

Confidence under pressure

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[0 : 00] Psalm 3, a psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son. O Lord, how many are my foes? Many are rising against me.

Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation from him in God. But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory and the lifter of my head.

I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me from his holy hill. I lay down and slept. I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.

I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all round.

Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God. If you strike all my enemies on the cheek, you break the teeth of the wicked.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing be on your people. There's many challenges to living as a Christian, but one of the toughest ones, I think, is to keep together that which we believe about God or we think we believe about God.

[1 : 07] When our circumstances often seem to be at odds with that or often feel as though they're at odds with that. We believe in God's goodness and commitment to us.

And yet so often in our hearts we're overwhelmed with sadness. We're paralyzed by fear.

Sometimes we're even consumed by anger.

And it's a struggle keeping those two things together. When our circumstances push us one way and what we believe draws us another way. And that gets worse because sometimes in that sort of situation we're already super aware of our sinfulness.

And then from there it's very easy to conclude that our circumstances are evidence that God's actually abandoned us.

So often we slip into that pattern of doing our theology by circumstance. Now perhaps our church family life is a current example of this struggle.

[2 : 17] For nine weeks we've soaked up and we really have enjoyed soaking up from the letter of Colossians. The wonderful truth that our story, our story, is inseparably bound to the story of Jesus Christ.

That in Christ and united to him, the image we've been using is that our buckets are full and overflowing. Buckets of identity, meaning and purpose and security and satisfaction.

In Christ we have the good life, the full life, the rich life that God intends us to have. But then you just need to look over the last two weeks in our church family and so much has been happening.

There's been so many in hospital. I've never seen it like that before. So many at the one time in hospital. We had the birth and very short life of Narrahan.

We got the impending death of John King. We got so many struggling in their marriages. We got so many grief stricken by rebellious children and at their wits end as to what to do with them.

[3 : 33] Then a bit of wider thing, we got the threat of economic recession. We got the growing fear of escalating war. And so it seems like perhaps, I can't speak with the authority of the Lord, but it seems like, at least we need to consider that, perhaps our theoretical knowledge and enjoyment of that notion of fullness in Christ, that we have everything we need to live well, is actually being severely tested by circumstances.

Will we live as those whose buckets are full in Christ, in the uncertainty of life, in the messiness of life, in at times the grief of life?

That takes us into Psalm 3 that we're going to be looking at this morning. And I just want to mention that Psalm 3 is actually an important progression from Psalm 1 and 2, and that's not just an Irish-ism.

There's an important progression in the themes of the Psalms. So Psalm 1 declares that good life is sourced in obedience to the Lord. Psalm 2 declares the absolute sovereignty of God to achieve His purpose in and through His people.

And Psalm 3 puts us sort of in between those two things, in the life of faith, as we see it expressed by King David, a life grounded in those two truths, that there is the good life, and that it is to be found living under the sovereignty of God.

[5 : 10] But it's a challenge. It's a challenge. We struggle through daily circumstances and experience of living in a world that's broken by sin, broken by rebellion.

And that's why we're going to jump into Psalm 3 now. Because at the very start, we see that David's bleak circumstances cause him to retreat or flee.

Now, some of this stuff, I'm assuming you've read the backstory in 2 Samuel 14 to 18. If you haven't, you're a guest here this morning, then you should read it sometime.

It'll really fill in the picture of Psalm 3. That's the awfulness behind verses 1 and 2. And to put it in this blunt form, the awfulness is a coup d'etat organized against King David by his very own son Absalom, whom he had treated with such kindness and generosity.

And coup d'etats are always, by definition, bloody affairs. The backstory, therefore, is an outrageous political drama where secretly, over a four-year period, Absalom worked to win the hearts of the nation of Israel to himself against his father, King David, through intrigue and deception.

[6 : 42] Essentially, he was saying to the people, look, come over and demise it. I will be a better king. And eventually, Absalom got the support and marched openly with a huge army and occupied Jerusalem, the center of the nation.

His intent? To depose and kill his father, King David. So it wasn't just an outrageous political drama, it was a really sad family drama.

Because of the monarchy, the only way Absalom could get the throne was actually to kill his father. Who was the current king? Murderous intent.

Now imagine the pain that David was feeling, King David was feeling. When he thought about what his son intended to do. When he thought about how his son had planned this for four or five or six years, in verse one, David's situation was getting worse by the day.

David knew that this had got a momentum and that trusted loyal people that were abandoning him by the day and signing up with Absalom.

[8 : 07] And caught unawares, if you read the back story, caught unawares and unprepared, David decided to retreat or flee from Jerusalem. Remember, Jerusalem was the seat of his throne, the seat of his power, the center of the kingdom, the very place where God had installed him.

And David decides to retreat or flee. Now a very important question in here, why did David flee or retreat? Well, I don't think it was because he feared Absalom.

Quite the opposite. I think it was because he loved Absalom. He loved Absalom and he could see the foolishness and the stupidity of his son.

Recognizing the son wasn't just dealing with him, but he was taking on God. But I think also David loved his people and he refused to subject them to a bloody savagery of a coup d'etat.

A bloody civil war. So David retreats. But that action was a loving action for the good of his son and for the good of his nation.

[9 : 23] But perhaps most hurtful of all is that last line in verse 2 was the rumors. Rumors are always hurtful, aren't they? Because they're everywhere, but you can't actually get a hold of them.

Rumors are devastating things. And the rumor circulating was that David's own sinful behavior had brought all this upon him. Perhaps it was a reference to the fact that David himself had replaced King Saul.

Or perhaps it was a reference to David's sin with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband. In other words, the rumor was saying, look, God has abandoned King David.

And now he's put his blessing on Absalom. So if you want to be on the right side of history, that's a modern frame, get with Absalom. And again, imagine David's feeling there.

Imagine what that would do with his inner landscape. Well, perhaps it's true. I thought that this, my sin had been, I had repented of it and had been dealt with by the Lord and the Lord had restored me.

[10 : 31] But maybe, maybe not. It would have caused enormous torment in David's mind as he considered this possibility. So friends, it's not hard to sense something of the agony and the distress and confusion that afflicted King David.

And most of us will recognize the thinking that quickly flows from that. And we look at our circumstances and we quickly move to thinking that, well, perhaps my circumstances reflect that I've forfeited any support or blessing or ongoing relationship with the Lord.

Now, at this point, we have to look at this strange little word in the text called Selah at the end of verse 2. Now, nobody really knows what it is in detail.

The best guess, I suppose, the best scholarly guess is that it's a musical notation which is something like pause or rest or interlude.

In other words, I think what it's really saying is, look, given what I've just said, stop and reflect.

Remember, this is poetry. So it's actually saying, stop and reflect what's just been said.

[11 : 53] Is the growing majority right in their assessment of King David? Should he be doing his theology by circumstance? Could it possibly be true that God has abandoned his servant, King David?

We'll pause and reflect. It's a huge concept with so much writing on it.

Next point I want to make if you've fallen through in the outline is that King David does retreat, but it's really important to know how he retreats. He doesn't retreat into himself or into his own fears, but he retreats into God's character and God's word if you look at verses 3 and 4.

But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. Isn't it true that so often when life gets tough we do retreat into ourselves, into our own inner thinking, into our scrambling for a new connection with our own resources to begin the process of self-salvation?

And sometimes that's expressed in victimhood where the best way to deal with things is to say that somebody else is to blame for my circumstance. Or perhaps it's withdrawal from relationships generally in life and engaging only with those people that we think are safe who will actually deliver some happiness and well-being to us.

[13 : 50] But there's nothing like that in David's response. Instead, David moves deeper into the heart of God.

Convinced that strength and refreshment and courage to thrive is not in changed circumstance, but in a fresh appreciation of God's beauty and God's covenant faithfulness and God's sufficiency for his every situation.

But you, O Lord, are a shield. He starts to rehearse what he knows about God. You, O Lord, are my bodyguard. That's the emphasis of that word there.

Picture a cluster of CIA men gathered around the president, literally protecting him from every angle. For any enemy out there who wants to harm him, that's the picture that David retreats into. God is the source of my value, security, and reputation. That's the force of my glory and the lifter of my head. See, King David isn't interested in popular esteem.

[15 : 10] He knows that he has no glory in himself. But since his position is a reflected glory, that is, as God's king, he has the reflected glory of God himself, the covenant God himself, as a servant of the Lord, then David knows that he can trust the Lord to act for his own glory.

God is his vindicator, in other words. David is confident that Yahweh, that is the name of the Lord God here used in this psalm, Yahweh, the personal name of God, Yahweh himself will fight for David.

Why? Because David is God's appointed king. And therefore, equally true that when his enemies take on King David, they should realize that they're taking on Yahweh.

And in the end, David knows that it's God's assessment of him that matters. And that physical circumstances are not an accurate guide to God's assessment of him.

And verse 4, he continues to rehearse what he knows. God's salvation purpose gives my apparent chaos order.

[16 : 46] I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me from his holy hill. Now again, in poetry terms, it's a little bit cryptic here. But the point I want to say is this, is that David's predicament does not drive him away from the Lord in a frenetic attempt at self-salvation, but drives him to the Lord in urgent prayer.

Why? Because the Lord is the one who has the answers. The Lord who knows everything can put order into the chaos of David's life. and his confidence is rewarded because the Lord answers him.

Confirming what? Well, we're not told here, so we assume that the answer is confirming David's analysis in verses 2 and 3, verses 3 and 4 rather.

confirming David's faith and trust in God alone.

And sensing that God answers him from his holy hill or another word would be Zion or both of those things are just words for Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is very significant because that's the place where God has taken up his dwelling among his people.

[18:07] That's the place where God rules both the nation of Israel and the whole world. So, the confirmation for David is that Absalom who has now occupied Jerusalem may think that his word is going to rule.

But David's confidence is no. The sovereign Lord is still enthroned and his word will be the final word heard and acted on from Jerusalem.

It will be God's power, God's voice that will be heard ultimately. And so, there's a really lovely confirmation and rehearsal here for David.

That is, King David's confidence is not that God is on his side, but that he as God's king is on God's side.

That's a hugely different statement. That he's part of God's much bigger salvation plan for his people. And again, with that thought we say, Selah.

[19:23] Just pause and reflect on that truth, on God's character and purpose as we struggle through the mess of life.

Flaying into God's character enables King David to press on in confident faith and trust verses 5 and 6.

Knowing God's character and rehearsing in his own mind and regaining a confident trust in that and seeing the beauty of his situation as being on God's side enables David, frees David to do what he needs to do.

Confident that the Lord will do what only he can do. And so in the short term David needs to get some rest. And so he lies down and he sleeps.

He sleeps sound. And you can hear him getting up the next morning saying, my goodness me, in spite of all that's been happening I slept so sound last night.

[20:55] That of itself is evidence that God is sustaining me. And what's more he's saying to his advisors I woke this morning strangely without fear. Even though my enemies are still there, even though my circumstances are still the same as where they were last night, I woke fresh this morning.

Again, why? Because God is on the job. God now, again, it's important to realize here that this is not the sleep of an arrogant fool who's lost touch with reality.

it's not the sleep of an arrogant man supremely confident in his own resources saying, well, let them do what they want, I'll sort them out in the morning.

It was the confident, trusting, faithful words, the actions of faith in God's control of the situation. Yes, David's enemies were all about him, but so was the Lord and the terms there are very much parallel.

His enemies were all about him and it's meant to bounce off what David's already become convinced of, that the Lord was all about him. And so, as we're told in the back story, David gets up and prepares himself for the battle that Absalom has left him no choice but to fight.

[22:34] And I think David goes into that battle and if you read the back story, you can get that from the back story. He goes into that battle, not actually sure how it's going to turn out, but what he is sure about is that whether he lives or dies, God's purpose for his people will be achieved.

But we're not done yet because David's still stepping through this process and he does press forward with new confidence but he's always longing for God's ultimate renewal of his rebellious people.

verses 7 and 8. Now again, we see in verse 7, David's faith perspective. He says, Arise, O Lord.

It's a call, as it were, a pleading with God to act. This is your show, God. I'm on your side. You're my commander in a sense.

over to you, in a sense. David's hope for that day and for every day in the future was God's action, God's activity.

[23:54] Now, this is a really important balance here because, see, we can look back and we say David had displayed incredible faith, incredible trust in response to his circumstances.

There's no question about that. He had done what was right in terms of responding to his circumstances but here's the point. David was never satisfied with his response. He was never satisfied with his actions. He never relies on them and he certainly never thinks that he can deliver what God's people really need because, you see, David himself was a man of sin. He knew that his faith today could crumble into foolishness tomorrow. That's been his history in the past. So, while he was seeking to do the right thing, he was never satisfied with it. He never relied on it and he never, ever for a moment thought he could deliver in this situation what God's foolish people in the height of rebellion really need. And so he says, Arise, O Lord. [24 : 57] And then he says, Save me, O my God. Now, it seems and looks immediately like it's self-interested but I don't think it is. Rather, he knows the fortunes of his people are tied to his.

He's their king and what comes to King David comes to his people. So, his ultimate concern as God's king is to see God's salvation purpose achieved through him for all God's foolish, rebellious people.

And David includes himself in that. He's capable of equal foolishness, equal stupidity and has been. See, at this point, I think David is preparing for a battle that's in front of him but he's longing for much, much more than just political reunification.

He knows what his people need. He knows what he needs and that is he knows that rebellion comes from the heart and therefore to properly address and fix rebellion then he and his people need new hearts, new desires, new attitudes if the cycle of foolish, rebellious, destructive, sinful actions is to be broken finally and fixed properly.

[26 : 36] So David's longing even as he prepares for an immediate battle he's longing for something much bigger, a bigger battle as it were to be fought to deliver God's people. And if you look then at verse 8, salvation belongs to the Lord, your blessing be on your people.

David knows that salvation and blessing are inseparably linked, two sides of one coin and that both are God's intention to deliver to his people through his appointed king.

So to know God's blessing, Psalm 1, is to be delivered from rebellion into new obedience and righteousness. That is the blessed life.

To know God's salvation requires new submission, new loyalty to God's sovereign king. That's Psalm 2 again. So in this situation, David understands his people.

He understands that they're craving for the life of blessing, the good life. And that's a proper craving. That's a real craving. But they're foolishly trying to find it in Absalom, which is what Absalom is foolishly promising God's people.

[28 : 03] That he will give them a better life, the life that David couldn't give them and didn't give them. So he feels for his people.

He sees their plight, one stupidity building on another. And King David longs for the Lord to act, claiming back his rightful honour, delivering true blessing for the truly good life for his people.

And friends, if you haven't already come with me to this point, you can hear the whisper of Jesus in that, can't you? You can hear the whisper of Jesus in that longing of David.

Jesus is the one who actually delivers on that which David can only long for and articulate.

See, like King David, Jesus experienced the awfulness of hatred, rebellion, disloyalty, and betrayal from his own family.

[29 : 14] John chapter 1, he came to those who were his own but they wouldn't receive him because they could get a better life apart from Jesus.

but like King David, the Lord Jesus continued to be committed to their best interests even while they were rejecting him.

and if you look at 2 Samuel 18 verse 32, there's a really poignant verse there right at the very end of this whole story when David is grieving for his son Absalom.

You could just feel the pathos. David said, Absalom, Absalom, my son, I wish that I could have died in your place. My friends, that's the gospel.

David was breathing the gospel without even knowing it. Would that I could have died in your place. You're the rebel, you're the fool, Absalom, but I, as God's king, would gladly have died for you if I could.

[30 : 37] And of course he couldn't because David's hands had blood on him. But the Lord Jesus did. what David could only long for and experience in part, Jesus did.

