

Psalm 3 “What to Pray When Your Son Wants to Kill You” **

Main Idea: David wrote Psalm 3 when his son Absalom was trying to kill him. In the psalm David shares with us what he prayed in this unthinkable time in his life. He pours out four realities that he experienced. One thing’s for sure. When life gets hard we find out whether God is real in our lives or not.

I. David experienced trouble (1-2).

- A. People were opposing him.
- B. People were saying that God wouldn’t save him.

II. David experienced God’s protection (3-4).

- A. God is a shield.
- B. God allows His people to share His glory.
 - 1. We live roller-coaster lives when we live for people’s approval.
 - 2. We live confidently when we live to please the Lord.
- C. God hears the cries of His people.
 - 1. We must acknowledge God’s holiness.
 - 2. We must become holy.

III. David experienced sleep (5-6).

- A. He didn’t find rest in his circumstances.
- B. He found rest in the Lord.

IV. David experienced God’s deliverance (7-8).

- A. He prayed with God’s reputation in mind.
- B. He prayed with God’s people in mind.
 - 1. God doesn’t save the strong.
 - 2. God saves those who admit their need.

Take Inventory: The real Christian is the person who really trusts in the real God.

“Come to Jesus! Life will be sweet. Your problems will vanish.”

Sounds good, doesn’t it? An offer like that goes out again and again from pulpits across America (and over the airways from television preachers). And listeners buy it hook, line, and sinker. It sounds so good.

The problem is, it doesn’t match reality. And the reason it doesn’t match reality is because the offer simply isn’t true. Come to Jesus and life will be sweet? No, come to Jesus and you’ll get a cross. Your problems will vanish? No, according to Jesus the world will hate you.

Should a person come to Jesus? Absolutely! There is no other way to God, said Jesus (John 14:6). He alone offers the guarantee of life beyond the grave, eternal life in the presence of God. He alone offers forgiveness for sin, peace that never passes, and joy that the world cannot rob from us.

But a problem free life? No, that's not His offer. Help for the problems, yes! Elimination of problems, no, not in this life.

One of the things you discover when you read the Bible is that it's full of stories of *real people who really believed* in God and yet had *real problems*. That's one of the reasons I love the Psalms. The book of Psalms shows us what real people prayed when they faced real, even overwhelming challenges.

Such is the case in Psalm 3. Note the heading and you'll discover that Psalm 3 is *A psalm of David*. The Hebrew word for 'psalm' (*mizmour*) means "a song, a melody with words."^[1] It's actually a different word than the one used for the title of the entire book of Psalms (*tehillim*) which means 'praises.' King David, Israel's greatest king and a man after God's own heart, penned the words in this prayer-song. But when? The heading indicates that when David wrote this psalm there was trouble on the home front. He wrote it...

When he fled from his son Absalom. David faced many hard times in his life. Goliath told him he was going to feed him to the birds. His father-in-law, Saul fired spears at him twice and hunted him like he was a dangerous criminal for years. He lost his first wife due to Saul's unjust treatment. The Ziphites betrayed him. The Amalekites once kidnapped his wives and children. For sure, David was no stranger to hardship.

But this may well have been David's lowest point in life. His son, Absalom, perhaps his *favorite* son, not only broke his heart but tried to take his life.

What do we know about Absalom? He was David's third-born son whose mother was a princess, the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3). He was a handsome man with a head of hair like none other. In fact, we're told that in all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. 2 Samuel 14:25 says, "From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him." His sister, Tamar, is referred to as "the beautiful sister of Absalom" in 2 Samuel 13:1. 2 Samuel 14:27 says that Absalom had three sons and a daughter, that the daughter's name was the same as her aunt, Tamar, and that "she became a beautiful woman."^[2]

Sadly, Absalom's sister, Tamar, was raped by their half-brother, Amnon, David's first-born (13:1). To get revenge, Absalom took matters in his own hands, killed Amnon, and then fled for his life and lived in exile for three years (13:38). Finally, after burning Joab's barley field, Absalom maneuvered his way back into public life and his father's favor (14:31, 33).

Sadly, beauty often leads to conceit. It did in Absalom's life. He became a proud, blame-shifting, self-promoting young man, and in time a shrewd politician who worked the crowds through flattery and stole the heart of the nation (15:5-6).

The day came when he threw away pretense, sounded the trumpet, and brashly usurped his father's throne, proclaiming himself Israel's king. Absalom set up a tent and lay with his father's concubines in public view.

David, in order to escape Absalom's wrath, had no choice but to flee Jerusalem, barefoot, weeping, and head covered as he left (2 Sam. 15:30). David says that's when he wrote Psalm 3.

And to make matters worse, David knew he had brought some of this on himself. According to 1 Kings 1:6, David was a passive dad who instead of confronting sin in his boys' developmental years, let it slide. And although David was a godly man *most* of his life, there were days when he strayed, one in particular when he committed adultery.

What do you say to God when your son is trying to kill you? You may never face that situation—I hope not—but all of us will face hard times in life, some brought on by our own foolish decisions. What can we say to our Maker in such times? The Holy Spirit gave us Psalm 3 to show us.

Commentators suggest that Psalm 3 and Psalm 4 are parallel and can be read together. Some conclude that Psalm 3 is a morning psalm and Psalm 4 an evening psalm.^[3]

In Psalm 3 David shares what he prayed in this unthinkable time in his life. He poured out four realities that he experienced.

I. David experienced trouble (1-2).

“O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’ *Selah*”

Notice how David begins. *LORD!* he says (there is no “O” in the Hebrew text). David begins by uttering God’s personal, covenant name *Yahweh*. “In the language of prayer in the OT, this address has the same connotation as ‘Abba, Father’ in the NT,” says Willem VanGemeren.^[4] The term speaks of the deep spiritual intimacy he knows with God.

David has called on Yahweh thousands of times in his life, none with more desperation than in this prayer. Death is staring him in the face, a shameful death, a death that would dishonor the God who has been so good to him, and surely God’s reputation would be marred severely if David was killed by his own son.

David here mentions two aspects of his trouble.

A. People were opposing him. What people? 2 Samuel 7:1 indicates that under David’s leadership Israel defeated the surrounding nations and came to experience an era of international peace. So what people is David talking about here? Who are his ‘foes’? Not the surrounding nations but fellow Israelites! The enemy is now *within* Israel.^[5]

His son has become his enemy. So has his trusted counselor and friend, Ahithophel (Bathsheba’s grandfather), who betrayed him. So had a large portion of his generals and soldiers who deserted him to follow Absalom. Men who had previously fought for him in battle are now lined up against him, intent on taking his life.

Three times David uses the word *many* in verses 1-2. “O LORD, how **many** are my foes! How **many** rise up against me! **Many** are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’” He gives a number in verse 6, saying there are “tens of thousands” drawn up against him on every side.

To complicate matters, David knew he was at least partly responsible. Shimei was right. Do you remember Shimei? He’s the guy who pelted David with rocks as he was fleeing Jerusalem, and cursed David in 2 Samuel 16:7-8, saying, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!”

And David knew Shimei, though out of line, was at least partly right. He did have blood on his hands. He had disobeyed God and dishonored his calling as king by sleeping with Bathsheba and ordering her husband’s death.

Furthermore, David well knew that God predicted this, when after his adultery with Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet revealed to him this sobering prophecy in 2 Samuel 12:11, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you...’” But not only were people opposing David, worse than that...

B. People were saying that God wouldn’t save him. Verse 2—“Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’” *God will not save him*—that’s the sense of the verb translated ‘deliver’ (Hebrew *yeshuah*).

That’s a far cry from what they used to say about him. They used to sing a song about David, one that became popular soon after he killed Goliath and the Philistines, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands

(1 Sam. 18:7).” A reputation is a fragile thing. It’s built in a lifetime, but ruined in a moment.

Here’s how the Young’s Literal Translation renders what the people were saying, “There is no salvation for him in God.”

Why were the crowds saying *that*? Apparently because Absalom’s smooth talking convinced them: “The old man is past his prime. He’s blown it by his sinful blunder and God is through with him. Israel needs a new king for a new day, and I am the man!”

David concludes verse 2 with ‘selah,’ apparently some sort of musical notation. Remember, this is a prayer that David sang, a *psalm* (*selah* appears some 71 times in the Psalms). So ends part one of the psalm. David experienced trouble.

II. David experienced God’s protection (3-4).

“But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah*”

Note how David changes his focus in verse 3. The cause of David’s trouble is still there, but David chooses to look at something else, at *someone* else. Peter Craigie remarks, “If one gazes too long upon the enemy and his might, the enemy grows in the mind’s eye to gigantic proportions and his citadels reach up to the skies (Deut. 1:28). The hypnotic power of the enemy is broken when one turns one’s gaze towards God, who is able to fight and grant victory.”^[6]

That’s a good thing to do when you’re overwhelmed. Focus on God. Having done so David affirms three truths about God.

A. God is a shield.^[7] “You are a shield,” says David to Yahweh. As a warrior David has used a lot of shields in his life. But this isn’t your typical shield. This shield isn’t simply guarding David’s front-side, but is *around* David. “You are a shield *around me*, O Yahweh,” says David.

God protects His own on all sides. There is no chink in the armor when God is your shield. It matters not the size of the army in opposition, not one stray arrow can get through unless the Lord allows it. God is a shield. What’s more...

B. God allows His people to share His glory. “You bestow glory on me,” says the NIV. “It indicates the honour of serving such a master,” writes Derek Kidner.^[8] “You are...my glory,” is how the NKJV puts it.

God is the glory of His people. David had been a great king for years, and here he acknowledges why. The Lord who alone is glorious gave him glory and lifted up his head.

When people are against you it’s easy to drop your head, and with what people were saying about him, David sure felt like dropping his head. But God wouldn’t let him! I love how the KJV puts it, “The lifter up of my head,” that’s what God was to David.

There’s a lesson here for us, a vital lesson.

1. *We live roller-coaster lives when we live for people’s approval.* Up and down, up and down—*up* when people speak well of us, and *down* when they criticize us. Approval junkies live pendulum lives. On the other hand...

2. *We live confidently when we live to please the Lord.* Living to please the audience of *one*, ought to be our motto for living. It was Paul’s who said in 2 Corinthians 5:9, “We make it our aim to please Christ.” David affirms a third truth about God...

C. God hears the cries of His people. Verse 4—“To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.” David was a man’s man, fearless in battle, yet when you read his psalms you find him crying a lot. And out loud, too.

It’s the direction of his crying that’s significant. He cries *to the Lord*. That is, he takes his problems directly to the Lord.

And the Lord answers him, David says. Absalom took over the city for a brief time and declared that he was king, but David affirms that it’s not what Absalom says that carries weight, but what *Yahweh* says. *He answers me.*

From where does the Lord hear and answer David? *From his holy hill*, says David. According to Psalm 2:6, God’s ‘holy hill’ refers to Zion, the city of Jerusalem, the place where sacrifices were made for sin. You see, in order to be heard by God...

1. *We must acknowledge God’s holiness.* God is holy, that is, He is perfect and sinless. And God requires holiness, which creates a problem for people like David (and you and me) for we are not by nature *holy*. We are sinners. Is there hope for us? Yes...

2. *We must become holy.* “Is that possible?” you ask. Yes, because of what happened on that holy hill. In David’s day lambs were sacrificed in the tabernacle on that hill to cover sins temporarily, but one thousand years later the final lamb was slain. God Himself became a man in the person of Jesus Christ and there on that holy hill, the Holy One died as a sin-bearer to make men holy. Hebrews 10:14 explains, “By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Those who believe in the risen Jesus and accept the sacrifice He made on the cross are *made perfect* by Jesus. What we couldn’t do for ourselves, He did. And by faith in His work we become holy. And as holy people we can cry out and be heard by God, just like David was!

God answers those who look to the holy hill! Is that where you are looking today? I want you to know that people who look there experience a dramatic change. David did...

III. David experienced sleep (5-6).

“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.”

Remember, David’s not talking about sleeping in his soft bed in the palace. He’s talking about sleeping in some strange bed, if not on the ground in some field, while he’s running from Absalom.

That’s amazing. Humanly speaking, sleep is difficult if not impossible when someone is intent on killing you. Did you ever hear a noise in your house at night and have trouble sleeping, worrying that maybe some criminal was after you? For David, it wasn’t *maybe*, and it wasn’t *someone*. His life *was* in danger and *thousands* were after him.

Yet he slept. How do you explain that? Two things were true of David...

A. He didn’t find rest in his circumstances. Rather...

B. He found rest in the Lord. Beloved, sleep is a gift that comes from God, as is every other good thing in life. Actually, the Bible has a lot to say about *sleep*.

Psalm 4:8 “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” Psalm 127:2 “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves.” Psalm 121:4 “He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” That’s why we can sleep because God never sleeps!

Other passages dealing with sleep include: Prov. 3:21-26 (good sleep is a by-product of seeking wisdom); Prov. 20:13 (don't love sleep); Jonah 1:5-6 (Jonah's sleep was an expression of disobedience); Acts 20:9 (Eutycus slept in church); 2 Cor. 11:27 (Paul often went without sleep for the gospel ministry's sake)

Don't miss this. We need the Lord for *everything*, from the ability to sleep at night, to the ability to put our feet on the floor in the morning. It's all from God.

David shares one more experience in Psalm 3. He experienced trouble, God's protection, sleep, and finally...

IV. David experienced God's deliverance (7-8).

“Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. *Selah*”

David knows his problems are bigger than him, but not bigger than God. So he asks God for deliverance, fully expecting it to come. We've seen that word before in the psalm, haven't we? In verse 2 people were saying it's what God wouldn't do for David, “God will *not deliver* him.” But in verse 7 David asks for it anyway, “Deliver me, O my God!” And in verse 8 he makes it clear why he's asking God to deliver him, “From the LORD comes deliverance,” David affirms. “Salvation belongeth unto the LORD,” is the KJV rendering.

All three times David uses a form of the Hebrew word for salvation (*yasha*, the verb ‘save’; and *yeshua*, the noun ‘salvation’). Does the word sound familiar? Someone's name is linked to that word. “And you will call his name *Yeshua* (Jesus) for he will save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).”

Listen to Charles Spurgeon's comment: “Search Scripture through, and you must, if you read it with a candid mind, be persuaded that the doctrine of salvation by grace alone is the great doctrine of the word of God: ‘*Salvation belongeth unto the LORD.*’ This is a point concerning which we are daily fighting. Our opponents say, ‘Salvation belongeth to the free will of man; if not to man's merit, yet at least to man's will;’ but we hold and teach that salvation from first to last, in every iota of it, belongs to the Most High God. It is God that chooses His people. *He* calls them by his grace; *he* quickens them by his Spirit, and keeps them by his power. It is not of man, neither by man; ‘not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.’”^[9]

That's why David asked the Lord to deliver him. David knew that deliverance comes from the Lord and nowhere else.

But what about David's other request here? *Strike my enemies on the jaw. Smash their teeth.* Isn't David being a little vengeful here? After all, Jesus said we're to turn the other cheek, didn't He? Yes, Jesus said that and made it clear we're not to retaliate against personal attacks. But this isn't personal for David. This prayer request is about *God*. It's a God-centered request. How so? In two ways...

A. He prayed with God's reputation in mind. What happens to a person if someone smashes a fist into their jaw and breaks their teeth? That person's going to have a hard time *talking*, right? Why would David want God to do something that would make it hard for his enemies to talk? Remember verse 2? What were they saying? Things about David but more importantly *about God* that were not true! Silence them, Lord! They're saying You won't save me. They're maligning Your grace and marring Your reputation. Make them be quiet, Yahweh, not for my sake, but for Yours!^[10]

B. He prayed with God's people in mind. “May your blessing be on your people,” is how David finishes his prayer. The enemy is still after him, but he's not thinking about himself, but about God's people. He's asking God to bless His people, all of them, and that would include the very people who took his throne and were trying to kill him.

You say, “I could never pray that prayer if my son did that to me!” David didn't pray it in his own strength, but God's. That's the point of the psalm.

1. *God doesn't save the strong.* To the contrary...

2. *God saves those who admit their need.*

In a few moments you are going to witness a baptismal service. When a person is baptized they are announcing by their actions, "I was a weak, helpless sinner, but God saved me. I have died to myself, but God raised me to new life in Jesus Christ."

As we prepare for the baptism, I'd like to share with you an excerpt from a letter I received from a dear brother, Barry White. Barry served as a medical doctor, evangelist, and church planter in one of the poorest and most remote regions of Cambodia, but had to leave his work there due to family health reasons. Barry makes yearly trips back to Cambodia to encourage the leaders in their care of the young church. He writes the following about what happened in May:

"In Krolaa Village where we have been going on discipleship trips for over six years, we were confronted with several questions: 1. How to resolve a problem where a husband was making decisions without his wife's input? 2. What to do with a man who had children with a woman but was not married? 3. How to help two young Christians have a proper engagement? 4. How to baptize believers without a place to do so? The 4th question had a wonderful 1st-Century answer. Since biblical baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus we needed water deep enough for them to enter in to. There was nothing like that nearby. Going far away would diminish the public testimony of the eleven believers' faith in Jesus before their village. One of our company came up with the idea to dig a hole. To which, one said that all the water would drain out before we could fill it. Then, I knew why the tarp was in the back of the Landcruiser I had borrowed: it was to go into the hole. I stood there in amazement as I watched some of the very ones to be baptized digging the 'grave' into which they would enter and then come out again. 70+ gallons of water carried from a well later, eleven went into the water, eleven times one of the men read from Romans 6, eleven came out again with big smiles on their faces, and eleven times I shouted, 'Risen from the dead'. The rest of our visit in Krolaa that picture of these new creatures in Christ and an empty hole in the ground struck us all."^[1]

I invite you to take inventory as we leave Psalm 3 with this thought in mind. A problem free life? No, that's not what describes the person the Bible calls a Christian. But this is. *The real Christian is the person who really trusts in the real God.*

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semitic Domains*

^[2] It's interesting how the Bible specifically points out the physical beauty in Absalom's family.

^[3] Willem VanGemeran, p. 72. Although Peter Craigie argues that Psalm 3 may be an evening hymn.

^[4] Willem VanGemeran, p. 74.

^[5] Observation by Willem VanGemeran, p. 74.

^[6] Peter Craigie, p. 73.

[7] The Hebrew word *magan* is elsewhere used to describe the scales of a crocodile.

[8] Derek Kidner, p. 54.

[9] Charles Spurgeon, p. 24.

[10] Peter Craigie observes, “The enemies had spoken wicked words, but mouths cluttered with shattered teeth could no longer voice their enmity.” p. 75.

[11] Barry White, *The White Family: Ambassadors and Pilgrims* newsletter, June 2007