TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS
PSALM 54

MAIN IDEA
No matter what kind of situations we are going through; the important thing we need to remember is to keep our eyes squarely focused on Jesus.

I. FOCUS OF ATTENTION (VS 1-3)
   Evil people focus their attention on themselves. Righteous people keep their attention focused on God.
   A. ONLY GOD CAN SAVE US (1)
   B. ONLY GOD CAN ANSWER PRAYER (2)
   C. WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES (3)

II. GOD HELPS THOSE WHO CANNOT HELP THEMSELVES (VS 4-5)
   God has promised he would never leave us nor forsake us. He promises us His love, His presence, His power, and His provision.
   A. GOD LOVES US AND PROTECTS US (4a)
   B. GOD IS PRESENT WITH US AND PROVIDES FOR US (4b)
   C. GOD WILL FIGHT OUR BATTLES FOR US (5)

III. LIVING FROM THANKSGIVING NOT ENTITLEMENT (VS 6-7)
   God’s children live with a sense of deep gratitude knowing what God has done for them.
   A. THANKFUL ACTS (6a)
   B. THANKFUL WORDS (6b)
   C. THANKFUL ATTITUDES (7)
Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Psalm 54

We are in a group of psalms that have all been authored by David; that is Psalms 51-65. Several of these psalms give the historical context of their composition. If you recall, Psalm 52 was written in reference to an evil man Doeg who betrayed David to King Saul and also killed all the priests, their families, the residents, and all the animals in the priestly city of Nob.

However, one priest named Abiathar, escaped with the ephod of the High Priest and joined David. That's where the story picks up today. David received word that Israel's enemies were attacking the city of Keilah. The Philistines were looting and terrorizing the city. David got word of this and asked God if he should go rescue the city. God instructed him to go; so David took his men and fought off the Philistines. After defeating the Philistines, God warned David to leave the city. Here is what is interesting about this. David has already been anointed the legitimate King of Israel. God has already rejected Saul as King. Therefore, Saul is the illegitimate king who is ruling while Israel's legitimate king is running for his life. God miraculously protected King David and his men as the whole army of Israel hunted them. In this morning's psalm, we see the Ziphites who are Jews from the tribe of Judah (which by the way is the tribe David comes from) betray David not once, but twice; even after he saved them. During all this time, Saul used the Israeli Army to pursue David, David had the chance to kill Saul several times; yet did not because David believed it would be wrong to kill Saul since God anointed him king. David's reasoning was that God anointed Saul; it would be up to God to take him out. It seems that it was David's fate to be betrayed by people that he did good to. Another important point is that all this historically takes place before David committed the grievous sins of adultery and murder that Psalm 51 was written in response to. David proved his love for God in the way he righteously comported himself. David continued to do the right thing; even though it seemed as if no one appreciated it and several people continued to betray him. So this is David's prayer response to the betrayal. David clearly believed the he should act righteously even though he suffered for it. That meant that he would not take personal vengeance. He would place his wellbeing in the hands of God. For the most part, David was careful to keep his eyes focused on God. Spiritual eyesight is an important theme throughout the Bible. We would assume that since we know that physical sight is important.

One day a woman started to cry as she looked in the mirror. She said to her husband, “Honey, I'm old, I'm ugly, I'm fat, and I'm undesirable. Could you please ... please say something nice to me?”

He responded, “Well at least you have good eyesight.”

The main idea of this morning’s text is this. NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF SITUATIONS WE ARE GOING THROUGH; THE IMPORTANT THING WE NEED TO REMEMBER IS TO KEEP OUR EYES SQUARELY FOCUSED ON JESUS. I think that's something we have to remind ourselves of every day. Whether things are going well or whether things are going badly; we can embrace every situation with joy if we will just turn our eyes upon Jesus.

I. FOCUS OF ATTENTION (VS 1-3)
Verses 1-3 explore different focuses of attention. EVIL PEOPLE FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON THEMSELVES. RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE KEEP THEIR ATTENTION FOCUSED ON GOD. The psalm paints very different pictures of these two types of people.

In verse 1 David makes it clear that he believes that only God can save us. In order to make the psalm more readable, our modern translations may have done us a disservice. Both verses 1 and 2 start out with the phrase, “O God.” If we were to read this psalm in Hebrew or if we were reading the ESV or Mitchell Dahood’s translation, we would see both verses start out with the phrase, “O God.” God is meant to be the central focus of attention in this psalm. Just so there is no mistake, David wants to identify the God He is praying to. He uses the generic term for God, Elohim in verses 1, 2, 3, and 4.

In verse 4 he addresses God as Adonay which means Lord. This is an interesting title for God in the mouth of David. Jesus argues that David recognized Jesus as Lord. In Psalm 110, David said, “My Lord said to My Lord, sit at my right hand.” Jesus pointed out that as the King of Israel; there would be no one David would address as Lord. Therefore, Jesus claimed that David was describing the interaction between God the Father and God the Son Who is Jesus. In this psalm, David is demonstrating his submission to God as his only legitimate Lord and Master. And to cap it all off, David addresses God, his Lord, by His proper Name, Yahweh. This indeed is the One true and living God. There is no other. He is God. He is Lord. He is Yahweh. This will be important because the enemies who are attacking and betraying David are also Jews and David is clearly addressing the God of the Jews.

David cries out to God for salvation. That is a powerful word. In Hebrew the word is yasha and in Greek the word is sōdzo. These words have to do with healing and liberation of all sorts. This word is used in Exodus 14:30 like this:

30 That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. 31 And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.

Exodus 14:30-31 / Today's New International Version

For Jesus, setting people free from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death was how He saved. The word means to heal as well. We know that He healed people physically, spiritually, and emotionally. In this psalm, David is asking God to save him from Saul, Israel’s army, and all those who have treated him treacherously by betraying him.

He asks God to save him by His power and His Name. Remember that for the Hebrew, Name was used to describe a person’s nature and character. Name makes us present to the community. David is asking God to judge between him and those who are ruthlessly pursuing him. David calls out to God for liberation.

In verse 2, we come to understand that only God can answer prayer. False gods cannot answer prayer. People today like to say prayer is like putting positive energy out there. David is not confused nor should we be confused. There is only One true and living God. That is the God of the Bible.
Again, David starts out this verse with “O God.” We now encounter the word shama again. We have talked about this word quite a bit. It means “to hear” and it starts out the daily prayer of the Hebrews, “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is God alone.” Notice how David uses it. “O God, hear my prayer.” In the second line, he implores God to listen. The word for listen has the sense of God giving us His ear. It can also mean to harken. We could translate David’s request as asking God to empathically listen to his prayers. David wants God to understand his words and his heart. An important aside comment I would like to make is that our words should be used to save and to deliver people. Our words should be used for good and not for evil. Our words should reflect our love for God and our trust in God.

Verse 3 makes the point that we cannot save ourselves. God’s children keep their eyes focused on Him. In contrast, wicked people keep their eyes focused on themselves. If you notice, this verse contains three lines of poetry. It falls into the category of climactic parallelism. In other words, each line builds on the previous line and ends up with the payoff thought in the last line. That phrase ends by describing the people David is describing as people without regard for God. In other words, like the previous psalm has stated, they are fools because they ignore the existence and presence of God. They have made themselves gods in their own eyes. They have rejected the One true and living God. That’s the payoff phrase; they have no regard for God.

The first two lines describe them as arrogant foes who are ruthless. Again, this is translated correctly but misses the shock and violence of the verse. First of all, our text translated the first line as arrogant foes. The word literally means stranger and is the common word for foreigner. This would be a word that described people from foreign countries. But David’s enemies here are not the Philistines or invaders from a foreign country. They are fellow Israelites. To make things worse, they are from the same tribe he is from. He refers to them as foreigners and strangers. He does this to emphasize the fact these attackers are estranged from him who is their legitimate king and fellow countrymen; and they are estranged from God. The way they are acting; they may as well be pagans who worship false gods. They have abandoned Israel, Israel’s true king, and the God of Israel. They now worship themselves; their own lusts, appetites, and desires.

The next line describes them as ruthless people. This word has a violent flavor to it. They have no hesitation to brutalize and kill people. They have no regard for life. Mitchell Dahood translates this word as barbarians. Who are people who turn away from God? They are traitors, barbarians, evil, and narcissistic in the worst possible ways. They have made themselves gods in their own world. Whatever they lust after, they will pursue; even at the expense of others. They have no hesitation to use and even to kill people to get what they want.

After all that; it is no wonder David ends this section with Selah. Even though this is common and understandable; we should gasp to think of the evil that evil people unleash in this world; while thinking they are perfectly righteous. Let’s try to capture David’s thought here. EVIL PEOPLE FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON THEMSELVES. RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE KEEP THEIR ATTENTION FOCUSED ON GOD. Selah; be silent and think which category you fall into!

II. GOD HELPS THOSE WHO CANNOT HELP THEMSELVES (VS 4-5)

In verses 4-5, we see that God helps those who cannot help themselves. GOD HAS PROMISED HE WOULD NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US. HE PROMISES US HIS LOVE, HIS PRESENCE, HIS
POWER, AND HIS PROVISION. We have to always keep this in mind as we read these psalms of David that describe his situation while on the run from Saul. David had six hundred men who were on his side. On the other hand, Saul had the entire army of Israel working for him. Think about this. The well trained and well equipped Israeli army consisting of thousands of foot soldiers, charioteers, and horsemen were hunting David and his six hundred rag tag, poorly armed, and untrained men in an area that covers the lower third of Israel. In human terms, it shouldn’t have been difficult to find and exterminate this band of David and his faithful followers; especially since so many people were willing to spy on and betray them. They only reason they were able to prevail was that God protected them every step of the way. In fact, two incidents stand out. One time, King Saul went into a cave to go to the bathroom. While he was doing his business, David came and cut off a piece of his robe. Another time, David sneaked up on Saul while he was sleeping and stole his spear. Both times, Saul was heavily guarded by his soldiers and both times David could have easily killed him. Only God could give David and his followers that kind of advantage over trained soldiers.

He reminds us in the first half of verse 4 that God loves us and protects us. Verse 4 is clearly the central message of this psalm. We could say that God is our rock. In the first half of the verse, David refers to God as his helper. Let me make an aside comment here. In trying to place men in an authoritative status over women, people try to use this verse from the creation account:

18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.”

Genesis 2:18 / New Living Translation

They argue that Eve was Adam’s helper as if she was under his authority and less powerful. But here and in other places in the Bible, God is referred to as our helper and no one would dare make that argument in regards to God being under our authority. Getting back to our text, we see that God is the One we can count on to help us because He loves us. He protected David; He can protect you and me.

In the second half of verse 4 we see that God is present with us and provides for us. Notice that David transitions from identifying God as generic God to Lord. Even though David is king; he views himself as subordinate to the real King of Israel, the world, and the universe. God is Lord of the universe, Lord of King David, and Lord of our lives. Now we come to the word “sustains” in our text. This is an interesting word that not only means to sustain but to lean on. In other words, because God is a loving and personal Lord Who is personally present; He can protect us and provide for us. He is our Rock.

Verse 5 completes that thought by showing us that God will fight our battles for us. David demonstrated his trust in God’s love, God’s plans, and God’s timing by not taking Saul’s life. God brought Saul's life to a tragic and disgraceful end. He actually had to have his young armor bearer help him commit suicide after being critically wounded. God punished Saul and elevated David. We have to keep this in mind when we look at David’s prayer. These are one of the prayers modern day scholars find trouble with. We call them imprecatory psalms. David prays for real harm to come to those who have betrayed him including Saul. We could use the modern day terms that apply to guns. David may say something like, “God, when they have me in their sights and pull the trigger; make the gun backfire, blow up in their face, and kill them.”
I think the description of a boomerang may be a little more appropriate. The enemies of David take aim and launch the weapon at him. David prays that God would make that boomerang pick up speed and do the damage to them that they intended for him. David asks God to annihilate and exterminate them.

Jesus commanded us not to take revenge on people or to try and get even. Jesus commands us to love our enemies and pray for them. I think before we can forgive someone or genuinely pray for them; we need to take the matter before God and acknowledge how harmful they were to us and how they harmed us. We must first embrace the pain and the suffering before we can genuinely pray for them and forgive them. That can only be done as we live in the abundance of God. GOD HAS PROMISED HE WOULD NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US. HE PROMISES US HIS LOVE, HIS PRESENCE, HIS POWER, AND HIS PROVISION. As we live in the fullness of this unfailing lovingkindness of God; we can overcome those who seek to harm us.

III. LIVING FROM THANKSGIVING NOT ENTITLEMENT (VS 6-7)

I think this final section is critically important for Christians to embrace. Verses 6-7 describe a person who has learned to live with attitudes of thanksgiving not entitlement. GOD’S CHILDREN LIVE WITH A SENSE OF DEEP GRATITUDE KNOWING WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THEM. In my opinion, this is the most devastating sin our country and the world faces. People are no longer thankful; people have come to have attitudes of entitlement. Let me first lay out the problem before we get into the text. If a person thinks that he or she has a right to get what they want when they want; they can never be thankful because they have come to think what they have they deserve. The flip side of this is if people do not get what they want when they want it; they become angry and oftentimes violent. That should never happen with Christians. Let me explain. Christians know well and understand clearly that the only thing we are entitled to according to the standards of righteousness is an eternity in hell that starts right here on earth being separated from the love of God. In other words, I was born into thousands of years of sin passed on; and in addition to that, I have personally and willfully sinned against God. I am a slave to sin, Satan, and death. I deserve to live a miserable life here. In order to be a Christian, we must come to this conclusion; if God were to judge me on what I have earned, then all I am entitled to is to live like pathetic scum on this earth. I deserve to be spit on and despised. I am useless, valueless, and garbage. If that is not bad enough; I deserve to burn in hell for an eternity when I die. If that is indeed my starting point, then I will be thankful for the smallest thing I get.

Second, anything I receive comes as a direct result of God’s undeserved love and blessing. Since everything belongs to God; if I receive some food, I’ll be grateful; if I am able to work, buy clothes, and have a roof over my head, I’ll be grateful. Christians realize that everything we have, everything we are, and everything we call our own; actually belongs to God and He chooses to share it with us.

Finally, when we come to God in faith and He applies the blood of Christ to our lives; He grants us eternal life. He comes into our lives now and journeys through all of life with us. When we die, He escorts us safely to our eternal heavenly homes. We will spend eternity with Him in heaven. That should cause us to be thankful.
Since we understand that every breath we take comes as a direct grace of God; we live with thankful hearts. Even when things go badly, we give thanks because God is with us. The Apostle Paul said this:

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 / Today’s New International Version

Being thankful is the way we can demonstrate our love for God. The first half of verse 6 reminds us that we can do this with thankful acts. In addition to all the sacrifices that covered a multitude of sins and all the sacrifices required by religious laws, the Hebrews could bring a special sacrifice to the temple just to say thanks to God. Isn't that a beautiful gesture? Sometimes we could demonstrate our thankfulness to God by giving extra money or service to the church. I have noticed that for some reason poor people tend to be more generous and thankful givers than rich people. I think that's because rich people have fooled themselves into thinking they have become rich because of their hard work and wise thinking. Therefore, they think they are entitled to the money they have. It never crosses their minds that the only reason they have money is because God gave it to them. That causes them to focus their eyes on themselves and not on God. Jesus said that where one’s treasure is; their heart will be there also. Thankful people readily share what they have with others and with God. Their treasure lies in heaven with God. Their generosity flows from their thankfulness.

In addition to thankful acts, the rest of verse 6 demonstrates that thankful words flow from thankful hearts. David was a man who often burst out into spontaneous praise. Look at this. He now addresses God by His personal Name, Yahweh. Even though David is living in caves as he is chased across mountains and deserts; he realizes that God is the one protecting him. One of the spiritual disciplines is doing the examen. Before we go to bed at night, we review the day under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We examine how we used our words. Our words should only be used for good and not for evil. Jesus’ brother James said this:

7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. 10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! 11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? 12 Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can’t draw fresh water from a salty spring.

James 3:7-12 / New Living Translation

If our hearts are full of love and thanksgiving to God, then praise and good words should come out of our mouths. You see people who believe they are entitled to things will always have evil coming from their mouth because no one can every have absolutely everything they want if they are driven by their lusts and their selfish desires. David was always thankful to God. That’s what God loved about him.

As Christ fills our hearts, minds, and souls, thanksgiving should constantly be coming out of our mouths. I don’t know if you have ever had the privilege of being around a truly thankful person. My Aunt Betty lived with us during the last years of her life. She said thank you for everything.
think “thank you” were the words that most came out of her mouth. She was so thankful and non-demanding, you would just want to keep doing things for her.

I imagine that’s the way it is with God. When we continually thank Him for everything and don’t complain; He must be deeply moved and want to keep giving us more.

The key for believers is to live with thankful attitudes. David says that God delivered him from all his troubles and that he joyfully looked in triumph on his foes. David escaped and was able to avoid being captured that time; but he certainly wasn’t safe. Saul would continue to pursue him and try to kill him. David was able to live day by day, and moment by moment. He was thankful for everything. I would like us to live with thankful attitudes. Let us learn to live acknowledging that everything belongs to God and everything we receive comes as a direct blessing from God. That sets us apart from the rest of the world. GOD’S CHILDREN LIVE WITH A SENSE OF DEEP GRATITUDE KNOWING WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THEM.

I’m pretty confident that while on the run for his life, David was extremely thankful to God for every grace. It was only when he was safe in his palace that David forgot to be thankful for what he had. When he saw the wife of one of his trusted soldiers naked, what he had was not enough. He had to take this woman and kill her husband. That’s what comes from an attitude of entitlement. David paid dearly for that; but he did once again become humble and thankful. Let’s keep our eyes fixed on Jesus; not on ourselves and not on this world. NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF SITUATIONS WE ARE GOING THROUGH; THE IMPORTANT THING WE NEED TO REMEMBER IS TO KEEP OUR EYES SQUARELY FOCUSED ON JESUS.

Lectio Divina
Psalm 54 (TNIV)