

In Distress, But Confident In the LORD

Psalm 3

Turn in your Scriptures to **2 Samuel 11**.

David was a humble shepherd, a giant-killing folk hero, a mighty king, and a great sinner. He was loved, feared, hated, respected, lied about, and plotted against. He worked, fought, danced, wrote songs, committed adultery, murdered, and turned back to the LORD. Surely, we all have something in common with David.

Psalm 3 is the first of thirteen psalms that bear a superscription relating to an episode in David's life — A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON.

I've had you turn to a point that is chronologically before that episode (2 Samuel 11). It's when David broke:

- the 10th Commandment "You shall not covet."
- the 7th You shall not commit adultery; and
- the 6th You shall not murder.

Notice the very last sentence of **2 Samuel 11** (verse 27). "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." The LORD is absent from chapter eleven until the very last verse where it says the LORD was displeased. And that matters. Your life will be shaped either by pleasing or displeasing the Lord — and each one will have a lasting affect.

In **2 Samuel 12** God sends Nathan the prophet to David, and Nathan begins by telling a parable in which a rich man (David) has many flocks and herds, and a poor man (Bathsheba's husband, Uriah) had one little ewe lamb. The rich man took the poor man's pet lamb which used to drink from his cup and lie in his arms and grew up with his children and was like a daughter to the poor man (11:3). The rich man took the poor man's pet and cooked it for dinner. David responds with precise and accurate judgment — 2 Samuel 12:5-6 "Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

The parable Nathan told helped David mete out an accurate sentence, but David didn't quite see clearly yet, not until Nathan identified the characters in the story. 12:7 "Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" Nathan helps the king understand what his selfish actions truly are — 12:9 "Why have you despised the word of the LORD," and 12:14 "you have utterly scorned the

LORD.” The consequences? 12:10-12 “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ 11 Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house... 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.” Being ejected from the throne by your own son in Jerusalem is visible for everyone to see and critique.

David’s confession: 12:13 “David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’” That is the right response when you have despised and scorned the LORD. The fuller confessions of David are found in Psalm 32 and 51. There’s immediate hope. “And Nathan said to David, ‘The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die’” (12:13).

2 Samuel 13 records the beginning of evil in David’s own house with the shameful story of Amnon and Tamar. Amnon defiles Tamar and then treats her with hatred. Her brother Absalom takes her in and plots murder against Amnon, which he carries out in 2 Samuel 13:23-29. Absalom flees to Geshur and remains there three years. 2 Samuel 13:39 “And the spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom.”

2 Samuel 14 Absalom returns to Jerusalem, but resides apart from David. 14:28 “So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king’s presence.” But that changed after Absalom sent for Joab requesting to appear before the king. Initially Joab ignored Absalom’s request until Absalom had his servants set Joab’s barley field on fire. 14:33 “Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.”

All history is selected for a purpose. That is especially true of God’s inspired word. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed-out by God and is profitable...” Paul wrote in Romans 15:4 “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

The consequences of sin are dark and twisted.

Now, I’m not sure what kind of son Absalom was. I don’t know what kind of father he was to his own children. I do know that David loved Absalom. I do have an idea of what kind of man Absalom was. For example:

1. After receiving visible acceptance/reconciliation by his father the king he took for himself the visible presence of royalty and power. 2 Samuel 15:1 “After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him.”

2. Absalom positioned himself by the gate to steal the hearts of the people purposely undermining and casting a negative perception upon his father/king (15:6 “Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel”).
3. Absalom exploits religion to put his conspiracy into action. 15:7-8 “And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, “Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. 8 For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, ‘If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.’” We need to understand that people use religion and religious appearances, even seeming right doctrine and practice, for evil purposes? While Absalom pretends to worship he is about to betray his father and steal the throne.
4. Absalom was deceptive and secretive. People who lack transparency, honesty, and open dialogue with those God has placed in authority are not to be trusted for they lack integrity (David was the LORD’s anointed king, not Absalom)— Absalom’s character is defined by his slippery, manipulative, and secretive ways. 15:10 “But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, ‘Absalom is king at Hebron!’”
5. Absalom forms a group of leading men giving the impression that David supported his actions — he even enlists David’s trusted counselor Ahithophel. 15:12 “And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.”

READ 2 SAMUEL 15:13-17 (the setting of Psalm 3)

Now turn to Psalm 3.

In Psalm 3 we have a national situation as well as a very personal situation with David. Psalms 3 and 4 seem to be companion Psalms — they form a pair: Psalm 3 a morning song; Psalm 4 an evening hymn. David is now in exile in the desert, a fugitive on the run in the wilderness from the betrayal of his son. David is no longer in control of his circumstances (which can be very unsettling). Psalms 3 and 4 were born out of adversity, out of betrayal, out of deep emotional pain.

Psalm 3 is in four stanzas of equal size, with two verses in each. There are three “Selahs”, occurring after the first, second, and fourth stanzas. What Selah actually means is debated, though it seems to indicate either praise, pause, silence, lifting up the hands, a time when the musicians paused, or a time when only the instruments played. This morning we will incorporate several of these: a meditative pause of silent praise with an instrument being played alone while a key thought is projected on the screen (indicated in blue below). We will pause for about a minute each time we arrive at a Selah.

I. Overwhelming Opposition (1-2)

- 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. Selah

David uses the great name of the LORD (Yahweh) 6x in this Psalm. David uses the word “many” 3x. There was a flood of trouble. This was overwhelming opposition. David’s cry is to the covenant keeping Yahweh who both knows, has designed, and sustains all things.

These two verses seem to echo 2 Samuel 15:12-13 “And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing. 13 And a messenger came to David, saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.” There are probably several things rushing through David’s mind here.

First, the consequences of sin and the lingering regret. Surely, David must be thinking about the shame his recent sin with Bathsheba has caused (2 Samuel 11:2-5). “Why did I sin against the LORD like that?”

Second, the betrayal of a son. Perhaps this stings the most. Maybe he is beginning to believe the accusations himself, that there is no salvation in God. If you listen to sustained criticism long enough (either from a growing number of people or from a relentless vocal minority) you can actually begin to believe it’s true (even when it’s not).

Isn’t this the disastrous affect of bullying? Whether it be physical, mental, or spiritual it can have a debilitating affect. It creates fear and causes deep pain.

Here's what they are saying about David, 3:2 "there is no salvation [help] for him in God." God has abandoned David (that's the line of criticism). And that's what Satan wants you to believe.

PAUSE & MEDITATE w/INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC — The guilt of sin, criticisms and actions of others, and unexpected difficult circumstances may lead you to believe God has abandoned you. But there's more to your story.

II. The LORD Is A Shield Who Protects and Responds Amid Opposition (3-4)

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

Again David uses the great name of the LORD (Yahweh). God is not like the "many" who are unfaithful and who oppose David. And God is not like the many who may oppose you. God is a protective shield. David's confidence rested in the nature of God, described here by a metaphor "shield" — a defense that completely encompasses and surrounds. To Abraham God says in [Genesis 15:1](#) "I am your shield." David now claims this centuries later. David places himself under the protection of the Great King who has promised to protect his own.

v.3 "my glory" — David's glory is not in his name, his kingdom, his palace, or his power. Through humility and brokenness David cries out a truth — Yahweh is David's glory.

v.3 "and the lifter of my head" an expression indicating confidence in the Lord — Yahweh has the power to raise up the humble and abase the proud. [1 Samuel 2:7-8](#) "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. 8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world."

Absalom and company may have dethroned David, but they can not dethrone the LORD from his holy hill. And that's who David prays to — I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill (3:4). God is still in control, and Yahweh is still calling the shots even though a temporary upstart king has hijacked the throne and taken up residency. God laughs (Psalm 2:4).

Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland commenting on Psalm 3 wrote, “Even in moments of great despair, when the soul feels abandoned by all others, comfort may be drawn from the assurance that God answers.”

PAUSE & MEDITATE w/INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC — Our confidence is not in our knowledge of the future, in the absence of difficult circumstances or people, or in the might of our strength, but our confidence is in God’s character, promises, and the fact that he will answer.

III. The LORD Gives Rest and Sustains Amid Opposition (5-6)

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.

Another night has past. David wakes up in camp a day or two after his escape from Jerusalem, and he’s still alive. Life is a gift from God. If life gut-punches you unexpectedly there is still hope, and there is still life to live for God’s glory — v.5 “I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.”

God is the difference between despair and hope; between distress and peace; between anxiety and rest. In the face of overwhelming opposition David could say “I will not be afraid” (Ps 3:6). In the face “of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around” (Ps 3:6) David chose to trust God in the middle of overwhelming trouble. Too often we seek for rest and comfort in our circumstances, friends, and attempts to control an outcome rather than in God himself.

David is surrounded by enemies like a city under siege, but he looks to God — the one who is greater than “many thousands” (v.6). Too often our plans come before prayers; we react before we request help from God. David’s enemies have set themselves “all around”, but the LORD is David’s all-encompassing shield. And so David chooses to trust Yahweh.

Abandonment of our problems to God takes humility. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:6-11 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a

little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

There is no “Selah” after the third stanza. Why? Perhaps David, in choosing to trust the LORD, has an urgency to sing the final stanza of triumph.

IV. The LORD Helps Amid Opposition (7-8)

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's critics had already concluded that God will not deliver him — there is no salvation for him in God (Ps 3:2), but now David cries out for deliverance — Save me, O my God (Ps 3:7). The comparison is not by accident. v.1 “many are rising against” David, and now David prays, v.7 “Arise, O LORD!” When God rises up against the opposers and strikes the enemy it makes little difference who or how many rise against you.

David compares his enemies to animals. v.7 “For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.” Albert Barnes wrote, “The language seems to be taken from a comparison of his enemies with wild beasts. The cheek bone denotes the bone in which the teeth are placed, and to break that is to disarm the animal.”

It may seem harsh to those who have embraced a soft view of Yahweh, but we must understand that to rise in opposition to God or His people, will bring forth a reaction from Yahweh who will render all enemies toothless, and therefore, harmless.

3:8 “Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! Selah”

PAUSE & MEDITATE w/INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC — Enemies may surround, evil may seem unstoppable, the wicked may appear to triumph, trials may overwhelm, but God will rescue. God will bless His people.

CONCLUSION

Yahweh is the glorious King, who is close enough to hear and respond to your prayers.

Psalm 1 — Yahweh's blessing is guaranteed on the righteous.

Psalm 2 — The uncontested Messiah-King-Son will not be dethroned or tolerate challengers. But those who choose to bow and believe in the LORD's anointed King are secure — "Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Ps 2:12).

People may conclude about you what they did about David, 3:2 "there is no salvation [help] for him in God." But God did not abandon David. Satan wants you to believe there is no help for you in the LORD. But that is a lie spawned from the pit of hell.

Romans 10:9-13 "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

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