, the tribulations and the tears, we thank thee that thou art our constant.

Bless us then, Lord, we pray. Bless us as homes and as families. And remember us, we ask, that whatever our burden may be today, that we might bring it to the Lord in prayer and to bring it with tears, knowing that, as the psalmist says, that thou didst my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free.

[36 : 20] Bless us then, we pray, go with us, we ask, and to this day thine own day and help us to rejoice in the Lord always because the Lord, one who is faithful, do us good and we pray for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Well, we'll bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 116. Psalm 116, we're singing in the Scottish Psalter and we're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 8.

Psalm 116, where there's this, it begins with this wonderful confession of faith. The psalmist says, I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here.

I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear. and he goes on down to verse 8, for my distressed soul from death delivered was by thee, thou didst my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free.

Psalm 116, from verse 1 down to the verse marked 8. To God's praise. I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did here.

[37 : 42] I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

Of death and wars and sorrows did that the faith of us frowned.

The days of hell to hold on me I live and troubled heart.

Upon the name of God the Lord then did I hope and sing deliver thou my soul O Lord I do thee humbly pray God merciful and righteousness yea yea gracious is our Lord God since the King I was brought low in every land of

Lord O love my soul do thou return unto thy quiet rest for our people the Lord to thee his body hath expressed for my distress soul from death delivered was by thee thou mist my morning eyes from tears my day from falling gray pour and us II