

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message Freedom from Anxiety

Scripture Psalm 3

The Psalms have appealed to people for more than 3000 years. Written by and for the Israelite people in the era of the Old Testament, the Psalms still appeal to us because they speak to our emotional needs. The Psalms help us to understand how we, as the followers of God, can find our way through the difficulties of life and maintain our confidence in the living God.

About half of the Psalms were written by David. Many of the Psalms written by him were based on personal experiences he had. These Psalms have a superscription after the number which is a clue to the background situation. There is a story behind Psalm 3. The superscription states "A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom."

Let's read through the Psalm, and then we will talk about the background story and then we will think about David's confidence in the protection and deliverance of God.

Read Psalm 3

Quick Overview

In the first two verses, David acknowledged the multitude of enemies which have arisen to oppose him. In verses 3 and 4 he acknowledged his faith in the power of the LORD to protect him. In verses 5 and 6 he expressed his confidence that the LORD would sustain him and that he would not be afraid or anxious about his situation. The last two verses are a prayer for deliverance and vindication and an affirmation that the LORD will deliver and bless him and all of God's people.

The historical background for this Psalm was very sad, possibly the lowest point in David's life. This low point was the direct consequence of a grievous sin committed by David. I'm sure you are familiar with David's affair with Bathsheba (*II Samuel 11-12*). You will recall that David, one night, from the roof of his palace, witnessed a beautiful woman bathing and, even though she was the wife of another man, he sent messengers to get the woman and he slept with her. When the woman revealed that she had become pregnant, David arranged for her husband to be killed in battle. After Bathsheba's time of mourning for her husband was completed, David brought her into the palace and she became another of his wives.

The LORD through the prophet Nathan rebuked David in very strong terms. The LORD said, "because you have struck down the husband with the sword and have taken his wife to be your own, therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah to be your own" (*II Samuel 12:9-10*). Then the LORD added these words, "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you" (*II Samuel 12:11*).

From that point on, David's life was torn apart by a succession of family troubles (*II Samuel 13-14*). One of his sons by one wife fell in love with the daughter of another wife and raped her. Two years later, the brother of the girl who had been violated murdered his half brother in retaliation. Absalom, the murdering son, then had to flee from David and was estranged from his father for a long time. Absalom had very little loyalty to his father, and he was a very ambitious man. Over a period of time he stole the hearts of the people and proclaimed himself as king in a conspiracy to usurp the position of his father (*II Samuel 15-16*). The words of the LORD, "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you," certainly came true. David was forced to flee the city of Jerusalem with his wives and children and a small army of loyal followers. All of this might seem like a modern soap opera, but it was a reality show of 3000 years ago.

Scripture describes how David went forth from Jerusalem weeping, barefoot, and with his head covered because of his sorrow. Yet even as he was fleeing the palace he made a hopeful statement to the high priest Zadok, "If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see the city and his dwelling place (the tabernacle) again" (*II Samuel 15:25*). David waited out the crisis at an encampment on the east side of the Jordan River (*II Samuel 17:24*). It was during this period that Psalm 3 was probably written.

Just imagine the situation. The enemies who had arisen against David were not from other nations, but from within the people of Israel, instigated by a member of his own family. How ironic this was because David, through his leadership, had ushered in an era of peace for Israel. The nations around Israel had been subdued and there were no significant international threats (*see II Samuel 7:1*). According to verses 1 and 2, the internal enemies were numerous. Their number is emphasized by the repetitions: “How many,” “how many,” and “how many.” For David, the extent of the rebellion against him was shocking.

In the midst of this troubling situation, the king prayed, “O LORD.” The word in Hebrew is “Yahweh.” “Yahweh” was an appropriate name for David to use, first, because it was the most intimate name by which God had revealed Himself to Israel and, secondly, it was the name used by God when he had previously made a unique promise to David. I want to explain this promise because it is the basis on which David maintained hope. David wanted to build a permanent tabernacle to mark the presence of the LORD among the people of Israel, but God turned David’s desire into a promise about the future.

Let me read some excerpts from II Samuel 7 concerning this promise: “After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, David said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent’” (*II Samuel 7:1-2*).

“That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: ‘Tell my servant David, I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom, And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever’” (*II Samuel 7: 4, 8-9, 11-13, 16*).

Even as David was making his escape from Jerusalem, he knew that the LORD would not go back on His promises. David knew that the LORD would be faithful to him in spite of his unfaithfulness to God; in spite of his gross sins of adultery and murder, and the opposition of enemies. Even in his desperate situation, David could, in verse 3, confidently describe God his “shield” and his “Glorious One.” David anticipated that the LORD would “arise” and “deliver” him by striking down the enemies.

There are actually two kinds of adversaries mentioned in verses 1 and 2. First, there were the already “existing foes.” To their number were added the many who were rising up against David. Verse 1 indicates that opposition had expanded from an underground type of dissent to an open and growing rebellion.

In addition, there was a second group of “many.” We can refer to them as “the skeptics of David’s God.” Verse 2 quotes them as saying, “God will not deliver him.” Not only were these people being critical of David, but they did not anticipate that any more help would be given to him by God.

David had a different understanding of his relationship to God and a different level of confidence in God. To David, God was a “shield” of protection around him. Furthermore, David declared that God was his “Glorious One.” This term refers to the power of God. It signified the LORD’s rule and authority over everything. He was the “Glorious One” who was over everyone and everything. David could have confidence in the protection that God could provide because he knew that God’s glory and power were greater than any manmade dangers.

The phrase “lift up the head” is a Hebrew idiom affirming confidence in the LORD. It is the acknowledgement that the LORD has the power to advance and exalt the status of His followers and to abase those who are wicked no matter how mighty they are. The phrase also can be used in the sense of vindicating the innocent. Even though David had reason for despondency, his knowledge of God gave him reason for hope. He was counting on the LORD to protect and validate his position as the authentic leader of Israel.

There is an interesting sequence describing David's attitude in verses 3, 4, and 5. First, he acknowledged the LORD as his personal great and powerful LORD, then he raised his voice in his appeal for help, and then he laid himself down to a peaceful sleep. This indicated that David had an incredible amount of trust in the LORD. So confident was David in the LORD's sovereignty that he had no sleepless anxiety or fear. Even in his time of great despair, betrayed by his son, when he felt abandoned and scorned by his countrymen, David was able to draw comfort from his assurance that God would hear and answer his prayer, and would "lift up his head."

David expected to awaken in the morning because the LORD would "sustain" him. This word "sustain" has a range of meanings. We don't know what David had in mind when he wrote this word. "Sustain" is a synonym for "protection," and this may be the meaning since verse 6 refers to the "tens of thousands drawn up against him on every side." The word "sustain" can also mean that the LORD would "uphold" David in the sense of vindicating his right to be king; or that the LORD would help David to "persevere" through all the adversity. Whatever the actual meaning might be, David is a model of faith. His trust and confidence in God was quite remarkable given the serious nature of his circumstances. David understood that his problems were far beyond his own abilities to solve, and so he abandoned all his concerns to the LORD.

Verse 4 mentioned David's "cry to the LORD." Verse 7 is probably the actual words of the cry referred to in verse 4. David called on the LORD to "rise up" and "deliver" him, to "strike the enemies" and "break the teeth of the wicked." These phrases are carefully chosen to offset statements which appeared earlier in the Psalm. The phrase "arise, O LORD" is used as contrast to the many people who were rising up against David in verse 1. Likewise the phrase "deliver me, O my God" is in contrast to the statement of the skeptics in verse 2. The structure of this Psalm is quite amazing.

David called on the LORD to "strike all his enemies on the jaw." This was David's way of asking the LORD to pour out wrath on his enemies. The phrase "break the teeth of the wicked" has a similar meaning. These phrases were written to offset the outspoken and aggressive behavior of the many people toward David. David wanted his enemies, who were also the enemies of God because of their wickedness, to be silenced, and made powerless and ineffective. From his standpoint, deliverance would come when God eliminated the opposition to his reign as king of Israel.

Many of the Psalms conclude with an expression of confidence that prayer has been or will be heard. The last verse in this Psalm is an affirmation that the LORD will indeed provide deliverance, in spite of what many people were saying in verse 2. Again, we can see another example of the balance in the structure of the poetry. Although many people were scornfully declaring that “God will not deliver him,” David had confidence that deliverance would come from the LORD. And David was eager for this to happen because he knew that blessing would not come on the people of Israel until he had been restored to his rightful position as king.

Let me tell you about the outcome of this episode. David was restored to his throne. God did honor His promise to give to David a descendent who would establish a kingdom forever. In this sense, this episode in David’s life had a positive ending. But even if this episode had not ended so well from a human perspective, David was content to have his circumstances, even his life, to be under the authority of, and in the hands of, the sovereign LORD. That is the attitude we all must have as we face the trials and uncertainties of this life.

Takeaways for Psalm 3:

- When we are faithful to God, God will protect and “lift up our heads.” This statement applies to us both before and after physical death.
- We can be free of anxiety and fear when we trust God. We can sleep well at nights knowing that God is in control of our circumstances.
- God is our Shield, verse 3, our Sustainer, verse 5, and our Deliverer Savior, verses 7 and 8.