

Affliction & Assurance

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to see you all here, both in person and on the live stream. We're glad you've joined us this morning. I want you to picture a scene thousands of years ago in the land of Israel.

As the sun begins to lower in the west, a door opens in the east wall of the city of Jerusalem. A group of court officials and families hurriedly push past. Out of the walled city of Jerusalem, down into the kindred valley. They carry only weapons they can hastily grab and a few belongings.

A sense of urgency, a sense of fear drive them. As they go down from the city to the bottom of the valley and back up.

Their great desire is to get up and away from the city. At their front, with his head bowed and his dusty face streaked with tears, King David walks barefoot in grief.

[1 : 05] The country itself cries out in lament. As the anointed king was forced to flee his throne because of the rebellion of his son Absalom. Who had stolen the hearts of many of his people and many of his warriors.

David had heard from a messenger that Absalom was coming with an army to pursue him and to take him. So the king led a remnant of his people out of the city, up to the Mount of Olives, through the mountains to the other side towards the River Jordan where there would be a moment of peace and rest.

Friends, this is the scene, this is the setting for Psalm 3. Which is our psalm for this morning as we continue in our series this fall in the book of Psalms.

As we look at them as songs of hope in uncertain times. This is the account in 2 Samuel 15 and 16 that brings us to the writing of Psalm 3.

So let's look at Psalm 3 together. If you're looking in your Bible, it's probably right about in the middle. Psalm 3, let's read this together. Psalm 3.

[2 : 24] 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 for him in God. Selah. 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. Selah. 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 around. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God.

For 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.

[3 : 29] Selah. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you this morning for this word. We thank you for the word of comfort and hope that it brings us.

I pray this morning that you would give us all ears to hear and hearts to receive the truth of your word. Lord, and by your spirit, Lord, may you strengthen us in faith as we know you, our rock and our redeemer, more through this song.

Be with me as I speak. I pray for your help that you would be glorified in all that I say and all that we do this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. As David writes this psalm, it breaks down into four very simple groupings, two verses each. Each one expressing a different aspect of David as he's processing his situation before the Lord.

The four aspects are this. We can look at them not only for what they meant for David, but what they mean for us today. Verses 1 and 2 talk about his affliction.

[4 : 42] Verses 3 and 4 talk about his affirmation of who God is. Verses 5 and 6 describe his actions in response to what he knows of God. And verses 7 and 8 are his assurance.

So let's look at this together. Verses 1 and 2. His affliction. For David, his foes were very real. His rebellious son was leading a group, an army of people to depose him and perhaps to kill him. Certainly to overthrow his kingship and to replace him. And if you look at verses 1 and 2, one of the things you notice is that the word that's repeated the most there is many. It wasn't just a few people. This is not a small palace coup. In fact, Absalom had gone away so that he might gather a large group of people to himself at Hebron. And then he was coming back to take over Jerusalem. And the picture here is one of like a rising tide. Imagine Absalom at the head of an army that keeps gathering people as they go. A picture of an encircling army.

[5 : 49] A picture of one that is closing in on him. Hemming him in on every side. An ever increasing menace. This is what David was facing.

And I wonder if you've ever felt that sense of panic and feeling trapped. Feeling pursued like that. Now, my guess is very few of us have been actually pursued by armies.

That's normal in these days and days. Maybe some of you have. But very few of us have not had actual armies pursuing us. But you know, if you've experienced it at all, you know it doesn't take an army.

All it takes is one person determined to ruin your life. One person who seeks your destruction. To create that sense of trapness.

And that sense of being pursued. That desire to flee. It might be a fellow student in your high school class who is out to alienate and isolate you from your friend group.

[6 : 57] A co-worker who is determined to undermine your work and your reputation. A family member or a former friend who has turned on you in bitterness and anger.

And you know, our foes may not even be people. I think as we think about our lives, we realize that the enemies of our soul are many. There are other kinds of pressures and trials that create the same sense of feeling of a rising tide.

That is surrounding us and encircling us and entrapping us. Certainly in this day of pandemic, I have felt this more than usual.

When my child gets a small cough or sneezes a couple of times, suddenly I have to think through all of this rising tide of questions.

Can I go to work tomorrow? Can he go to school tomorrow? What do I do if he's really sick? Do I go to the doctor? Do I have to get a COVID test? Do I have to quarantine for 14 days? What about, what about? And all these questions begin to surround me and create a panic.

[8 : 07] There are other kinds of circumstances that also make it difficult. Maybe some of you, I know some of you, have experienced loss in this time. You have lost a loved one, whether it be to COVID or just for other reasons.

And yet, that loss becomes a rising tide of grief because we are generally cut off from our normal means of grieving together.

We can't gather in large groups to have funerals. We can't get together to express this grief together. Even normal, fundamental means of comfort, like a hug or a cup of tea with a friend, are at least a lot more fraught.

Some of you, I think, have been surrounded by those. There are all sorts of other pressures and trials we face. Some of you live and work in places where the pressure for you to succeed and to perform and to get ahead is a never-ending pressure.

And every time you think, well, once I can get over this hump, it'll get better. It doesn't. It just seems like there's another mountain to climb. And the pressures continue to rise and encircle you.

[9 : 24] And some of you carry around the ongoing burden of broken relationships and scars from old sins, the whispers of past lives.

And all these things can be like a rising tide that surround us and make us feel trapped like David. And they bring us often to the place where the accusers of David at the very end of verse 2 bring us. For they whisper the doubt that rises up in our own hearts as well.

Well, can God really save me from this? Is there salvation in God in the midst of these trials and these problems?

I think this is the thing that is actually the one that breaks us. We can face all sorts of things. But when we start to doubt whether God can get us through, when we start to doubt that God will be

with us through it, that is when we truly are broken.

[10:35] One commentator writes this, In whatever form trouble comes, the hostility of others, circumstantial problems and tragedies, personal sorrows, its tendency is to drive us inward, to make us retire hurt.

It urges us to find some corner in which to moan over our lot, to marvel at how unfair life is, and to chew the fat of our own misery.

I find that true. How easy it is when it gets difficult to want to retreat, and to run away, and to complain.

But David does not do that. And he gives us a model of how we can respond differently as well.

Instead, he turns to God. In verses 3 and 4, Having talked about his afflictions, now David turns his gaze to the God that he knows.

And he says, But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.

Remember, David's enemies were real.

[11:45] It was a real army with spears and swords. And he says, You, O Lord, are a shield. Now, many of you know I'm a Lord of the Rings fan, and if you've ever seen The Hobbit, The Battle of Five Armies, it's a very, very poor excuse for the original book, which is wonderful.

But it's still a pretty decent movie. And one of the coolest things is, in the Battle of the Armies, when the dwarves show up to fight, they do this amazing thing, where they line up in order, and they pull their shields out, and they actually are double-ranked, and it becomes this wall of shields that is impenetrable.

The Roman phalanx taken to another level of defensiveness. And this is what David is saying God is for him. God surrounds him with this phalanx of shields, with this impenetrable wall, that no sword and no spear will ever be able to penetrate.

God, you are a shield. Not only does David say, you are a shield, but you are my glory and the lifter of my head.

What does that mean? Well, think about David. David sat in a place of all human glory. He was the king who sat on the throne of Israel and its greatest power and influence.

[13:13] And at this point, he was fleeing as a refugee. He had lost all of his human glory, and yet David knew where to look.

He looked to God and he said, God, even though I have lost all of that, I have the most important glory I can ever have. And that is that I am yours. I am with you.

And that being related to you, knowing that you are my God, gives me a glory that enables me to withstand the greatest trials. You are not only my glory, but you are the lifter of my head.

If you went back and you read 2 Samuel, and you have to go back a couple more chapters, go back to chapter 10, start there, and you read, what happened with Absalom was not completely without cause or without reason because of David's actions.

David had failed multiple times in his kingship, in his leadership, in his character, in his leading of his family and addressing evils within his family. And so Absalom's rebellion was not without some cause for shame for David.

[14:35] So not only was he fleeing because he was afraid of his life, but he was fleeing in shame. And he looks up to God, and God says, not shame, lift up your eyes, I am going to come, and I am going to restore your honor.

I am going to restore your glory. You are not a failure. You are not ashamed. But as David looks up, he knows that as God lifts his head up, he can be bright-faced and looking with hope and faith to God himself.

The other thing that David sees that maybe isn't quite as obvious in this verse is to which God is David looking. In my Bible, likely in your Bible, there's some indication in verse 3, but you, oh Lord, that word in my Bible has Lord in three smaller capitals, right?

And lots of times, Bible versions in the English try to distinguish this word because it's the word that God used when he revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush.

And it's the word that is used throughout the Old Testament for Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, the particular God of the people of Israel, the God who created the whole world, yes, but then who also enters into a covenant with his people.

[16:11] It is the same God who came to David in 2 Samuel 7 and said, I'm going to make you the father of a, or the first of a line.

I'm going to seat your descendants on the throne where you will reign forever. Your family will reign forever. This is a covenant-keeping God who enters into binding agreement with his people to be their God and they will be his people.

And as they enter into that covenant, there is great hope in that unbreakable bond. So as God looks up to this God, his shield, his glory, the lifter of his head, the covenant-keeping God, he cries out to him and he knows that the Lord will answer him.

And it's really beautiful to see that David, having fled the holy hill that he used to sit on his throne in, looks back and he knows, you know what?

I have lost that throne. I have lost my holy hill. I've lost my seat there. Absalom may sit there, but though I may have lost all those things, God is still sitting on his holy hill.

[17:28] He is still reigning over his people and over his nation. He is still reigning over my life. And so I will have hope. So when the rising tide of affliction surround us, David gives us a model.

We can turn and look to God and look to his character, to look to his nature, to see his faithfulness. And friends, this isn't just for David as an Old Testament king, but this is for all of his people throughout the years.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8 as the church looks to God in a similar way. What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No.

[18:38] In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

David, having named his affliction and having looked to his God, then responds in his actions in verses 5 and 6. you can look with me and he says, I lay down and slept.

Now, imagine this. Because David was not going to a hotel nor was he going to a fortified fortress. He was in the wilderness. He was by the bank of the Jordan River.

But he had no protection, no great army, no bulwarks were erected to protect him. And yet, because he knew the God that he had trusted in, that his God would be his shield, he lay down and slept even when he was being pursued by an army intent to kill him.

I don't know if you've ever experienced this. I had an experience this week. I had a kind of rough week in a number of areas and felt like the rising tide of troubles were a bit overwhelming for me.

[20:18] And on Thursday night, instead of working more on my sermon, hopefully it doesn't show too much, but instead of working more on my sermon, which had been my plan for the evening, feeling this rising tide and remembering this verse, I went to sleep early.

I never go to sleep early. I went to sleep and I rested and the Lord gave me rest. And he gave me confidence that he could take care of all the things that I was facing.

And then the days since he has taken care of some of them, not all of them, he hasn't made them all go away. But stopping and sleeping and trusting is one of the best ways that we can exhibit our faith in God and act it out.

And David shows us why we can do this. He gives us two things. He says, first, he did this because he was confident that the Lord would sustain him, that the Lord would continue the covenant that God had made in the past, that God would not abandon that and so that he knew that, look, the Lord will take care of me.

And so I can lie down and sleep entrusting these problems to God. not only could he say that he was confident that the Lord would sustain him, but it also expresses that he was not afraid of these rising armies.

[21:52] Verse 6 says, I will not be afraid of many thousands, even ten thousands. And David is not saying this with masculine bravado.

He's not saying it in denial of the reality of the army that was chasing him. He was saying it in the face that he was looking at that reality and knowing that it was true and he was saying, even though these things are true, I will not be afraid because God is my shield and my protection.

friends, I wonder how you're doing facing the rising tide in your life right now. Are you able to lie down and sleep and trust in the character and the work of God in your lives?

Now look, we need to be careful as we think about how to apply this because there are times when you can see it throughout Scripture and throughout church history where God does intervene miraculously, wonderfully and he changes our circumstances.

He neutralizes our enemies. He removes the trials. He takes away. He comforts our grief. There are many ways in which God can and has and continues to act in wonderful ways to provide for his people and we in faith ought to look for that and to expect that God will do this at times.

[23 : 19] to know that God delights to help us but we also need to know because Scripture tells us and because the history of the church tells us that God doesn't always deliver us.

He doesn't always remove us from the difficulties. He doesn't always lessen the rising tide. sometimes he allows suffering and trials to come into our lives but in the midst of that he is still with us.

He is still our shield and our protector and though he may not remove the storm outside he's able to create a place of peace within his protection and within his care where we can live with confidence and walk through the hardest things.

with faith and hope. This is what Paul refers to in Philippians chapter 4 when he talks about praying and bringing all of our requests and petitions to God praying that God himself would surround us, would keep our hearts in perfect peace and would guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Jesus. He will sustain us and he will comfort us and he will allow us to lie down and sleep even in the midst of the trials.

[24 : 53] And friends we know that this rest for our souls is a precursor to the rest that will come in our eternal salvation when God will defeat all of his enemies, when they will no longer be these powers that rise himself up against our souls.

But God will have defeated them and we will enter into an eternal Sabbath rest of joy and peace with God. So David having named his affliction, affirmed the character of God, responded in these actions then finishes his psalm with a statement of assurance Jesus.

He cries out, verse 7, he cries out, God will you act, will you now act on what all that I have said, will you destroy the enemies?

And the images here are powerful and sometimes we feel a little uncomfortable with them in our day and age. But let's think about what they mean. Verse 7 says, Arise oh Lord save me my God for you strike all my enemies on the cheek.

What does that mean? That is a slap in the face is what it means. It is a will you humiliate, will you bring low those who have raised themselves up against me?

[26 : 14] Will you show that you are greater than them in your deliverance? And then the second one, will you break the teeth of the wicked? It's an imagery that's taken from the wild animals.

Might be rephrased. Will you defang the enemy? Will you take the weapons out of their hands? Will you take away the very tools that they have to inflict harm?

Will you remove them? And in doing so will you remove the threat that they bring to me? Now David had very real enemies that had swords and spears.

And you will see if you continue reading in 2 Samuel that in fact God provides in lots of ways for David and eventually he is restored to his throne.

There are many times when we have very real enemies who want evil for us as well. But we also must remember Jesus' words in Matthew 10 28.

[27 : 23] Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both the soul and the body in hell.

Because friends part of the great hope of the Christian gospel is that this life is not all that there is but that there is an eternity that God is preparing us for.

And that in that our greatest enemies are not our difficult circumstances are not the people who oppose us are not the trials that we face. But the greatest danger is that our souls might be turned away from God.

That sin and death would reign. That the devil would have power over us and pull us away so that we might actually deny God.

These are our great enemies. enemies. And the great hope that we have, the great confidence that we have is that those powers have already been defeated.

[28 : 26] The cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that we know that one day they will be finally and fully eradicated.

died. This is the striking final statement that he says. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Salvation is not simply something that the Lord gives to us or something that he does for us but that it actually belongs to him.

That it is a part of who he is that he is a saving God and he overflows with this salvation to us in Jesus. Jesus. He is the covenant keeping God.

You see that? It's the same Lord again. He is the covenant keeping God who has made a new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ that by Jesus life and death and resurrection salvation is finally fully accomplished in him.

That he has taken sin that is ours on himself. That he has borne a death that we deserve. That he has risen from the dead to defeat those powers of sin and death.

[29 : 39] And so the early church can proclaim in Acts 4.12 There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Jesus has defeated death and so he is our shield. in this life. He is our glory and the lifter of our head.

He is the one who when we are joined with him by faith we are raised from death to life. We are raised from shame to acceptance. We are raised from abandonment to welcome and status as a member of his family.

He is our refuge in the rising tide. So when we feel overwhelmed, when we feel that our enemies will not stop, when our trials and our sufferings and our losses mount, when we feel encircled and trapped, we doubt if God is able to save us.

Friends, we have a place to look. We look at the cross of Jesus Christ. We look to the empty tomb and we know that God is our shield and our refuge.

[31 : 01] We cry out to this God for help and then we go to bed and sleep and rest in him and trust that he is able to sustain us and he is able to save us.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this word of comfort. We thank you for this word of encouragement. Lord, we thank you that you are a God who saves.

Lord, I pray this morning that, Lord, when we are facing the rising tide of trials, Lord, that we would be encouraged to look to you.

Lord, that we would be strengthened in our confidence that you are a God who is able to save and that you are a God who does save all who trust in you. Lord, I pray this morning for those who may be facing particular trials.

Lord, that you would minister to them this morning the truth of this word, that you are their shield and their glory. Lord, I pray for those who may be with us this morning who may be exploring Christianity.

[32 : 11] Lord, that they would see what kind of a God you are, who is our help in time of need. Lord, that they would be drawn to you and to put their faith in you this morning.

Lord, thank you for this word we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.