

Title: The Pilgrims' Delivering Salvation

Text: Psalm 3

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Introduction

These are the songs of a pilgrim people. We pilgrims are travelers, not wanderers. We know where we are going. And we know to whom we belong. We belong to the One who owns this pilgrimage and has claimed us for himself as his inheritance. We travel in company with other pilgrims. And as we travel, we sing our songs knowing that not all of life for the righteous is without difficulty. Or threat. Or severe distress.

Survival is in the human DNA. Self-preservation is a divine gift to keep us alive. That gift that's part of man being made in God's image has been perverted by the fall, just like everything else. So we have worldviews that express themselves in terms of the "survival of the fittest".

But survival, for the most part, has been written out of the American (and western) equation. This is the first time in the history of the world that survival is not at the front end of society's consciousness. We live our lives without thinking about where the food is coming from, where our shelter is coming from, and thanks to a constitution and terrible, awful events like Gettysburg and D-Day, we don't worry about whether life will end any time at the hands of an enemy bent on our destruction (though other events such as 9-11 and the Boston Marathon bombing force us to think about it, if only for a moment). We may be temporarily reminded of our fragility by the likes of Hurricane Ike, but we buy a generator for the next time, patch the roof, remove the trees and life goes on.

In fact, survival has gone missing from our worldview so much we've taken to entertaining ourselves with it, making a multi-million dollar television game and empire of a tribal vote for survival. The best-seller list and A-list movies include a series using the ultimate human survival game, where humans are the hunted, as its compelling storyline. Survival is entertainment.

There is a segment of society among us, though, for whom survival is acute. You don't know where your next breath is coming from. Life has closed in on you. Your back is against the wall and there is no way out. Life seems on the brink. These pilgrim songs easily find their way to your soul. But for most of us, we do not live life on the brink. David did. It shows up all over the Psalms, including the one we are considering this morning. Psalm 3. The superscription on this Psalm identifies it as a Psalm that was written during the story of David and Absalom. In fact, the way the superscription reads, it's a real possibility that David wrote this Psalm before the ordeal was over.

It is very easy for us to dismiss the story of David and Absalom as a blip on the Bible story screen. We suffer from "knowing-the-end-of-the-story-itis". We know what happens at the end. We know of Absalom's defeat and David's vindication.

We also tend to play "Aesop's Fable" with the story of David and Absalom. We read and interpret the story of David and Absalom as a morality play, with David getting his just deserts, enduring the humiliation of a son who bore the emotional brunt of David's sin with Bathsheba. David pampered Absalom and, voila!, wouldn't you know, the spoiled son now wants the throne, too. After all, God said that the sword would be in David's house. While God's promise came to pass, this is not the thrust or the import of the David and Absalom story. Absalom is the serpent in the house, representing those

whose ambition is to usurp God and his Anointed One. It is expected outside of Israel. Those evil nations. In Absalom, we find such evil intent on the inside, close to the throne, David's favored son. This is the seed of the serpent threatening to destroy the seed of the woman, the promised Anointed One. And humanly speaking, Absalom very nearly pulls it off. David's dynasty, the signature reign of God's covenant with his people, almost is over as soon as it has begun.

And this is where we are in Psalm 3 this morning. David is on the brink. The Davidic line, even God's covenant with David and Israel, hangs in the balance. Even his eternal destiny is in question. What will happen to the Anointed One? What is the response of the Anointed One when life goes down to the wire and God's reputation is on the line?

Psalm 3 unfolds in 3 stages. This is what it looks like:

Second person complaint (how many) and expression of hope - Psalm 3:1-3

First person confidence - Psalm 3:4-6

I cried aloud

I lay down and slept

I awoke

I will not be afraid

Second person cry for help (Arise, Save) and expression of hope - Psalm 3:7-8

These stages can easily be seen in your Bibles. The first stage of this prayer-song is written in the second person, a complaint addressed vertically to God, followed by an expression of hope. (Note the "Selahs"; we are not sure what those are in Hebrew song. Sometimes it seems that they function as a break or pause. but not always... and that is true here... one shows up in the middle of a stanza). The second stage beginning with verse 4 is reflective, first person meditation. The last stage beginning with verse 7 reverts back to an address to God in the second person... the vertical appeal is resumed. And it ends with another expression of hope. This is David's song, and it is a song for his people who share his destiny.

The dire threat of David's situation with Absalom is seen immediately in the opening lines of Psalm 3. "O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. Selah" The singer and his community should be in shock. How **many** are my foes. **Many** are rising. **Many** are saying. Whatever happened to Psalm 2? Psalm 2 is a picture of glory. David is the Anointed One in triumph over his enemies. Psalm 3 opens with chaos. David is under threat, usurped from his throne, humiliated in being jettisoned out of his glorious palace. David, the Anointed One, is on the brink of extinction.

Notice the escalation that opens the complaint. Many are my foes. Here's what those foes are doing. Many are rising up against me. "Rising up" is military language. Absalom has marshalled whatever military might he controls against David. But this is not the height of David's angst and desperation. This three-fold complaint ends with "Many are saying of my soul". And what are they saying? "there is no salvation for him in God." This is the grand indictment. This is the height of the threat. David's enemies are not satisfied with simply overthrowing David. They attack David's divine right. They aim for the soul. They aim for the covenant and the relationship between David and God. They attack the foundation of David's anointing. They want to siphon the hope from David's eyes. And like Goliath, there is venom in the way they speak of the idea of salvation being found in God. These are the wicked of chapters 1 and

2.

Absalom usurps the throne with blasphemy in his heart and mouth. Come, let us cast off our chains. There is no salvation in David's God. This would be expected of the Gentile nations around Israel. But David's own son? His own flesh and blood? A beneficiary of the covenant between God and David? This threat, this mockery, this blasphemy is not on the lips of a pagan giant, but his own family.

And Absalom has the numbers. Boy, does he have the numbers. We know this from the account in 2 Samuel. Use of "many" isn't simply hyperbole. For all intents and purposes, the entire kingdom is with Absalom. "Thousands" David sings in verse 6. These kinds of numbers speak to the gravity of David's life on the brink. David is outflanked and outnumbered. Many have joined with Absalom against the Anointed One and saying "there's no salvation for David in God." There are so many against David, it is simply a matter of time before Absalom catches up to David. The numbers are so formidable, the language here suggests David probably wonders if there are some among his own group who will join Absalom to impugn God and his salvation. Hope is fading. David is a goner. If the enemy blasphemers are to be believed, God has abandoned the Anointed One.

Yet **at the end of this first stage** of address to God is an expression of hope... ironically, to God himself. David cries out: **But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.**

Verse 4 tells us that verse 3 is a cry of desperation. This isn't simply an appeal. This is an utterance from one at the end of his rope. David's insides are coming out in his voice. David's cry is his response to the blaspheming enemies, but rather than respond directly to the blasphemers, David's cry is heavenward.

But you!! Desperation points David to the only one who can save him. David doesn't believe the taunts of the enemies. David will not let go of the hope. His survival is not dependent on himself. There is no pulling himself up by his bootstraps. David has no means to pull this off. David's only recourse, in the face of those who claim he has no salvation in God, is to appeal to that very same God. God is his shield (again, military language). God is his protector. God is his Warrior. David directs his appeal vertically... to the very God of whom it is being whispered behind his back and shouted from Absalom's rooftop, "there is no salvation in his God." On the lips of his enemies is blasphemy. On David's lips is a song, an expression of hope. David reminds himself what he knows to be true about a God who is a warrior for his people. It is all against one, but the one is a warring God who is a shield for his people against those who are bent on destroying the Anointed One. This shield isn't simply a front protection... this shield is supernatural, providing protection on every side.

If there is no salvation for David in God, David cries to that God anyway. And identifies himself with that God. My glory! This exclamation of wonder offsets the blasphemous slur of the enemies. This is understood as "The Lord is my glory. David does not see humiliation, but glory in the God who supposedly will not come to his defense. The height of David's desperation is to identify himself with the one who is being blasphemed and attacked. This glory does not originate in David. It originates elsewhere, appropriated and applied to the Anointed One... "lifting up the head"... it is God who has anointed the head of this king. It is then, God, to whom this anointed head will appeal for salvation and deliverance.

This brings us to this second stage of this song being sung by the psalmist and his congregation. Having made his appeal to the only place he can make a desperate appeal, David is moved to introspection and meditation: **"I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah I**

lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.”

There is a fourfold reflection: I cried aloud, I lay down and slept, I awoke, and I will not be afraid. When David is on the brink of extinction, what is it that fuels his cry? What is it about this covenanting God that allows him to see that God is a shield of protection on every side? It is God’s dwelling presence with his people. The holy hill is where God resides. God is not idle. God is not distant. The Divine Warrior is present among his blaspheming people, responding to those who cry out to him in desperation. Because God is present, he is an all-encompassing shield, even when there are enemies bent on David’s demise all around him. Verse 6. David is not afraid, even though there are throngs and throngs of enemies around him ready to devour and pounce. David is the ant to be stepped on, yet David in his desperation knows God is a present shield of protection. The Lord answered me... from where he still rules and reigns Israel... I will not be afraid.

And what do we have in the middle of it all? This is the jolt. This is stupendous... in the midst of desperate circumstances, when David is hanging on by a thread... ready to be snuffed out... life is being sapped from him... such is his resolute faith and trust and hope in the God who shields on all side... that he finds rest in his Divine Warrior Shield. There is pandemonium and noise all over this Psalm, including David’s cry. Many are rising up, throngs and throngs of people are set against David with military might... and throngs are mocking “there’s no salvation for David in God.” The enemies are roaring, ready to kill... and there David finds rest, he sleeps. He is able to awake from his sleep because in the midst of it all, there is a delivering Salvation Shield on his behalf. The Lord sustains David in his sleep. Few images speak to such resolute confidence than this picture of sleep against the backdrop of tumult. David places his physical being where his mouth is. He makes his appeal, and then is satisfied in the Divine Warrior.

This brings us to the third and final stage of the song. The desperate cry for God the Warrior Shield to act takes on a new level of desperation. “Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! Selah”.

David wants more than protection. David cries for an offense. David has moved the song from complaint to reflection to an imploring for action. Note the contrast that begins this third stage. This complaint to the Divine Warrior began with “many rise up against me.” Now David says “Arise, O Lord”. Many are all around. God’s shield is all around. Many rise up against David. David cries out for God to Rise up against the enemies. “Arise, O Lord” is language identified with the ark of the covenant. This is God’s presence acting on behalf of his people against his enemies. The Divine Warrior is not simply a shield, but one who fights for his people.

And the second desperate cry: “Save, me O God”. There is no salvation for him in God. David begs to differ. Deliver me, fight for me, save your anointed one. David recognizes that he cannot save himself. David can muster no more fight. He has only “Save, me O God”. This cry shreds to ribbons the blasphemous claims of his enemies. There is salvation for David in the only one who is capable of providing deliverance... the Divine Warrior himself.

This fighting on behalf of David takes on the tone of bringing down curses on the heads of those who break covenant with God. You strike... or you have struck. There is a present tense to God’s action on David’s behalf. You strike, you break. The imagery here is of an animal that has David between clenched jaws in a death grip. David is about to be devoured by ravenous wolves, including his own

son. His enemies can smell it. They have their prey in their jaws, ready for the kill. David cannot save himself, he is incapable of saving himself. He must have the Divine Warrior Arise against his enemies and Save him, crushing with a swift blow in one decisive act to loose David from the death grip.

Such decisive action by the Divine Warrior silences the blaspheming throngs and produces deliverance for the Anointed One under threat. "Salvation is of the Lord". This is the third time "salvation has been mentioned." God's response from his holy hill, his visible presence among the people in the tabernacle saves David and shatters the enemies. The tables are turned. The blasphemous riot cry, "There is no salvation for David in God" is exposed for the false lie that it is: "salvation is of the Lord". He responds to the cry of his people.

For David, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" is a statement that is loaded with intense desperation. Such a hope does not easily roll off of the tongue or flippantly spill from his lips. Contra the blasphemy salvation is of the Lord because the Divine Warrior does indeed provide a hedge of protection around his people who cry out for help. This God who dwells among his people rescues his people from the brink of unbelief and doubt and death. This God doesn't simply "save". He exclusively *owns* salvation, the only one who can provide it.

The final appeal: your blessing be on your people. Note this Psalm ends with the same theme of blessedness as the first two Psalms. But the "blessed is" has been replaced with a petition. David and the congregation have just invoked curses on their enemies. Strike and break the enemies. Your blessing be on those who cry out "Arise, O Lord"; "Save me O God". At the end of the day, the blessed man cannot save himself. He is in need of a Delivering Salvation coming from God's holy hill. It is in the shield and fight that the Divine warrior blesses those who are his, to the point where they have such confidence and satisfaction in him that they can lie down and sleep when the world is burning down around them.

Conclusion:

What is our response? What does this mean for us? It would be really easy for us to say, "Yeah, this is what God does for us when we are down and out." Not that God does not protect and act on behalf of his people.

But do we hear the mocking rancor of the throng against the Anointed One: "there is no salvation for him in God"? Listen to the taunts of the blasphemers. "Save yourself". "Let see if Elijah comes to save him". "Come down and save yourself. No one else is going to." "There is no salvation." Do we understand that there was an Anointed One overwhelmed and pushed to the brink? Many are the enemies. Many are rising up against the Anointed One. They have the numbers against only 1. See the clenched jaws ready to rip flesh and finish off the kill.

And because this Anointed One is bent on being a shield for his people, he fights for his people by forgoing salvation. There is no divine rescue. Redemption and the salvation of a people is on the brink. All of history is on the brink. It doesn't get any bleaker.

Hebrews chapter 5 verse 7 makes this remarkable statement: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up **prayers** and supplications, with **loud cries** and tears, **to him who was able to save** him from death." This Psalm is on the lips of Jesus as he voluntarily goes to the brink and doesn't survive. He lays his life down and he goes to sleep in the midst of the mocking tumult of jeers. And when he awakens, he is the Divine Warrior who Arises to Save his people who cannot save themselves.

You understand that I did not finish Hebrews 5:7. Christ cried out. He was not rescued, but he was heard! God did answer his prayer. The rest of the Hebrews passage says, “and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

Christ went to the brink and was not rescued so that He could rescue us. Christ became the Divine Warrior in his death, resurrection, and exaltation. He answers people who cry out his name from his holy hill, the Delivering Salvation for His people. His people are in a desperate plight, overwhelmed by the darkness and rebellion of sin. Regardless of where we are at, regardless of whatever it is that threatens to do us in, Christ is our Divine Warrior. Salvation belongs to him. When there was no hope of salvation from sin, he provided it for us.

Some of you are overwhelmed in your sin. Some of you are feeling closed in by life. Some are feeling desperate. It is OK to cry aloud for rescue. It is OK to pray, smash the teeth of my sin. strike the cheek of that which has me in its death grip. See the beauty and wonder and glory of Jesus. Christ, the Emmanuel who dwells with his people, his holy hill... comes to the rescue of his people, saving them from their sin. Oh yes, our Divine Warrior is our Delivering Salvation, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Salvation belongs to you, Christ. Your blessing... all of the benefits provided in your salvation, be on your people.

The Pilgrims' Confidence Expressed in the Assembly:

These are the songs of a pilgrim people. We pilgrims are travelers, not wanderers. We know where we are going. And we know to whom we belong. We belong to the One who owns this pilgrimage and has claimed us for himself as his inheritance. We travel in company with other pilgrims. And as we travel, we sing our songs knowing that not all of life for the righteous is without difficulty. Or threat. Or severe distress.

Let us stand and speak the words of this great Psalm, expressing our confidence and hope in our Delivering Salvation who has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and has transferred us into his marvelous light:

O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. Selah But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.

I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! Selah