

EXPERIENCING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE (Volume 1: Psalms 1-10)

Session 4 - Psalm 3: A Confident Cry for God's Deliverance

Introductory Remarks:

- This is the first psalm with a superscription: "*A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.*" There is no reason to believe that this historical situation did not lead to the writing of this psalm as some have tried to argue. It certainly fits the contents of the psalm and the desperate situation that David experienced as he had to flee from his own son Absalom (2 Samuel 15-16).
- The troubles David faced with his family were a part of God's judgment for his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). The devastating results of this judgment are recorded in 2 Samuel 12 - 19. Psalm 3 focuses on the incidents recorded in 2 Samuel 15 - 16 when David's kingdom is essentially stolen from him by his own son Absalom. The messenger who came to David to report Absalom's conspiracy brings news that "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom" (2 Samuel 15:13). David and those who were still faithful to him were forced to flee Jerusalem. The depth of David's despair is emphasized in 2 Samuel 15:30 where it says that "David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went."
- Perhaps the most interesting thing concerning this historical background and Psalm 3 resides in the fact that no specifics of the historical event are clearly indicated in the psalm itself. While the historical background fits the content of the psalm, the psalm itself is recorded for us in such a fashion that it could be applied to any situation where we are facing opposition especially when it includes attacks on our faith.
- With the psalm using military images and language, it is also easy to make a connection between this psalm and our ongoing spiritual warfare in this life. The psalm's answer to David's dilemma is focused on God himself and his protection and defense of his people. These concrete instances of God's salvation or deliverance of his people from the physical threats and taunts of their enemies lends a powerful tangible picture of the reality of our spiritual warfare. We can't help but see the echoes of such a cry in the Lord's Prayer ("lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" - Matthew 6:13) and in the clear dependence upon God that is emphasized in our need to put on the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20.

Lament Psalms:

- Psalm 3 is classified as an individual lament.
- Laments make up a large portion of the Book of Psalms. In fact, when we look at the various types of psalms, there are more laments than any other type. This should teach us something important about what it will mean for us to live out our faith in a world that is still plagued by sin, Satan, and a sin-saturated world.
- **Laments are prayers of faith to God that reflect the cries of the human heart in times of need.** In the Psalms we find these cries coming from both individuals and the whole community of faith. However, if we pay attention, we can see indications that the individual laments do not lose sight of the whole community (i.e. Psalm 3, 51) and the community laments are never meant to ignore the importance of the faith of the individual (i.e. Psalm 44). The individual and the whole community of faith are intimately intertwined in both the Old and New Testaments.
- "It is fitting that the first lament psalm of the book is filled with confidence, because throughout the collection confidence and praise form significant parts of laments. This witnesses to the fact that the faith of the psalmists was steadfast in spite of the lamentable circumstances they faced; it was steadfast because they had come to know the LORD by experience as well as revelation." (pp. 216-217, Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, Volume 1*)

Psalm 3:1-2 - The seemingly hopeless situation of being attacked by an ever-increasing army of enemies who want to destroy the psalmist and his faith.

- "*O Lord...*" (v. 1) - The psalm begins with an indication of the faith of the psalmist. He knows where to take his problems. We can learn a lot from this very truth. No matter how desperate the situation seems to be, we must look first to God in faith. All of the psalms reflect this truth in one way or another. We know that God is with us and "knows the way of the righteous" (Psalm 1:6). A part of experiencing his presence in every circumstance is knowing that he is to be loved, served, feared, worshipped and trusted in everything.
- "...how many...Many are rising...many are saying..." (vv. 1-2) - His enemies seem to never stop coming. There are so many of them that it is overwhelming to think about. We don't want to miss the feeling of helplessness that occurs when the odds seem to be totally in the enemy's favor. Another example of this feeling can be found in the reports of the spies who were sent into the land of Canaan (Numbers 13-14). Only Caleb and Joshua trusted God enough to encourage the people to go ahead and fight against a

seemingly insurmountable army. The people, however, listened to the other ten spies and rebelled against God. Psalm 3 is the cry of someone with the faith of Caleb and Joshua. "If God is for us who can be against us" (Romans 8:31-39).

- *"...many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God"* (1:2) - The enemies are not only attacking David to take away his throne, they are trying to land a crushing blow to his faith. The saddest part here is that this is not the nations and rulers outside of Israel, this is his fellow Israelites and even his own family. But this is also where the psalm finds its most powerful expression of faith. While they are declaring that there is no deliverance for him in God, David immediately turns to the very God that they are seeking to diminish and overthrow.

Psalm 3:3-4 - An expression of complete confidence in God.

- *"But you, O Lord..."* (1:3) - The enemies are wrong about God. This is at the heart of all the enemies of God and his people. They don't know God and what it means to be his child. Again we see the powerful foundational truths of Psalms 1 and 2 coming to bear on the situation. The firm foundation of the righteous is found in God and in having a life that is thoroughly saturated with the truths of his Word. The one true King is the one who reigns over all and he is able to crush his enemies without a second thought and in an instant. There is no threat to God in their taunts and there is no true threat to God's people because he is their shield, their glory, and the one who lifts their head up.
- *"...you...are a shield about me..."* (1:3) - God is the psalmist's only defense, but he is also the only defense the psalmist will ever need. He is not just a shield that covers an area limited by the size of a normal shield, he is a shield that surrounds his people. God is, in other words, a protection from attacks that may come from any direction.
- *"...my glory.."* (1:3) - There is a great deal of discussion about what this particular designation means in this context. When we speak of the glory of God we focus on the manifestation of all that he truly is. It is the shining forth of all of his glorious attributes. He is glorious because of who he is and this beauty and magnificence shines through as he reveals himself. Our "glory" is meant to be a reflection of his. However, sin mars that reflection and we seek to grasp glory for ourselves through all kinds of sinful pursuits. We grab at the glory that only truly belongs to God. Thus we have no cause to "boast" (an idea closely related to "glory") in anything in ourselves (Jeremiah 9:23-24). David realizes this truth and looks only to God as his glory. Our glory is only found in God and in his work to make us into those who reflect his glory as we were created to. Thus we read of the glory that is being restored to us in Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit does his work in our lives: *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being*

transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

- *"...and the lifter of my head." (1:3)* - God is the one who lifts up the humble. When it seems that we have no hope, no strength, and no reason for confidence in our current situation, it is God who lifts up our heads in victory. David knows that God is the one who does this for his servant. He has a confidence that resides in this God who is for his people and promises to protect them and deliver them from their enemies.
- *"I cried to the Lord and he answered me from his holy hill." (1:4)* - This is a significant statement for one who has been removed from the very place where God's presence is said to dwell. David is separated from the holy hill in Jerusalem, but he does not see himself as separated from the presence of his God. For he has cried to God and God answered from his holy hill. Once again, "the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (Psalm 1:6). God is with and for his people.

Psalm 3:5-6 - God's answer to his prayer leads to even greater confidence as the threat increases.

- *"I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me." (1:5)* - Perhaps this is the clearest indication of the historical background mentioned in the psalm's introduction. This may represent the fact that after fleeing in the night, David was able to go to sleep and wake up having been protected by God from his enemies. Both his ability to go to sleep and to wake up indicate the God has already provided a deliverance from those who wanted to destroy him and his faith. Our sleep is often hampered when we are worried. A certain faith in God can allow us to sleep and to wake up with a knowledge of God's protection, care and faithfulness. This in turn leads to further confidence in God.
- *"I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around." (1:6)* - When we consider what David is saying here, we begin to see the depth of his faith in God. David's ability to sleep and wake up with confidence stems from a settled faith in the God who is his and is for him. The number or power of his foes is not a relevant issue. It only matters who his God is. As he slept, his enemies could have been gathering all around him ready to overwhelm him and his small entourage. Still he knows that his God is more than enough for the victory. He is in completely safe hands.

Psalm 3:7-8 - He calls upon the God who is his salvation to bring complete deliverance.

- What we need to see happening in this psalm is that God is the answer to every attack of the psalmist's foes. They are many, but that is irrelevant when it comes to having God on your side. They rise up against God and his people, but God rises up against them. They say "there is no salvation for him in God," but God is their salvation for "salvation belongs to the Lord."
- *"Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God!"* (1:7) - The cry is for God to act and for him to act now. It is a bold request, but it is also one of faith. This prayer sounds like the one Moses would pray when they were setting out from Mt. Sinai with the ark: *"And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, 'Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.'* (Numbers 10:35). Here we find the "already, but not yet" aspect of our faith being expressed. We are already citizens of God's kingdom and have the blessing of God resting on us. However, we have "not yet" experienced all that being a part of his family and his kingdom includes. The fullness of that awaits our resurrection and experiencing the fullness of his presence throughout eternity. Yet there is a desire that continues to operate in us to experience that fullness. So we appropriately ask God to bring a further taste of his blessing now. So we cry out for him to act now, to "Arise!" on our behalf. And we do so expectantly because of his steadfast love for us.
- *"For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked."* (1:7) - Those who use their mouths to attack the faith of God's people will be judged. While we do not forget the mercy of God in the call for such enemies to repent (Psalm 2: 10-12), we also understand the fact that those who persist in their rebellion against God will one day finally and completely be defeated. Words such as these are simply ways to communicate the severity of God's righteous judgment on those who persist in their sinful rebellion against him and his people.
- *"Salvation belongs to the Lord..."* (1:8) - Here is the third use of the related words for "salvation" or "deliverance." The enemies claimed that there was no deliverance for him in his God, but he has prayed for God to "Save" (v.7). Now he makes the declaration that salvation is found only in this God. It would be impossible not to make the connection with the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. The words used of deliverance/salvation here are the Hebrew terms that form the foundation for the name "Jesus" in the New Testament ("Joshua" in the old). Thus, our Savior was to be named "Jesus" because he would "save" his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21). It means everything for those of us who have faith in Jesus to be able to declare that "salvation belongs to the Lord."
- *"...your blessing be on your people."* (1:8) - Here we are reminded of the blessing of God that rests on his people because of their relationship with him (see Psalms 1 - 2).

However, we also see that individual laments are never simply individual. They keep the whole community of faith in mind. What is true for the individual cannot be separated from all of God's people. Therefore this prayer for God's blessing on David is also expanded to the rest of God's people. For God to bring this deliverance will also be a blessing to the whole people of God.