

A Prayer for God's People in Dire Situations (Psalm 3:1-8)

Introduction

I don't think it comes as a surprise to anyone that we are living in times of increasing hostility toward those who profess Christ as Lord and Savior and who seek to live in accordance with the Scriptures. Many share a growing concern about an agenda where coercion and intimidation have become the weapons of choice in overturning cultural norms that have underpinned Western civilization for centuries. The engines of influence, particularly our educational institutions, the entertainment and sports industries, and mega corporations – increasingly are using their leverage to demand compliance with the new agenda—or face possible dismissal or even legal action. As God's people, we *feel* the rising pressure. So, **what are we to do?**

I think if we are honest with ourselves, most of us are wrestling with that question. Indeed, there is an ongoing discussion that permeates social media and news outlets, along with frequent advertising on ways that people who are alert to these dangers ought to prepare. There is a place for a larger discussion on this topic. In fact, Pastor Bob will touch on some of these concerns in our special meeting on Christian Nationalism on Sept. 6.

But this morning, we are going to look at a Psalm of David that shows us precisely *where we must begin*. **Psalm 3**. Notice how this psalm begins with a historical title that links it back to the account in 2 Samuel chapters 15 to 18 which we have been studying in recent weeks. It begins: ***A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, his Son***. From 1 and 2 Samuel, we have already learned a lot about David, both good and bad — especially the bad in the more recent passages. It finally came to a head when Absalom's bitterness against his father's passivity was ignited by his own evil ambition to overthrow his father. David's sin and its reverberation throughout his family had thrown the country into a crisis. A looming civil war threatened the survival of the king—and the future of the nation.

But God was not finished with his king nor His people. We begin to see David's recovery, specifically his awakening to his sin and his genuine confession to Nathan the prophet. We also see flashes of David's earlier faith: He humbly accepted God's correction, even coming from the lips of hecklers like Shimei; he rejected the offer of Zadok the Priest to bring along the Ark of the Covenant as David fled from Jerusalem. He would not stoop to using the visible reminder of God's presence as a personal good luck charm. David was far from perfect, but He was **still** *"the man after God's own heart."*

In Psalm 3, we learn even more. This psalm takes us from David's *difficult outward circumstances* shows us the *inner life* of a righteous man *under pressure*. It functions for the reader like a spiritual MRI of David's heart. And the Holy Spirit intends that it do the same for you and me. With that in view, let's stand together for the reading of God's Word:

3 O LORD, **how many** are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

² **Many** are saying of my soul,
 “There **is no salvation** for him in God.” *Selah*

³ But you, O LORD, are a **shield** about me,
my glory, and the **lifter of my head**.

⁴ I *cried aloud* to the LORD,
 and *he answered* me from his holy hill. *Selah*

⁵ I lay down and slept;
 I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
 who have set themselves against me all around.

⁷ **Arise**, O LORD!
Save me, O my God!
 For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
 you break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;
 your blessing be on your people! *Selah*

Pray:

The psalms tell the same story that the historical books of the Old Testament tell, but they tell it in a *different* way. Not through narration like the books of Samuel but through **prayer and praise**. Although each of the 150 psalms can be read individually, they were often intended to be understood in relation to surrounding psalms. You can see this especially in Psalms 1-3. Psalm 1 is about the righteous man (vs the wicked). Psalm 2, shows us that this righteous man is also God’s King— the One who is the ultimate solution to a world that is raging in rebellion against God. Ultimately, it points us to King Jesus. In Psalm 3, we see a **specific example** of this rebellion against God’s King, namely David. This is important to keep in mind as we read and apply this psalm.

Psalm 3 is a lament psalm. To lament is to *boldly declare your problem to the Lord*. Dare we say, “Complain?!” For some, that might sound unspiritual or perhaps even irreverent. But properly understood and used, **it is a vital way to talk to the Lord about the pressure we face in a broken world**. We already noted that *David is under intense pressure*. He had gone from being a celebrated hero to public enemy #1. But even though the charges against David remind us of his past sin and ongoing consequences, they have no **current jurisdiction over David**. They are malicious accusations of a rebellious son who has organized a conspiracy against God’s anointed King. So, what does David do and, by his example, what does he *encourage us* to do when we face dire circumstances as God’s people?

Look again at the first two verses of Psalm 3: ¹ O LORD, **how many** are my foes! **Many** are rising against me; ² **Many** are saying of my soul, “There is **no salvation** for him in God.”

Question: What do you do when you feel overwhelmed by your circumstances? How do you respond when your problems seem insurmountable? Do you try to distract yourself with busyness and activity? Do you try to escape your painful thoughts and feelings through binging on food, entertainment or whatever else you can find to avoid facing your fears?

David's example here may seem counter intuitive. But it is **sound** counsel. He is saying...

1. **Face your troubles and take them to the Lord (1-2)**

British pastor and Biblical scholar, Alec Motyer in his book, *Psalms By the Day*, explains the wisdom of such counsel when he writes: **"The vague is so often more alarming than what is candidly and specifically faced."** (p. 24). The more generalized our estimation of the problem, the greater the opportunity for our imagination to run away with it. As David faces trouble, he does not *minimize* it. Nor does he *exaggerate* it. He is realistic! Notice the word, "Many" It is repeated ***three times***. There is crescendo of urgency in David's request. First...

- a. *He calculates the opposition: "How many are my foes!"* (Lit. "How my adversaries have multiplied...") As David watches the ranks of the rebellion grow, he sees his own numbers declining. The math is working against him as his men defect to Absalom! Next...
- b. *He describes what they are doing: "Many are rising up against me"* (Notice the echo here from Psa. 2:1-3 (Read it) David knew Psalm 2. He likely wrote it, based on the fact that the early church ascribed it to him in Acts 4:25-26. So, he sees this opposition not as something random, but as something that is part of the fabric of human history. The pressure that he was facing began in Genesis 3 with the opposition of the serpent in the Garden who tempted God's image-bearers to rebel against Him. **"You can be like God!"** which is another way of saying: **"You can be your own god!"** We increasingly hear that in our own day, don't we?

For those of you who are worn out by all the recent discussion about "conspiracy theories", there may be some consolation here. There **really is a conspiracy**. And it's not *just* a theory. God has called it out again and again throughout Scripture. David realizes that at the end of the day, the opposition is not so much *about him* as it is *about the King behind the King! The King of Kings!!* When you begin to feel the pressure of opposition for your identification *with* and obedience *to* King Jesus, just understand this: You are not alone. You are in **good company**. This has been the lot of God's people through the ages. *And frankly it is the plight of millions of our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. It is also an evidence of our relationship to the King ("All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Finally...*

- c. *He reports what the many are saying: There is no salvation for him in God. (Cf. 2 Sam. 16:7 – What Shemei said to David). This is the most serious of the three attacks, because it has the potential to undermine David's faith in God's promises) Shimei (and others) were questioning either God's ability or God's willingness to help David.*

Either charge, ultimately, is an assault on God's character because God had anointed David through Samuel. And God had never revoked that anointing!

In today's secular culture, the charge being leveled against *faithful believers* **is that we are on the wrong side of history**. The Bible's message of salvation is considered a **road block** to the new vision of progress and ultimate human flourishing. We know that we cannot be faithful to God and truly caring to others by going along with the lie that *each person has a right to personal autonomy*. Yet, to not go along with that message is becoming increasingly costly. *Our lament* today is that the Gospel we believe and are called to protect and proclaim is being labeled as **"hate speech."** Just affirming what to us seems obvious, let alone biblical, is placing us in a position where everyday conversations feel like we may be walking through a minefield.

*So don't miss what David is showing us here in verse 2. He's talking to God about what is happening. He's too practical to tell himself to forget his problems. And he doesn't try to convince himself that they are insignificant. Instead, like Hezekiah who years later was faced with a threatening letter from the King of Assyria, he presents these threats before the King of the Universe with the expectation that God will hear and respond. What we learn in this psalm is that lament is a crucial **first step in dealing with our pressure.***

*Lament is the **starting point. But it is not an end in itself.** If you park too long on lament, if you gaze too long at the strength of your enemy or the intensity of your circumstances, your problem will just seem bigger and bigger. Peter Craigie rightly observed: "The hypnotic power of the Enemy is *broken* when one turns his gaze toward God." Which brings us to the next step in vs. 3-6.*

2. **Determine to trust the Lord** (3-6)

a. David prayed the Lord's promises v. 3 – **"But You Lord..."**

Already in verse 1, and now here in verse 3, he addresses God by His *personal, covenant name, Yahweh* (translated in our English versions "the LORD" - all caps). Yahweh is *the God who is present* with us. Psalm 2:6 reminds us that God had installed David as King on His holy hill (Mt Zion). But that installation was accompanied by the firm promise of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Sam. 7 that David's throne would be established *forever*. Because David was certain of God's promises confirmed in that covenant, his confidence was reinforced by the character of God.

David continues to calculate. But now he counters the three **"manys"** of verses 1-2 *with the Lord's promises*. Notice the descriptions he used: **"You are...."**

- **A Shield about me** (Gen. 15:1) Shields were essential for protection in war. The word here for shield in the Hebrew was a body length shield that offered maximum **protection**.

Yahweh was his *ultimate* protection in the battle with his enemies. David had read God's self-description in Genesis 15:1 that he revealed to Abraham, and he applied to himself. By the way, there are numerous other metaphors just like this one in the Psalms. God is a rock of protection, a fortress, a tower, an archer, a shepherd, a warrior and so many more. He's even a *thunder storm*. (That's a good one for those worried about Global Warming). These images are powerful tools to counter-balance "the manys" in life that oppose us! David went on to call Him...

- **My Glory** – This could refer to David's **reputation**. What gained him honor and respect from others. What gave him significance. **David's standing was ultimately in Yahweh's hands**. But beyond this idea is another possible meaning. "You are **My Glorious One**." (alt. translation in the NIV) This speaks of God and His majesty over the hosts of heaven or God's glorious heavenly court. He is so glorious that He can call His innumerable angelic army to aid His children (Psa. 34:7 – The angel of the Lord encamps around **those who fear Him**, and delivers them; Elijah & his servant in 2 Kings 6:15-17; Isa. 6:4 – "Lord of Hosts"; Luke 2:13-14 – "Multitude of the Heavenly Host"). Think of the scenes in Revelation! Notice also....
- **The Lifter of my head** – This phrase speaks of David's hope of **restoration**. (C.f. Psalm 27:6) It is a powerful contrast to the picture we recall in 2 Samuel 15 when he left Jerusalem barefoot with his head covered in shame. It's actually *a theme that runs through the books of Samuel* beginning with Hannah's song way back in 1 Samuel 2. The Lord *exalts* the person who *humbly depends on Him*. God restored David not because David deserved it, but because *David was trusting in God* to carry out what He had *promised*.

Application: So how was David able to respond this way? He didn't just make these up on the spot. *He confronted his real and dire circumstances with truths and metaphors that he had **already dug out of God's Word***. David, the righteous King of Psalm 2 was also the righteous man of Psalm 1 who *meditates on God's law day and night* (1:2) This is the only way that **he could and we can** flourish in the midst of the scorching heat of a broken world.

In essence, meditation takes the truth **about the Lord** and transforms it into a personal, experiential knowledge **of the Lord**. *Knowing* the Word is good. *Memorizing* it is *even better*. But the discipline that *transforms us and produces godly fruit under pressure* is our continuing meditation on God's Word. For David, it became the catalyst for his **doing** the Word. Notice also that David not only prayed, but

- b. David **acted** on the Lord's promises vs. 4-6
 - 1) He **cried out** to the Lord v. 4

In 2 Samuel 15:31 tells us that when David learned that his former chief advisor, Ahithophel, had joined the conspiracy, he prayed **'O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.'** He also advised Hushai to go to Jerusalem in order to position himself to *thwart* Ahithophel's counsel. Along with prayer, he devised a plan. He first *trusted* God for deliverance, then he strategized. The point is that faith and action are *not* incompatible. They work together. The verb here in verse 4 indicates that David's prayer was continuous. Evidently he kept praying well into the night. What is ironic is that David is at the lowest point of his life, both situationally and physically. He is hiding in the Jordanian rift valley, literally the lowest place on the entire planet (2500 ft below sea level) God is on Mt. Zion, his holy hill (2500 ft above sea level) And yet, in a way that David does not bother to explain, **God shows answers David from His holy hill.** Centuries later, Paul would write that nothing (not height or depth or anything else) can separate God's people from his love!

- 2) David finally went to sleep and woke up, for the Lord had kept on sustaining him. v.5 His sleep under such dire circumstances was itself an act of faith! I think we have another metaphor implied here: **"The Lord is my pillow!"**

How did David manage to sleep in the midst of all that? How did he wake up the next morning, having resolved not to fear enormous opposition? It was the boldness of a true faith that was supported by continually rehearsing and praying back to the Lord his promises.

Finally...

3. Align your prayers with God's purpose to save (7-8)

- a. David asked God to **act on his behalf**

7a "Arise, O Lord!" Ancient battle cry from Numbers 10:35 for God to act on their behalf. They are *rising*, so *rise* against their *rising*! This is a cry to the Lord of Hosts to defend His King and His name.

- b. David God asked for deliverance (cf. 3:2)

7b "Save me O My God!" I.e. Refute the false claim that they are making **about you** that you cannot or will not save me!

- c. In verse 8, David asked God to **humble and to neutralize** his enemies. This sounds pretty raw—even vindictive. But you have to get the intended meaning of these ancient figures of speech. To strike their cheeks and bash their teeth was not self-righteous vengeance (Striking the cheek = **Humble** them; Break their teeth = **Disable** them (Render their weapons (speech and military might) harmless. If you look at what David did after the death of Absalom, you see his heart. Not retribution but reconciliation of the nation! (You see the same thing in Psalm 2:10-12! The words of the King to the rebellious nations is a strong warning, but it is an offer of peace and forgiveness based on surrender to the King!!

- d. David prayed for this in anticipation of **God's blessing on His people** The blessed man of Psalm 1:1 is the one who will bless those who seek refuge in Him in Psalm 2:12! That is our hope and that is our message/

Ultimately this Psalm points beyond David to His Greater Son.

Like David, Christ understood that the Father had made Him King.

Like David, he was hated without cause and was rejected by his own people.

Like David, Jesus was driven into the wilderness to be tested.

Like David Jesus was taunted with shouts, he saved others, but he can't save himself.

Like David, God was His shield, his glory, and the lifter of his head.

Like David, the Lord Jesus cried out: My God!

Yet unlike David, our Lord suffered for the sins of others.

The early church understood Psalm 3:5 as foreshadowing Christ's death and resurrection. Like David, the Lord lay down and rose up.

Like David, Christ was vindicated and in that vindication pronounced blessing on the people of God.

Brothers and sisters, when you are in dire circumstances, know that you are not alone. Remember this prayer, because while things are difficult, it reminds us of where history is going and what eternity has in store for those are in Christ.