

“Salvation Belongs to the Lord”
Psalm 3
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A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

- 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*

What Keeps You Up at Night?

Have you ever found yourself wide awake at 3:00 in the morning, with thoughts swirling, keeping you from going back to sleep? Psychology Today surveyed over 1,000 people about the thoughts that keep them awake in the middle of the night. The top 5 3 a.m. thoughts reported were –

1. What do I want?
2. Am I doing the right thing?
3. What do other people think of me?
4. Where am I going in my life?
5. Why do I act the way I do?

If anyone ever had reason to lie awake all night asking questions and worrying over the answers, it was King David when his son Absalom had chased him out of Jerusalem into the desert wilderness on the other side of the Jordan River. David had so many things that could have occupied his mind –

1. How did so many of my people turn against me so quickly?
2. How could I have handled Absalom’s anger better? How should I have responded to him?
3. How will I ever get my kingdom back? Do I even want the throne back?
4. What’s more important, reconciling to my angry son or being restored to the throne?
5. Where is God in all of this?
6. How could some of my closest advisors side with the insurrectionists in overthrowing me?

Yet we find David responding very differently that we might have expected in Psalm 3.

Psalm 3 is, in many ways, the first psalm, and a psalm of firsts:

- Psalms 1 & 2 serve together as an introduction to the psalter, and Psalm 3 serves as the first psalm of the main body of the psalms.
- Psalm 3 is the first psalm with a title, the first psalm written by David, beginning a collection of psalms almost all written by David, which continues through Psalm 41.
- This is the first psalm to use the term “Selah,” probably indicating a musical interlude or pause, to give the hearer and singer time to think.
- It’s also the first lament, which is the most common type of psalm, and . . .
- the first psalm to use the name Elohim, translated as “God.”

Though this is the first psalm in the psalter directly connected with an event in David’s life, it is an event from later in his life, which is why this is one of the last psalms we’re looking at together this summer. We have just two more psalms left this summer, Psalms 63 & 30.

A. David’s Problem, vv. 1-2

The story of Absalom’s rebellion is told in 2 Samuel 15-18. David was suddenly and unexpectedly driven from his throne, his palace and his city by an overwhelming opposition force led by his son, Absalom. Thus, David’s opening cry of lament makes perfect sense:

*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*

David calls upon God as YaHWeH, his covenant Lord, the faithful One who has called him, anointed him as king, set him on his throne and brought peace to Israel through his reign. David thus has God’s promises and His faithfulness clearly in view as he addresses the Lord.

When Jesus was in distress, He looked to God as His Father, and Jesus’ cry of “Father,” is very close to David’s cry of “O YaHWeH,” as its’ a relational cry. When we are in distress, do we begin by looking to God, remembering who He is, calling upon Him as our faithful covenant-keeping Lord? Do we call, “Abba, Father,” in our distress? This is how Paul encourages us in our suffering, in Romans 8:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. – Rom. 8:15-17, ESV

David’s enemies were indeed many. While he fled Jerusalem with 600 men, Ahithophel advised Absalom to gather an army of 12,000 and pursue David. Earlier in his life, David has 300 men with him when he was pursued by Saul and an army of 3,000. Then, he was outnumbered 10-to-1, but now he could have been outnumbered 20-to-1, if Absalom had followed Ahithophel’s advice. But David had already sought the Lord and had cried out to Him, “O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” And God answered David’s prayer when Absalom refused to listen to Ahithophel’s advice, and Ahithophel ended up killing himself in despair at the loss of his influence.

But David was not just outnumbered by enemies, but these enemies were taunting him. They mocked and ridiculed David, saying, “There is no salvation for him in God.” In other words, David’s enemies wanted him to believe that it wasn’t just the fickle masses who had turned against him, but that God had rejected him, too.

As David was fleeing from Jerusalem, a man from the house of Saul names Shimei, threw stones from a distance and mocked him, saying, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! ⁸ The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.” This is the kind of taunting that David is remembering here in Psalm 3:2.

Jesus knew well the fickle nature of the masses in His day. Not only did the mobs change their cry in less than a week from, “Hosanna!” to “Crucify Him!”, but they also mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross and cried out to Him, “*He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.* ⁴³ *He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* (Matthew 27:42-43, ESV)

The world is quick to mock the children of God when we get into trouble or fall into distress. “Where is your God now?” they may say. Our culture is increasingly mocking and intolerant toward God’s people and toward God. Will we look to the Lord for the strength and peace we need when we are mocked?

B. David’s Protection, vv. 3-4

David knew that his only hope of protection and salvation was found in the Lord:

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*

David says three key things to God:

1. You are a shield about me.
2. You are my glory.
3. You are the lifter of my head.

David was exposed and in danger, sleeping in the wilderness, outnumbered by violent and mocking enemies. But David looked to the Lord as his shield, his protection, his refuge. David did not trust in his own military prowess or even in the 600 mighty and loyal warriors who surrounded him, but he found his security in the Lord his Shield.

David’s earthly glory and honor has all been taken from him. His royal palace, the city he had conquered, his royal household and his throne had all been taken from him. The City of David was now the City of Absalom. The throne of David was now the throne of his enemies. But David had not lost his glory, for the Lord was his glory. David knew the true honor he had was that of being chosen, loved, called and anointed by God as God’s own, and no men could ever take that away from David.

Finally, David had been cast out in shame. In shame, men hang their heads low, look at the ground and try to hide themselves. David knew that the Lord would lift up his head, that the Lord was the source of his confidence and joy. David would not hang his head in shame, for the Lord was the lifter of his head.

Think of all that Jesus had lost as He hung on the cross for us. He was beaten, mocked, scourged, ridiculed, He had no personal physical safety, no honor or glory, no pride. He was brought to the lowest point that any human being could be brought to, physically and socially. Yet He was right where God the Father wanted Him to be, and so He could be calm and confident, knowing He was fulfilling His Father’s will. He could lift His eyes to heaven and commit His soul to His Father’s hands, because He knew He had honored His Father and His Father would soon honor Him.

No matter where we are or what happens to us, if we belong to God as His dearly loved children through faith in Jesus Christ, He is our shield. What He allows to strike us is only ever for our good and for His glory. He is our glory, and no glory the world could offer should matter at all in our eyes when compared to the glory of being a child of God. He is the lifter of our head, the One who allows us to walk in confidence and joy, no matter what.

David may have been driven from his home and his city, but he could cry to the Lord and the Lord would hear him and answer him from his holy hill. God's holy hill here likely refers to Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and even though David had to flee, God would still hear and send him help.

God hears the prayers of His people, no matter where we are, and the fact that God hears our prayers should fill us with awe and wonder and gratitude and joy. William S. Plumer said in his commentary, "*How wonderful a means is prayer. The cry of a worm enters the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [that is, the commander of the armies of heaven], and He sends deliverance.*"

C. David's Peace, vv. 5-6

Knowing the protection and blessing of God as his Lord, as the shield about him, his glory, the lifter of his head and the One who answers his prayers fills David with great peace, and so he is able to say:

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.

David didn't toss and turn all night, wondering what would happen to him, or even wondering what he could have done differently. He had peace. He was able to sleep soundly.

Americans spend an enormous amount of money trying to get a good night's sleep. I understand the struggle, since I have a mattress that causes me pain. However, the most comfortable mattress in the world cannot give rest to a troubled conscience. God says twice in Isaiah (ch. 48 & 57), "*There is no peace for the wicked.*"

Howard Hughes was a rich, powerful, influential and creative man. He was a successful businessman, a Hollywood producer, an aircraft manufacturer and a hotel magnate. Yet he lived in such fear and paranoia that he would not come out of his hotel rooms for long periods of time. He spent almost the entire final four years of his life in his hotel suite in the Bahamas. Other very successful people, from Michael Jackson to Prince to Elvis Presley, suffered from great anxiety and sleeplessness and relied heavily on drugs to cope with life, until the drugs took their lives.

It's not just the rich and famous who suffer, of course. Anxiety, depression, sleeplessness and drug dependency afflict millions and millions of people. I don't want to be flippant or dismissive of serious problems people face, but so many people suffer so much because they do not know the peace of God. They do not know the peace of knowing that God truly loves them, their sins are forgiven, they are accepted and adopted by God, they have eternal life, God is always with them and will never forsake them.

We need the peace of God, which comes only from the Holy Spirit, speaking the Word of God to our hearts and giving us a peace that surpasses all understanding. Paul gives us advice on how we can know God's peace in Philippians 4:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness^[d] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests

be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. – Phil 4:4-9, ESV

How we pray, what we ponder and what we practice all affect how much peace we experience in our lives.

D. Salvation and Blessing, vv. 7-8

Finally, David finds confidence and rest in the Lord, and this psalm which began with a somewhat frantic lament, ends with a prayer for salvation and an assurance of victory, salvation and blessing –

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

David knows that his hope of restoration lies in the hands of God, and so he asks God to rise up and save him. David's prayer, "Arise, O LORD!", is in direct contrast to the opening lament, "Many are rising against me." It doesn't matter how many rise against David, if God will arise for him. As Paul said in Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

The mocking enemies of David had said, "There is no salvation for him in God," but David knows differently. He prays, "Save me. O my God!" and then confesses that "Salvation belongs to the LORD."

David's expression of confidence in God's victory may sound harsh to our ears, but it's a very practical image from the life David had known as a shepherd. If a lion or a wolf were to attack the sheep, the shepherd would seek to strike the vicious predator on the cheek to break its jaw and shatter its teeth. This would be the quickest and surest way to ensure the safety of the flock.

It's encouraging that David is again beginning to think as a shepherd and not just as a deposed monarch on the run. His concern is clearly focused not only on himself but on the flock of God as a whole. This is why he concludes:

Salvation belongs to the LORD;

your blessing be on your people!

And with one final *Selah*, he invites the choirmaster to lead the people to stop and think about this great truth. That's another piece of sure evidence that David was thinking beyond himself. As he was so often faithful to do, David wanted to ensure that God's people would benefit and be blessed by his suffering, so he wrote this song "For the Choirmaster."

God's people need to know, perhaps above all else, that salvation belongs to the LORD. If our salvation rests with the LORD, then it is secure and unshakable. But if it belongs anywhere else, it is shaky and unreliable. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end. This, too, was the peace and assurance of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8, when he said:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:28-30, ESV)

If salvation indeed belongs to the Lord from beginning to end, then it is His blessing we need and David can end his psalm on no better note than to pray for God's blessing to be upon His people.

What Helps You Sleep at Night?

When troubling thoughts wake you up or keep you tossing in the middle of the night, what helps you sleep? Warm milk? A late night snack? A glass of water?

These things are helpful, of course, but what about a reminder and assurance of God's peace and love? What about knowing that God is our shield, our glory and the lifter of our head? What about knowing that He is working all things together for our good? What about the assurance that salvation belongs to the Lord and He has chosen to put His blessing upon us? At the end of all of our tossings, it is only the peace of God that surpasses our understanding and that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!