

Trusting God in Trying Times

Psalm 3

ABC 6/12/22

Once again, this summer, we'll be spending it in the psalms. We were in the psalms last summer but as there are 150 of them, we've got plenty to go. We'll return to our study of Mark this fall. Open to Ps 3.

Those of us who remember Watergate recall Nixon's resignation. One day, he's the most powerful man in the world. The next, he resigns in disgrace. Life changed drastically that day for him. But his resignation wasn't nearly as traumatic & humiliating as the events that hit King David when his son Absalom led a revolt against him. David had reigned for decades. His military proficiency was legendary. But his sin with Bathsheba & Uriah had consequences for his family. Eventually, Absalom steals the hearts of the nation (2 Sam 15:6). He gathers followers & overthrows his father, & that's where we pick up the story. This isn't just a son overthrowing a father. This is Absalom trying to overthrow the anointed one of God through whom God had promised to bless the world. David realized that to survive, he had to flee with his supporters. They grabbed what they could & took off towards the wilderness. David followed, weeping (2 Sam 15-16). This had to be one of his most traumatic, humiliating experiences. Many he thought of as friends abandoned him & joined the rebellion. The most painful wound had to be the treachery & betrayal of his son. Things were falling apart for David. What do you do when life falls apart? Few of us have gone through anything close to the trauma David experienced. But we've all had times where we could identify with him. Whether it's the loss of a job, the death of a spouse, or the rebellion of a child, life is difficult. What do you do when life falls apart? What did David do? He wrote a psalm telling us what we should do. Look at the superscript above vs 1. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it's actually vs 1. It's the smaller print above many of the psalms which gives insight as to what brought about the writing of the psalm or instructions on how to use it. Here we read, **a psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.** That's the setting that brought about this psalm. As a side-note, the 1st, 2nd, & final stanzas are followed with the word, **Selah**, which is probably a musical notation that might mean to pause

& be silent or just the opposite. The truth is, we don't really know what it means. What do we do when life falls apart?

1. Lament in the Presence of God David cries out, **1-2**.

When life takes a turn for the worse we need to turn to & talk to God about what's going on. & it's not because God doesn't know what's going on; He does. David laments to God & lets God know of his burden. Instead of trying to handle trials & troubles on our own, going to God puts our difficulties in His hands. By prayer we acknowledge our dependence on Him for everything. David tells God about his situation he's facing because of Absalom's rebellion. He laments to God regarding his enemies, noting they are many & they taunt him, claiming that God is unable to deliver him. Vs 2 gives the words of David's enemies, who were challenging his relationship with God. The vs reads literally, **Many are saying *to* my soul....** Their words were hitting David in his heart, saying, **There is no deliverance for him in God.** Possibly, they were bringing up his sin with Bathsheba & the murder of her husband, saying, *How can you claim to follow God? God isn't on the side of a hypocrite like you!* They taunt & insult David saying God's not going to save him. They attack in an area dear to him. Spurgeon puts it this way: *It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God.*¹ Why should we lament about a situation God already knows? After all, Jesus says, **Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him** (Mt 6:8). So why do we tell God about a situation He already knows? We certainly don't pray to inform God, but to conform ourselves to His will. We pray to get burdens off our shoulders. 1 Pt 5:7 tells us to cast **all our anxieties on Him, because He cares for us.** We also pray in order to recognize that our trials aren't as big as we think. Sometimes we just need to verbalize what's going on. As soon as we describe the situation, we realize we may have exaggerated & made it into something bigger than it is. But we can't exaggerate to God. He knows the situation we're going through. Once we talk to Him honestly about it, it seems to shrink in size. David's acknowledging to God that he isn't able to handle this situation on his own. When life falls apart, we must do the same. Then we must...

¹ *A Treasury of David*, 1:25

2. Reflect on the Person of God But You (3) reflects David's shift of focus from his situation (1-2) to God Himself. After we cry out to God in lament, we must reflect on who He is. In prayer, it isn't enough to say, *OK, God, here's what's going on*. We must say, *Here's what's going on but I trust in You because You're a great & sovereign God*. We must reflect on who He is, especially during times of trouble. David expresses trust in God, because he knew his God. David refutes the taunt of his enemies by describing God's character & pointing to his relationship with God. *God can't save you*, taunt his enemies. David replies, **3-4**.

A. God is Our Shield David's enemies may be numerous & powerful, but he draws on his experience of the God who's sustained him in the past, the God who is **a shield about me**. God is one who protects, that's what shields do. God is a shield of protection around David. God has promised to protect His own & this is the 1st thing David points to in order to refute the claim of his enemies. **You, O LORD are a shield about me**. God is described often in the Psalms in similar terms. He's a refuge, protector, deliverer, warrior, keeper, preserver, rock, fortress, stronghold, rescuer, shepherd, & king. Note how David personalizes it, that the Lord is a shield **about me**. His faith in His God is personal. He also knows...

B. God is Our Glory Although David had great earthly fame, he's acknowledging that his identification with God is his only claim to **glory**. Whether God restored David to his place of earthly prominence or not, God was his **glory**. The term points to *the comparative unimportance of earthly esteem, which is always transient & fickle*.² As Christians, we will share in Christ's glory (2 Thes 1:10). Never forget that.

C. God is the Restorer of Our Joy *To lift up the head* is a common expression for restoring someone to his dignity & position after having been down. Joseph told the cupbearer, Pharaoh **will lift up your head & restore you to your office** (Gen 40:13). It seems to refer to God restoring to us the joy we had before the crisis brought us low. He brings down the proud, but lifts up the humble who cry out to Him, bringing joy to those He restores (1 Sam 2:1-10; Ps 107:9, 33-42).

² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, p 54

D. God is a Prayer-answering God (4) Spurgeon said, *We need not fear a frowning world while we rejoice in a prayer-hearing God.*³ David would agree. God's **holy mountain** refers to Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where the ark of the covenant & the symbolic presence of the Lord remained. David may have been forced off his throne, but God was still on His & in complete control. David kept crying out to God in prayer, knowing that God hadn't forsaken him in the past & wouldn't forsake him now.⁴ He didn't have the ark of God, but he had the God of the ark! If God restored him, David would worship Him. If God didn't, he'd still bow before His just & holy God.

Remember the order of events here. David 1st tells God of his situation. He then reflects on God's character. Then he prays. David's prayer comes after he's reflected on who God is. David 1st looks up to God & then cries out for help from God. David's understanding of God is what led him to pray & ask God for help. Do you want to know why we so rarely pray & trust the Lord during trials? It's often because we don't know who He is; we don't understand His character & nature. David acknowledged a few key truths about God & that led him to the place of prayer. Would you be more inclined to pray if you knew God **who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus** (Phil 1:6)? Would you be more inclined to pray if you knew there is nothing **too difficult for Him?** (Jer 32:27). Maybe if we knew God better we'd be inclined to pray more. If we stop & remember that God **causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose** (Rom 8:28) we may be more inclined to pray. That's what David did here.⁵ When life was falling apart, David laid hold of the Lord in prayer. Then what happened?

3. Gain Peace from God 5-6

Remember, David's being pursued & running for his life. Yet he can lay down & rest his head on the promises that God will sustain & protect him because God is his shield. Trusting the Lord when life falls apart requires us to lament in His presence, reflect on His person, & come to Him in prayer. When we do, we gain relief from the peace of God. David explains what God did in response to his prayer. Because David reflected on the person of God & trusted Him, he can sleep peacefully &

³ Spurgeon, p 26

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., "Be" Commentary Series, p 22

⁵ Brandon Bramlett, <https://brandonsdesk.com/2017/10/25/trusting-in-the-lord-during-trials-psalm-3/>

have no fear of his enemies. All of this Ps, but especially vss 5-6, is a real-life drama illustrating Phil 4:6-7:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer & supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. & the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus.

David cried out to God in prayer, then he went to bed, not in the palace, but on the run in the wilderness, & slept through the night. What could have been a restless, sleepless night becomes a night of restful sleep with an awakening to a new day (5). The crisis remains. There are still those eager to attack him. **Ten thousands** of them in fact. Fear of them, however, has gone (cf Ps 27:1, 3; 118:6).⁶ After lamenting, after trusting in the Lord by reflecting on His character, David says he went to sleep. Remember, nothing has changed about his situation but something has changed about his perspective. After reflecting on who God is & praying, he's so confident in God's ability to deliver him that he goes to sleep. That's what you call confidence. David expresses trust in God by telling us why he can sleep in the midst of trouble: because **the LORD sustains me**. We get a picture of David no longer having fear of his enemies, so much so that he can lay down & go to sleep, all because God has sustained him. Not only does David have a peace come upon him because of his God, he also no longer has fear (6). It reminds me of Jesus asleep in the storm (Mk 4:39) or Peter on the night before his scheduled execution. He was so sound asleep in prison that the angel sent to rescue him had to hit him to wake him up (Acts 12:7). David awoke safe & sound, because the Lord sustained him. When God is your **shield** & the One who **sustains** you, the odds or numbers against you don't matter. As many have said, *One plus God is a majority*. As Paul puts it, **If God is for us, who is against us?** (Rom 8:31). As Paul goes on to say, even if we're like sheep for the slaughter, **in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us** (37). This is what God will do if we trust Him. He'll sustain us & we can rest our weary head on the pillow of His sovereignty. God will give us **peace ... which surpasses all comprehension**. But we must 1st **let our requests be made known to God** (Phil 4:6-7). God will grant us peace in our trials but we must trust in Him & pray. We must rest in who He is as a sovereign God & He'll sustain us through our

⁶ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Theological Commentary, p 21

trials. Often we lay awake worrying about yesterday & tomorrow & things we can't change. Worry will keep you awake but faith & trust in God will help you sleep. I'm not trying to oversimplify. I'm just saying as a general principle that trust in God brings peace. When we think we have to control everything, we become anxious. When we realize God is our **shield**, the lifter of our head, we can rest more easily. How we live shows what we truly believe. Dare I say it? *How we sleep shows what we truly believe*. David wants everyone who reads this psalm to understand they too can have peaceful sleep & courage in the face of trials if they'll only pray & understand who God is. Our problems may not change, they may even get worse, but our perspective will change as we do this. We can get through the trials of life when we pray & recognize who God is. You'll never have peace & joy like David had until you understand truths about God which come from His Word. It's those truths which we must reflect on during our times of trouble. You may feel distant from God, you may feel like He's abandoned you, you may even feel like He's punishing you. But feelings can be deceptive. You need to have your faith rooted in the objective, unchanging Word of God because it doesn't matter how you feel during your trials. What matters is what you know & what you do with it. Once we know who God is through His Word, we can truly trust Him during our trials.

4. Express Petitions to God (7a) In a make-believe world, David could have said, *Amen* after vs 6. But in the real world, anxiety has a way of creeping back in. So David cries out to God, **7-8**.

In vs 1, **many** were **rising up** against David. He uses the same verb here to ask God to *rise up* against his enemies. This takes us back to when Israel was in the wilderness. When the guiding cloud of glory began to move & the camp set out, Moses would say, **Rise up. O Lord! & let Your enemies be scattered, & let those who hate You flee before You** (Num 10:35). It should be our default setting to run to the place of prayer as soon as we're afflicted with difficulties. We understand the prayer, **Arise, O Lord, save me**. But what do we do with the rest of vs 7? Isn't it wrong to pray for God to physically assault an enemy? This isn't the language of personal vengeance. It's David giving voice to his belief that right, true right, God's right, must prevail, & that all who challenge it do so at their peril.⁷ David says 2 things here that might make us uncomfortable. He says, **7b**.

⁷ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Theological Commentary, p 21

There are a couple of ways to understand this & I think both are likely true. The 1st is that he's simply saying God has done & does do these sorts of things. But you could also understand this as David asking God to do this. Whatever the case, he's calling for God to intervene & judge those who've risen up not just against David, but against the Kingdom of God. David's calling for God to humiliate his enemies. What would Jesus say about that? We must understand that this isn't David telling God, *I have an enemy & I want You to annihilate him*. That's not what this is. The enemies of David were also the enemies of God. They'd arisen against God, His anointed, His kingdom, His plan, & His promises. David wants the evil that's being done against him & against God to be stopped & punished & that's a good desire. For us to desire evil to be defeated is a good thing. David's desire for God to judge & set the situation right is a good thing. It's also important to know this isn't the only way David speaks about this rebellion or about his son. When he's giving instructions to his men as they're trying to put this rebellion down, this is what he says about Absalom, **Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom** (2 Sam 18:5). David wants this rebellion to be over. He wants justice, he wants God to vindicate him, but he loves & cares for his son. & there's a tension there we have to see.

5. Believe the Promises of God (7b-8) Why does David believe God will answer his prayer? Because he believes in the promises of God. David prayed because he rested in God's promises & in these 2 statements are 2 promises of God. One is a promise from God to His enemies, the other a promise from God to His people. The 1st is a promise to God's enemies (7b). David is resting in God's promise that He'll protect His covenant people by destroying their enemies. God had promised to do this. The 2nd is a promise to God's people (8). This was also a promise David rested in. David knew God promised to deliver His people. This was the source of David's confidence that God would answer his prayer for deliverance. God has promised to eradicate the wicked & that salvation belongs to Him. & these promises are what gave David the confidence to pray like he did. These are promises that speak directly to what he was going through. Because David rested & believed in these promises, he was able to pray confidently, *Arise & save me, because this is what You promise to the wicked & here's what You promise to Your people*. These promises of God are what

gave David his confidence that God would hear & answer his prayer. Considering these are promises specifically applicable to David's situation, how many promises of God do you know which are applicable to your situation? If we don't know the promises of God, we won't have the confidence that God will answer our prayers or see us through. The promises of God are the blood flowing through our arms when we lift up our burdens to the throne of God. If we know what God says about our troubles & trials, then we can rest in His promises. If we don't know His promises or we don't believe those promises, we'll have no rest. How many promises of God do you know? David's exclamation, **Salvation belongs to the Lord**, shows that David wasn't depending on his wisdom or on any military strategy. He acknowledges that any victory would come from God alone. When we cast ourselves on God alone for deliverance, He gets all the praise when He answers our prayers.

The psalm ends on a confident note. The **many** have been saying, *God won't deliver you* (2). David declares, **Deliverance** or **salvation** (same word) **belongs to the Lord** (1, 8). This **deliverance** isn't something purely personal. It's there to be shared. He calls for God's **blessing** on God's **people**. He wasn't praying selfishly. He was God's anointed king of God's chosen people. Absalom's rebellion negatively affected the entire nation. So when David asked God to deliver him, he saw it in terms of God blessing His people. Believing prayer always keeps God's kingdom purpose in focus. The Lord's prayer teaches us to pray, **Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven** (Mt 6:10). If your world has fallen apart because you've been wiped out financially or your marriage is in trouble or your child has rebelled, don't just pray selfishly so your happy world might be restored. Pray in light of God's kingdom purposes. Pray that God will act so that He will be glorified & His people will be blessed & strengthened.

God often delivers His people often through judging evil. We see this repeatedly in Scripture. The sacrificial system of the OT shows us that in order for sins of a person to be temporarily passed over, a spotless, blameless animal needed to be killed. The battles of the OT show that in order for God to fulfill His promises of blessing to His people, He was going to judge the evil of other nations & give Israel the land. David says the same thing here. **Deliverance** or **salvation** must come from

the Lord. Jesus' cross shows us the same thing. In order for our sin to be covered & salvation to come to us, God had to judge a substitute. Salvation comes through judgment & is for God's glory. David turned this horrible experience of betrayal, emotional pain, & nearly being killed into a song of praise. This teaches us that God can use our worst trials to deepen our trust in Him & to produce praises that will encourage His people. When life falls apart, you can experience God's peace by laying hold of Him in believing prayer. When He answers, He gets the glory, you get His peace & joy, & God's people get the blessing. Whether it's a minor crisis or whether life is truly falling apart, if Jesus is your High Priest you have access through Him to the same prayer-hearing God who rescued David. Even if the crisis is the result of your own sin, humble yourself before Him in repentant, believing prayer & He will exalt you at the proper time.

What are some takeaways for us today? 3 things I'd like to leave you with:

1. In trials cling to & trust the promises of God. They become the pillow on which we rest our heads as we realize that God holds everything in His hands. We do not. Of course, God hasn't made the same sorts of promises to us as he made to David. He's not promised us land & offspring. He's not promised us physical prosperity, & if someone says He has, quickly run the other way! But He has promised us even bigger & better things. If we don't actually think they're bigger & better, then our idea of what's important hasn't been formed by Scripture. God has promised that He'll conform us to be like His Son. Isn't it amazing? He adopts us into His family. We are the Absalom. We are the rebels against the King & He's saying, *I want to deal kindly with you. I want to bring you into My family.* If you repent of your sin & trust in Him alone, He's promised He's perfectly good & that nothing can separate us from Him. He holds us in His hand & no one can remove us. So in trials we trust in & rest in the promises of God.

2. We should love people & pray against evil. Jesus tells us to love our enemies & pray for those who persecute us (Lk 6:27). People often think this is new with Jesus. They think the OT is wrathful & gory & the NT is just love & cotton candy. That's not the case. God has been consistent in His character, after all, He's unchangeable. When Jesus tells us to love our enemies & love our neighbor, that's not new. He's quoting the OT. But we struggle to understand just who our enemies

are. Is it the person who cuts us off in traffic? The one we're competing with for a promotion? Who are our enemies? As Christians, I think we have to re-center & remind ourselves of what our primary identity is. Our primary identity is as people who are a part of the kingdom & family of God, everything else is 2nd to that. If that's true, then who are the enemies of the kingdom? They're people & forces that oppose God. This is key: We may be a part of this battle & we are a part of a spiritual battle, but people are not our enemies. People may be the enemies of God, but people are not our enemies. That is an important distinction. When we pray against evil, we must be careful to remove selfishness, judgmentalism, vindictiveness, & bitterness. When we see evil, let's not do evil & respond with vengeance. It's not wrong to call God to rise up & stop the evil being done. But do we do that as people who realize that we used to be the rebels & enemies against God? Do we do that as those who've received grace? We don't win our battle by destroying those who oppose us, but by converting them. If our intent is simply to defeat people physically or in an argument or politics, we don't understand the mission God's given us. The church doesn't fight its battles with anything but prayer & the gospel of Jesus. God has ordained government as an institution whose job is to punish evil & promote good, but that's not the church's job at that level. So we should pray against evil & pray for the salvation of those who are committing evil. If we can't bring ourselves to pray that God would extend grace to someone else like He's extended grace to us, we have a problem. It's also appropriate to pray that God would rise up & deliver His people who are being persecuted for their faith & that He'd protect those who're following Him. Our goal shouldn't simply be the destruction of an enemy, but the deliverance of God's people & the salvation of those who persecute them. Ultimately, every time we pray, **come Lord Jesus** (Rev 22:20), we're asking God to come in judgment. When Jesus returns, it won't be as before. When He comes again, He'll come in judgment & through judgment deliver His people. This is a difficult tension for us to hold, but we should love people & pray against evil.

3. Finally, we must remember that salvation is from the Lord. **Salvation** for David meant deliverance from his circumstances. For us, **salvation** is that we're declared righteous of our sin & credited with the righteousness of Christ. These things only come through God's action. This has always been

how it is. David, who was dethroned, had to count on God to deliver him. This is still how God fulfills His promises today. Consider Rom 4:4 which says, **to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.** But people are declared righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives them through His Son. In other words, if you're trying to earn righteousness, you're not going to get it. The only way we become righteous is if God gives us His righteousness through us trusting in His Son for salvation. If we're to be delivered from our sins, it must be because we cry out to God & say salvation is from the Lord.

If you're not a Christian, I encourage you to consider what it would be like for the end of this Psalm, David's prayer, to be your prayer. Something like, *Arise, O Lord, & save me. Strike down the enemies of sin & rebellion in my life. Break the teeth of sin & Satan's hold on me. Salvation belongs to you. May your blessing of salvation be on me.* For the Christian, this psalm can be our prayer too. While we have salvation as a present reality, we still struggle with sin & can't rid ourselves of it on our own. It'll only be through God & the work of the Spirit that we put sin to death in our bodies. We know that evil won't be completely vanquished until Jesus returns. So we're eagerly awaiting our final salvation. The Bible says we have been saved, we are being saved, & we will be saved. We look forward to the day when His kingdom will be seen & enjoyed in its fullness, when justice will reign & be carried out fully & fairly, & when righteousness will be upheld & evil will be punished. Then we'll experience the grace of God in its fullness. That's what we should long for as Christians. That deliverance for us is not yet done. Personal salvation is not all Jesus came to do. We wait for Him to return & usher in His kingdom in its fullness. As God enables us, may we trust in Him during our trials by going to Him in prayer, reflecting on who He is, gaining relief from His peace, expressing our petitions to Him, & believing in His promises.