

Salvation belongs to the Lord

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[0 : 00] In Psalm 3 this morning, we encounter a problem. Psalm 1 presented us with the essential dichotomy of individual life. Will you walk in the way of righteousness or the way of the wicked?

Psalm 2 expanded that out to an international scope and challenged us to find salvation, independence upon the sun. Psalm 3 kind of returns back to the individual level and it presents a problem, and a problem with which I suspect we can all identify.

Lord, how many are my foes? How many rise up against me? Many are saying of me, God will not deliver him. As we consider in this series the way of the righteous in the muck of life, we recognize early on in this altar that there are times and seasons, indeed for some of us, almost our whole lives, times when we cry out, Lord, how many are my foes?

Brian read us some of the backgrounds to the psalm for us earlier on, that section from 2 Samuel. And if you want to know how that rebellion panned out, then you can go and read chapters 16 to 18 this afternoon as well.

This psalm is written against the background of a real, genuine, historical military crisis. David's situation, as he writes these words, is bleak.

[1 : 24] The thrice-repeated many of these first couple of verses, it highlights the severity of the situation. David is facing not only the kind of international opposition that he might have expected, but worse, David is facing opposition from within, indeed even from within his own family.

Absalom is David's son. No wonder there's a note of real desperation here. One commentator calls these verses a forlorn cry. David feels neglected.

David feels under attack. Now, maybe there are one or two here who've been in a situation of military crisis, a point where the threat to your life is very real.

Maybe one or two, but even then I doubt any of us have done so from the position of being the king, the figurehead of that opposition. None of us, I imagine, have been in David's position of somebody wanting to come and claim our throne.

So that does give us a note of caution as we approach this psalm that there might be some things that are true of David that are not true of you and me. But still in God's providence, this psalm is here for us in God's word.

[2 : 35] And it is right and proper that you and I consider these words and make them our own. As James Boyce puts it, you may not be facing an imminent military battle when you wake up most mornings, but you are facing a battle.

For some of us, maybe our workplace is a battleground. Maybe it is a cutthroat place where everybody is trying to climb up and never mind how many faces you have to step on as you ascend that ladder.

What do you do when you return from a fortnight's holiday or come back from maternity leave and you find that your colleague has been maneuvering to take over your position? Maybe you and I don't have an army of thousands arrayed against us, but really how many enemies does it take to make your life miserable?

One enemy is more than enough to demoralize us, even to have very real practical costs to us. One is enough if the enemy is sufficiently determined. And maybe for some of us, those enemies are closer to home.

Maybe even for some, it is coming from inside the house. You don't have to wait until you arrive at work for the battles to begin. Maybe your son isn't raising an army against you, but your children might still hate you.

[3 : 52] They may have betrayed what you stand for or your husband or your wife. What do you do when domestic life seems like a battleground? What do you do when the spouse who should be

your ally seems to have become part of the force that is arrayed against you?

What do you do when the enemies rise up against you, be they one or be they many? And in verse two, it gets still worse. David proclaims, many are saying of me, God will not deliver him.

David's enemies know how to get him where it hurts. David perhaps is all too aware that God told him in 2 Samuel 12, out of your own household, I'm going to bring calamity on you.

So the possibility that God will not save him seems very real to David. And sometimes when we are being attacked by a particularly skilled enemy, sometimes they know just how to inflict maximum damage, don't they?

They know our insecurities. Maybe this is especially true of those who are closest to us. They know how to wound us. And we live in a world where abuse is all too commonplace.

[5 : 06] Whether it's physical, psychological, sexual, financial, or emotional, abuse is a reality for too many people. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2018, 4% of men and 8% of women suffered domestic abuse in the United Kingdom.

That is 685,000 men and 1.3 million women. That should be a horrifying statistic to us.

In too many households in this country, and for that matter in too many churches, abuse is a reality.

So let me take a moment to say, if that is your reality, please speak to someone.

Do not just let it continue. Speak to me, speak to one of the elders, speak to Joanna if you don't want to talk to me, or speak to one of the other elders' wives for that matter. We may not have easy answers, but we can promise to pray, and we can promise to walk with you in the pain, and we can promise to stand with you as you look for hope.

Now as verse 2 flags up for us, often it's not the physical wounds which are the worst. Often it's our emotions, it's our spirits that are most vulnerable.

[6 : 28] What's worst for David is the accusation, God will not deliver him. There's a sort of systematic beating down that ends up making a person feel that they have no value, that they are always wrong, that their opinion has no worth, and that can result in a belief that God would not want to save you.

That's what David's enemies are saying to him. That's what David is in danger of believing. God will not deliver you. And you can imagine that, can't you?

It can be the personal, you are not worth saving, or it can be the more general suggestion that there is no God to do the saving.

Have you not grown out of those fairy stories yet? Don't you know better by now? We can be made to feel intellectually deficient, can't we, for believing in a God who saves.

We can be surrounded by enemies. Spurgeon said, it is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God.

[7 : 52] The psalm grapples with that reality. But do you see what David has already done in verses 1 and 2? Already, right here at the start, he's come to God about it.

Even as his enemies say, God wants nothing to do with you, David cries out to his covenant Lord, to his true God. So there in verses 1 and 2, we see a world of enemies.

And in our lives as David, in his life, well, we can face a variety of afflictions and attacks. So then how does David respond?

How do we respond in these situations? In verses 3 and 4, we see the greatness of God. Having faced the reality of his situation, having brought it to God in the first two verses, David moves on and he reminds himself, reminds his other hearers, reminds other prayers of this psalm, reminds us of truths about God that could be so very easily pushed out.

In several places, the Bible shows us how easy it is for dwelling upon the enemy to result in us feeling overwhelmed. As we look down, as we look at the world around us, as we see the problems arrayed against us, we can very easily feel overwhelmed.

[9 : 16] Perhaps the clearest example of this comes when Moses sends the spies into the promised land to go and suss out the situation. Twelve men are sent to investigate.

Ten of them are overwhelmed by the strength and stature of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. And they come back to Moses and come back to the people and they say, we can't attack those people, they are stronger than we are.

All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes. And we looked the same to them. The ten spies were overwhelmed by the forces arrayed against them.

But not so Caleb and Joshua. These other two spies said, we should go up and take possession of the land for we can certainly do it.

Had these two not seen what the others had seen or was this mere wishful thinking? No, no, both of them had seen the giants. But the ten, seeing the giants, had forgotten about God.

[10:24] And the two, on the other hand, focused so much on God that even those giants came to seem small. It wasn't wishful thinking. It wasn't bluster that made them say, we can certainly do it.

No, it was confidence in what God himself had said. Confidence in who God was and is. Now friends, when we face these difficult situations, it might be really hard for us to turn away from the giant standing in front of us and turn and consider God.

We might need to turn to words like these in Psalm 3 to remind us to do that. We might need a faithful friend who will help us to refocus our eyes.

But we must strive to fix our eyes upon Jesus. As the hymn puts it, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look filled in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

So what does David remind himself of? What does he turn to to fix his eyes upon his guard? Well, faced with these enemies surrounding him, David assures himself that his Lord is a shield.

[11:47] And whilst the word for shield here denotes a kind of small shield that's held in one arm as a mobile defense, well, not so the Lord as a shield. You, Lord, are a shield around me.

The protection that comes from God is total. And secondly, he is my glory. It's an interesting phrase, isn't it? One commentator says, it indicates the honor of serving such a master.

And perhaps, too, the radiance that he imparts to his servant. We could consider Psalm 34, verse 5. Those who look to God are radiant.

Their faces are never covered with shame. And 2 Corinthians 3. We all who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

At the very least, to say that he is my glory, it highlights the comparative unimportance of any earthly esteem, which is always so transient and fickle.

[13:01] So he is a shield. He is my glory. And thirdly, the Lord is the lifter of David's head. When David is downcast, the Lord takes him and lifts him up.

We heard in 2 Samuel earlier, verse 30 of that chapter, how David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and he was barefoot.

All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. Where there, as he went up that mountain, his head was covered, he was downcast.

Now, he recognizes God as the lifter of his head. And this image only gets richer when we consider the cultural background to it.

To speak of lifting the head speaks of high honor, speaks of being raised into a respected position. So when Joseph tells the cup bearer the meaning of his dream in that jail cell, he says, within three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand just as you used to do.

[14:11] The lifting of the head stands in contrast to the alternative. When one king conquers another, the defeated king lies prostrate and the victor places his foot upon his neck.

This is not a foot upon the neck. This is the lifting of the head. And for David, it is God Almighty who does that lifting.

Fourthly and finally, verse four, God will answer him. Anytime, every time, whenever David cries out, God will answer from his holy mountain.

These are David's assurances to himself. As he considers the enemies on one hand, he looks up and considers his God upon the other. And so the next pair of verses, verses five and six, speak of the peace which David enjoys, the peace which you and I may enjoy.

I lie down and sleep, says David. And maybe we could wonder about the wisdom of sleep as the coup rages on, as men pursue him seeking his life, as the foes rise up against him.

[15:22] But the I here is a deliberate emphasis. It follows on from the but you of verse three. The enemies are rising up. God is a strong shield all around.

Therefore, I will sleep. Because you, O Lord, are who and what you are, I, I can go and take a nap. David speaks here from the perspective of the following morning when he can assert that he did indeed wake up again.

The assassins couldn't trouble him in the night. The many enemies could not defeat him as he slept. Why? Because the Lord sustains me. David has that confidence in the first night and he knows that that protection is going to continue.

Verse six, I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side. Now, I would love it if it were true that in every situation our experience was of that kind of immediate peace.

That there wouldn't be anything keeping us awake at night and worries troubling us in the small hours of the morning. But I know and doubtless many of you know from experience that that is not always the case.

[16:41] But these verses do tell us that there may be that immediate peace and they assure us that for us to have that peace even as the situation is unresolved is possible and even appropriate.

David's still on the run as he prays this prayer. Absalom is still rising up in rebellion. David does not know what tomorrow is going to hold but David does know who God is.

He trusts in the goodness and the power of his Lord. In one of those strange quirks of our modern interconnected world I read in a commentary by an American pastor a story of a couple from Northern Ireland which he found in a book by Irene Howitt who lives down the road.

And the account in this book concerns Pat and Andrew Cardy whose nine-year-old daughter cycled to a friend's house to play and never came back.

And a week later she was found murdered. What must that week have been like? Those days of waiting searching hoping doubting.

[17:53] and all about the fourth day Pat's doctor brought her some sleeping tablets and she went to bed wondering if those tablets would be her constant crutch.

And before bed she was meditating and the words of a verse came to mind. Psalm 127 verse 2 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest eating the bread of anxious toil for he gives to his beloved sleep.

And as Pat thought on those words and the love in which they were wrapped she claimed those words and slept peacefully that night and every night thereafter.

Now that verse did not bring Jennifer back. It was not a magical end to her anguish but sometimes this is what God does.

He gives peace even in the midst of tragedy and he may do so immediately. What's the hope here? Well in Psalm 127 Solomon recognizes his hope is not in what he can accomplish by staying awake.

[19:09] It is not his going over and over the situation that will provide the solution. It is not him doing another hour's work that will put bread on his family's table.

It is not that bread of anxious toil. No it is not his anxiety that produces the results but rather in peace God gives to his beloved sleep.

And so too David some years before Solomon could sleep in the face of the most terrifying circumstances because David knew his God. He knew his sustaining protecting power.

And so in verse 7 we come to the prayer of this prayer. Thus far what we've had is a description of the situation and declarations of God's character and now comes the request.

Arise Lord deliver me my guard strike all my enemies on the jaw break the teeth of the wicked. This is a military prayer.

[20:17] The opening sentence is reminiscent of what Moses used to pray when the ark of the Lord set out with the armies of Israel. Numbers chapter 10 when the ark set out Moses said rise up Lord may your enemies be scattered may your foes flee before you.

David needs victory over the forces of his son Absalom. In verse 1 the many foes rise up. Now he calls out that God would rise up.

And so far so good. But I imagine some of you don't love what follows. Maybe for some of you when we sang this psalm earlier this verse was difficult to think.

Why is David asking for this kind of vengeance? May strike all my enemies on the jaw break the teeth of the wicked. And even if it was okay for David to pray that is it really something that we should be singing now?

Are we not in the New Testament era? Is it not true that God is love? Well let's lay that last one aside first because here's what Revelation tells us the saints who have been slain because of the word of God are praying.

[21 : 32] How long sovereign Lord holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? And in the context of the apocalyptic imagery of the book of Revelation let's not kid ourselves that judging the inhabitants of the earth and avenging the blood of the saints is somehow a gentle cuddly thing.

now there's vengeance and judgment going on in the New Testament. This is not just David getting a bit too angry. So what do we do with this?

Well a big part of what we need to understand here is that this is what salvation looks like. This is what deliverance involves. Whilst David had peace even in the middle of his difficulty, ultimate safety requires the difficulty to be removed, requires the threat to be removed.

Dale Ralph Davis recounts the story of Bessie. Bessie was a Burmese python accidentally set loose in a block of flats and the plumbers were called in to track down this eight foot reptile in the walls and in the pipes.

And two weeks after the snake first got loose she was found loitering in the ceiling of the flat immediately below her original home. For two weeks the residents of this block of flats were checking under their beds and inside their sheets as they went to bed.

[23 : 06] After hearing of Bessie's discovery one resident confessed, we'll definitely sleep better. Understatement of the decade there. How could they feel safe while the threat remained?

Well so too David and his enemies. So too you and I. You and I cannot ultimately enjoy full total security.

The saints cannot be ultimately vindicated until there are no more enemies. Either the enemies must be no longer enemies, they must kiss the son lest he be angry to return to Psalm 2.

or his wrath will flare up. If you want the deliverance, if you want the salvation, if you want the blessing of verse 8, this is how you get there.

The psalm began with the enemy saying God will not deliver him. The psalm concludes with David declaring from the Lord comes deliverance. This idea is picked up in the language of Revelation chapter 7.

[24 : 15] As the multitude who are gathered around the throne cry out, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. And the angels fall on their faces and worship God saying, Amen, praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.

Amen. Whatever the situation, from the Lord comes deliverance. Let's pray.

Lord God, as we recognize the reality of difficult situations in our lives, as we acknowledge to you the reality of enemies who surround us, Lord, thank you that you are greater.

You are more powerful than any foe arrayed against us. Even as tens of thousands assail us, you are a shield around us, our glory and the lifter of our head.

Lord, when we are tempted to lie awake, plotting, planning, wondering, worrying, Lord, grant us sleep, we ask.

[25 : 50] Grant us rest, confident in your protecting power now and in that deliverance that will come in all of its fullness.

Thank you, Lord. Amen.