

Psalm 3 • The Lifter of My Head

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

We're in Psalm chapter 3. Suffering, difficulty, and hardship are universal experiences for all people, and that's one thing that none of us are ever going to get away from or escape from. How we respond to those things is absolutely huge however, and that is often what really separates people in terms of their suffering. Because, as I said, we all suffer, but how we suffer and the attitude with which we suffer... And I'm singularly impressed with the life of David who wrote so many of these Psalms and, particularly, the way he responded in the midst of them.

And, I think you'll agree that his attitude is absolutely huge because, rather than responding to God out of anger, or bitterness, or any other negative sort of a feeling of...I guess I'm searching for the word here...just, something that just wants to blame God. David instead turned to the Lord every single time something challenging happened in his life.

And, as we get into chapter 3...but in Psalm chapter 3, this is the first Psalm that begins with the title and the title tells us just what kind of difficulty David was enduring during this time.

And it says, “*A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.*” Now, take out the name “*Absalom*” and it sounds even a little more ominous. Here's a prayer, a song if you will, that David offered up when he was fleeing from his son. Who in the world flees from their son?

You guys know the story; this corresponds to the events that are recorded for us in 2 Samuel chapters 15 through 18. You'll remember that David's son, Absalom, who had already committed murder against one of his own brothers and had been banished for all intents and purposes, is now back in Jerusalem. And he has now risen up against his father and declared himself king of all Israel.

And that meant, of course, that David's life was in danger because, whenever someone was doing this kind of a coup, that meant that you had to eliminate any possibility of competition of the other king coming back into power. And so, his main goal would be to kill his father and David knew that, and that's one of the reasons that he ran along with many of his trusted people.

However, as he was on his way, you'll remember word got to David that more and more of those people that he thought he trusted were actually siding with Absalom and had gone to the other side to join Absalom in that rebellion.

And so, this is a prayer that comes from one of the most challenging or difficult of circumstances that you can imagine. I mean, it's one thing to run from your enemy when you know that this guy has been your enemy for a long time, he hates your guts, and there's never been any question about that sort of a deal. But, to have your own son rise up against you. A son whom David loved, by the way, and never stopped loving.

And, even when Absalom lost his life due to this rebellion, David mourned so much that Joab, you'll remember, actually went and rebuked him because it says that, after the army was successful in defending king David. They all came creeping back into the city like they were something to be ashamed of.

And so, Joab, you'll remember, went to the king and said, hey, buddy, you need to get out there and recognize and honor your troops, or by tomorrow morning there won't be a man left to you. That's how much David loved Absalom, this man who betrayed him, this man who created this rebellion.

We're going to get into this and, by the way, as we do get into these verses, you're going to see the word “*Selah*” occur a few times and then beyond in some other Psalms. Scholars aren't completely agreed as to what this word even means; it either means, to lift up or, to be silent, and we're not really sure which and even if those are correct.

If it means, to lift up it could be something as simple as, lift up your hands, lift up your eyes. If it means, be silent, then it could be a notation to pause for reflection, or it could just be a musical term. But, either way, when we come to it I'm not going to read it. Now you know what the deal is.

But, here's how David's prayer begins, verse 1, “*O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me;*” (ESV) And this first verse gives you a really good idea of David's current heart state, if you will, the state of his heart.

Verse 2, he goes on to echo the opinion of some who were around him saying, “*many are saying of my soul, ‘There is no salvation for him in God.’*” Now, I want you to understand that, when David uses the word “*salvation*,” he's using it primarily in terms of the understanding of deliverance because that is one of the main interpretations or translations of that word.

It can refer to your salvation as far as eternal salvation, but David doesn't have that in view here. He's talking about deliverance. He's literally on the run from his son and he's telling the Lord that, there are many who are saying of me, God's not going to deliver him. There's nothing God can do. He's out of God's reach, if you will. And, we know that there was even a man named Shimei who was saying that and worse.

You'll remember when David and his companions were leaving the city, or they were on the run from Absalom, this man, Shimei, was on a bluff above where they were walking and he was throwing dirt clods and rocks on David and his troop as they were traveling along, and he was yelling at David saying, you, man of blood, get out of here you're getting exactly what you deserve.

And this is what David is saying to the Lord, some are saying to me that there's no help from You because I'm actually being punished by You. This is actually a punishment of some kind. And that's a terrible thing to say to anybody when they're going through hard times; that the only One who could really deliver you is the One who's actually against you.

I mean, it really is a terrible thing to say because, when God's opposed to you, there's nobody who can come to your aid. I found a quote, in fact, by C. H. Spurgeon that says this better than I could, up on the screen here. He wrote,

“If all the trials which come from heaven, all the temptations which ascend from hell, and all the crosses which arise from the earth, could be mixed and pressed together, they would not make a trial so terrible as that which is contained in this verse. It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God.” —C.H. Spurgeon

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Because He's our last salvation. And, for somebody to come along and say, you have no hope, even God is against you in this, that's a horrific thing to say. But, David wouldn't accept that line of reasoning.

Look what he goes on to say in verse 3, and some of you are going to have an old Maranatha song going through your head; *“But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.”* I really love that statement and,

of course, a lot of people have loved it too, and that's why we've been singing this for years and years and years.

What David is doing, remember he's a warrior, he's a soldier, and he's using the language of the battlefield to describe God's protection and care, and he says, You are my shield. He actually makes that declaration in the midst of all of this that's going on; when people...his son is hunting him down like an animal, when people are saying to him, there's no hope. I think you're even beyond the reach of God because I think God is actually the One who's against you here.

David comes along and makes this declaration of faith and he says, *“But you, O Lord, are my shield, my glory.”* The word, *“glory”* refers, when he says *“my glory,”* he's referring to the One who honors and vindicates.

In other words, what David is saying is, you're the One who's going to vindicate me and keep me from walking in shame and defeat. And then he says, “You are the lifter of my head.” And that's an interesting phrase, isn't it? *“The lifter of my head.”* It's describing the reality of one's head naturally being weighed down as if heavy from the weight of battle.

But he speaks of the Lord lifting that weight and being able to lift his head to say relieving the distress and focusing his eyes on God, Because as you know, and we talked about this last week, probably the most challenging thing that we do when we're going through hardship is get our eyes off our hardship.

I mean, no question about it. When we're hurting, we focus on the source of our pain. Whether that source is a person, or a group of people, or an organization, or a nameless enemy of some kind. We tend to fixate on that very thing and, in so doing, we have our eyes pointed down at the battlefield, at the place where the difficulty is raging.

And David says, not only are You a shield, a protection around me, not only are You my glory, the One who vindicates me, but You're also the lifter of my head, the One who keeps my heart from being consumed by this difficulty. How is that possible? By looking up. And, that's what we talked about last week; that the Psalms help us to look up and that's why reading them has been such a powerful comfort for many Christians over the years; because it changes our perspective.

What does it take on our part for our hearts to be lifted up by the Lord? It's in verse 4 and this is a very important verse that you see. *“I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill.”* Now, that verse right there,

there's so much there, you guys. *"I cried aloud to the Lord."* I've been in the same room with a lot of people when they're going through great difficulties in life and I can tell you that we are very good at crying but we're not that great at crying out to the Lord.

We'll cry to people far before we'll cry out to the Lord. And what David is saying here is, *"I cried aloud to the Lord."* And then...and that is why he was able to have his head lifted to begin to see things from God's perspective.

So many times Christians they'll talk about that peace that passes understanding, and they're like, where's the peace? God promises peace. Where is it? I want to have that kind of peace. When I'm going through difficulties, I want to know the peace of the Lord. Hey, listen, that peace is not free. It's not unconditional, it comes with conditions. Let me show them to you, it's given to us in Philippians chapter 4. It says,

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Do not be anxious about anything, (here's what we need to be doing) but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving (here's David's words: cry out to the Lord, in other words,) present your requests to God. (cry out to God. And then it tells us,) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now, there's that wonderful promise of that guarding of our hearts with great peace. But notice it is conditioned upon crying out to the Lord. Bring your burdens to the Lord, don't cry to people, well, I mean, if you've got people who are willing to listen to your cry, I suppose. But don't let that stop you from crying out to the Lord.

And when someone comes to you and they're crying, and they may not be physically crying, but you can hear the cry of their heart, you and I need to be bold enough to say, have you taken this to the throne of grace? And, if not, then let's cry out to the Lord together. Let's petition the Lord together on this thing because you need peace to guard your heart and I can see that you don't have it. Let's get it. It's there, it's a promise.

It's a sure thing, but the condition is: cry out to the Lord. Don't be anxious, but take that time you would otherwise spend being worried and anxious and complaining and so forth, and cry out to God.

Oh, it's a wonderful thing. God promises to meet the heart that humbles itself before Him and cries out to Him with everything that you have. He promises to meet you. He will meet you. He'll meet you there at the place of your greatest need. You cry out to Him, you get down on your knees, and you cry out to Him, and He'll meet you at that place.

What's the result of crying out to the Lord? Finding His peace.

Verse 5, *"I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me."* David here says, proof of the confidence that I've been given, the peace that God gives; God enabled me to lay down and sleep. He's actually going to talk about this in another Psalm as well.

He goes on saying, *"I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around."*

And, you've got to understand here, people, when David makes statements like this, like he does here in verse 6, when he says, *"I will not be afraid"* you've got to understand he's not saying that he's never going to be tempted to be afraid, okay? He's voicing rather his determination not to give in to that fear under any circumstances.

I will not... You can almost hear it through clenched teeth, I will not be afraid for I will trust in the Lord. I will not be afraid. Am I tempted to be afraid? Every day, every minute of every day, but I will not be afraid.

And I think that you and I could learn a thing or two from David's attitude along these lines because he's looking straight into the face of the fears that he would otherwise be tempted to just give way to and he's saying, no, I'm not going to give way to you because David understood that fear was just as formidable an opponent as a warrior fully armed coming at him, with sword and shield.

David knew fear was just as bad, just as threatening to his life, and you and I need to understand that too; giving into fear is inviting the enemy into your home and into your heart.

And, I'm not saying that to condemn anybody because I've struggled with fear just like all the rest of you, but I...so I say this to exhort myself as well. And,

when we do fear, you guys, when we do find that fear has broken down whatever barriers we erected and it has broken through and gotten in, it's time to repent. It's time to confess it as sin.

This is the interesting thing about fear; so many times people, they don't know how to deal with fear. And so, it just goes on and on in their lives. And the reason that it just goes on and on, is because they never deal with it for what it is; it's a sin. Fear is a sin.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, right? It's coming from somewhere else; it's either coming from my flesh, or I'm being prompted... There's a necessity for you and I to recognize fear for what it is, it's a sin. When we give in to fear, we need to come to the Lord and say, Lord, I confess to You that I'm afraid. My heart is melting like wax, to use a biblical phrase, and it shouldn't be. I should be walking in the confidence of knowing that You are in charge in my life. But I'm not, I'm not doing that right now. In fact, I'm walking in the opposite of that. And I ask you to forgive me. Okay? I ask you to forgive me for being afraid.

Now, what have you done? You've taken this enemy and you've brought it to the cross, right? And oh, the power that you and I begin to wield in our walk with the Lord when we take the sins that we commit and we take them to the cross and we find forgiveness. The enemy can no longer take that thing and beat you over the head with it and the power of those things begin to lose their power through the blood of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that He gives and we find that we have a different attitude.

And if you have to confess sin 100 times a day, then do it. 200 times a day, do it. Lord, forgive me again, gave into fear. I'm sorry. I should be trusting You, but I'm not. And don't be afraid to admit that you're not trusting Him, He knew it already.

And then ask Him to help you trust. Lord, give me the power, give me the strength to keep my eyes on You and to trust You.

This is why David is making just this declaration, I will not be afraid though many thousands come against me, all set against me to destroy me, I will not give in to fear, even though I may be tempted.

As we go on here, beginning in verse 7, here's David's prayer regarding his enemies, *"Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked."*

There have been times when I've been praying the Psalms when I've been going through a time of prayer and sometimes I don't have a physical enemy. Sometimes I have spiritual enemies, sometimes my enemy is my own soul, my own emotions rising up against me and being exploited, for whatever reason.

And I see words like this, I see statements like this: Arise, O God, save me, strike all my enemies on the cheek. And I'm thinking, maybe that's fear. Maybe that's the fear in your life and you're saying, Lord, strike it on the cheek, break its teeth, break its ability to grab on and to bite and to tear, just break that ability in my life. If that's your enemy, then so be it. David may be talking here about physical enemies.

Fact of the matter is, you and I know from the New Testament that our battle is not against flesh and blood, so that's one of the great ways to use these imprecatory Psalms. To speak about whatever issue you're up against, Lord break it, break the power of this thing over my life.

Now, I want you to know too that this idea of David speaking words of declaration even though he may not be feeling it..., this is something we're going to see a lot in the Psalms. Here's what I mean by that, David would often speak great words of faith but then, as you read on in any given Psalm, you'll find out that he was really under it.

I mean, there are some songs that start off just real...sound like he's just starting really strong. But, by the end of the Psalm or maybe the midpoint of the psalm, he's telling God what's really going on. And he's saying things like, if you don't help me, I'm dead. I'm seriously...I'm going to die. And that's what's really going on.

And you read those words alongside the way he started off speaking at the beginning of the Psalm, and it almost sounds like you've got two different people talking. There's the strong man, and then there's the weak man. You've got the strong man that says, the Lord is my refuge and my salvation. In Him I will trust.

And then you get into the Psalm farther, and David's going, I am weary and my bed is drenched with my tears and all these... And you're going, really, that came from the same man? Oh, yeah, that came from the same man.

David was a man who believed in speaking confidence in the Lord, even if that confidence wasn't something he was feeling. Here's why; it's because he knew that God was not dependent on his feelings. He knew that the ability of God, the

power of God, was not hindered or made more strengthened by his feelings. God is who God is. Therefore, David is able to make a declaration about God regardless of how he feels.

See, this is the important thing that you and I need to get into our hearts and into our souls because we are so many times captive and in slavery to our feelings to the point where when I feel scared, nothing of faith comes out of my mouth. It's just fear all that comes out of my mouth.

And, I'm not saying that, again, to condemn you. I'm saying it's something I think we need to learn to emulate in the person of David where he's in the middle of literally fearing for his life and yet he says, the Lord is my salvation, the Lord is my deliverer, the Lord loves His children. And he'll make these statements, and this is what he's doing here.

Look at look at verse 8. He says, “*Salvation* (And again, that's the idea of deliverance, so, I'll say, deliverance) *belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!*”

In other words, what he's saying here is, it is the Lord who delivers. Okay? For him to say, deliverance or salvation belongs to the Lord, he's saying, it comes from God. It comes from God. Did you get that? It comes from God.

Do you know why I'm emphasizing that? Because we hear this (Pastor Paul points to his head) and then we'll walk out of here and go through some hardship and we'll instantly try to deliver ourselves. We'll try to create something or do something to deliver ourselves.

David truly believed deliverance came from the Lord, because he was tested twice with effecting his own deliverance. God gave his greatest enemy, king Saul, into his hands on 2 occasions and basically said, there you go, David, deliver yourself. You're free to do it. And his companions were encouraging him to do so. And they're even couching it in the language of heaven. The Lord has given your enemy into your hands. (1 Samuel 24:4) Now strike David and it'll all be over.

And David refused on both times. I will not deliver myself. Deliverance belongs to the Lord. Wow. What a man. And David realized, he knew that when you try to work your own work of deliverance, it's always a bad idea.