

To Save... or Not to Save???

Psalm 3

Do you believe God is working to save you? To give you His abundant life?
Or do you wonder if you have forfeited His good promises to you?

This is where the psalmist, King David, finds himself.

David knows the truth of Psalm 1 that he who delights himself in the Law of the Lord will be like a tree planted by streams of water, bearing fruit and finding success in all that he does.

He also knows that His LORD has anointed him as King in Jerusalem. He remembers that God has declared him to be “my son”. And he knows that God has given him the right to ask for the nations of the earth to be included in his realm, and to defeat any and all who would oppose him.

On the other hand, David is painfully aware that his sin screams against him that he no longer can claim these promises for himself. In fact, through the prophet Nathan, David is promised evil, even within his own house. (2 Samuel 12:11)

David has confessed his sin and has received God’s promise of forgiveness. (2 Samuel 12:13)

But David’s daily struggles will make him question whether God still intended to save him.

Has he lost God’s favor forever?

To save... or not to save...?

That is the question we all must face.

God has given me many promises of salvation in His Son Jesus Christ.

But my unfaithfulness to my Lord, and my inability to love my Savior fully, are like prosecutors in the courtroom telling me that there is no longer any salvation “for me” from God.

The contrast between Psalm 2 and Psalm 3 could not be greater. David, as God's chosen king, has been promised victory over every enemy. But in Psalm 3 David's enemies are surrounding him, and increasing in number and strength.

Read Psalm 3:1-2.

O LORD,
how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
2 many are saying of my soul,
there is no salvation for him in God.
Selah

David's situation is going from bad to worse. Things are not getting better for him. They are spiraling out of control. Things are getting so bad, that many people around him questioning whether God's favor remains upon him.

It is not so much that God is too weak to save. It is that God must have changed His mind about David.

"There is no salvation FOR HIM in God."

Everyone expects life to bring some trials. But when those trials become overwhelming, people begin to ask, "Is he under God's curse?"

And those who have no love for David are emboldened to say it more plainly, "God is no longer saving him."

What is more, David's committing adultery with Bathsheba and his orchestrating the murder of her husband, give credibility to the accusations. David has failed to delight in God's Word. He has taken the counsel of the wicked. Is he not therefore among those who are doomed to destruction? Has he now lost the favor of God?

Charles Spurgeon writes that this is the most terrible affliction of the human soul.

“If all the trials which come from heaven, all the temptations which ascend from hell, and all the crosses which arise from earth, could be mixed and pressed together, they would not make a trial so terrible as that which is contained in this verse. It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be lead to fear that there is no help for us in God.” Spurgeon 25

While the fear of losing God’s favor forever is the most terrible of afflictions. I would argue that it is one of the surest signs of the Spirit’s work in the heart of a believer. To feel your sin so terribly that you believe that you have forfeited any right to God’s rich blessings is not all bad.

It is a good sign that David’s heart is pricked by the accusations of his enemies. But this pricking is so terribly painful that the soul cannot endure it long. And if the soul cannot find relief, this pain will suck the life right out of the Christian.

“When the believer questions the power of God, or his interest in it, his joy gushes out as blood out of a broken vein.” William Gurnall (from Spurgeon 29)

What do you do when you are being crushed by trial after trial after trial, and the voice inside your head is saying, “God surely has abandoned me. And He is right to abandon me because of the evil of my sin against Him.”?

This is how David expresses himself to God in these first two verses.

But how did David get to this point?

It is helpful to know something of the backstory.

The psalmist wants Psalm 3 to be widely applied to God’s people in their various situations. That is why there are not many details given in the psalm itself.

But the psalmist or editor wants those who meditate upon this psalm to know the context. That is why he writes at the beginning:

ESV **Psalm 3:1** A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON.

It just so happens that the account of Absalom is given to us in detail in the book of 2 Samuel.

I would encourage you to go back and read at least chapters 13-18 on your own.

But I will fill you in on some of the details, hopefully so you can get a better feel for the predicament in which David finds himself.

Absalom is David's third son to his third wife - Maacah. She is the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur. Geshur was a kingdom to the East and South of Israel.

Absalom also has a sister who happens to be very beautiful.

Enter Amnon into the story.

Amnon is David's firstborn and rightful heir to David's throne.

Amnon and Absalom are half-brothers.

Amnon becomes infatuated with beauty Absalom's sister, named Tamar.

Because they are family, he cannot take her as a wife.

But Amnon has a "friend" named Jonadab.

Jonadab is the son of David's brother. Uncle Jonadab.

Jonadab conceives a plot whereby Amnon can get alone with Tamar.

And then Amnon rapes Tamar.

According to the customs of the time, Tamar must bear the shame of being violated (even though it was clearly not her fault). She moves in with her full brother, Absalom.

Absalom holds hatred in his heart towards his half-brother Amnon.

After two years of plotting, Absalom takes his revenge on Amnon.

He has his servants murder Amnon.

After being discovered that he is the one responsible, Absalom flees to the kingdom of his mother's dad – Geshur.

But Jonadab speaks up for Absalom saying that Amnon is only getting what he deserved for raping Tamar.

David is torn by the whole affair. He grieves the loss of Amnon. But he also mourns for the loss of Absalom.

Absalom remains in Geshur for three years.

It takes that long for David to find some comfort over the death of Amnon.

Enter Joab.

Joab is David's nephew by his sister. He is also the commander of David's army.

Joab was involved in the plot of David to murder Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.

Joab influences David to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem.

But once Absalom returns, it takes another two years before he is allowed into the king's presence.

Absalom now lives in Jerusalem, but spends two whole years in isolation from king David.

Finally, Absalom begins to reach out to Joab in order to resolve the situation.

In 2 Sam. 14, we read: So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

Absalom bows before king David.

The king kisses Absalom.

All seems to be in order.

But they are far from "in order". Absalom is plotting his own overthrow of David's kingdom.

He does this by winning the loyalty of the people.

He judges over their disputes in such a way that he appears a better ruler than David.

Absalom uses the power that he has in order to buy the loyalty of the people against David.

This goes on for four years.

2 Samuel 15:6 - So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Absalom then goes to king David and asks for permission to go to Hebron. Hebron is the place where David ruled as king (and yet not king) when King Saul still reigned.

Absalom lies to David, telling him that he wants to pay a vow that he has made to the LORD and to worship Him for bringing him back to Jerusalem. From Hebron, Absalom openly calls the people to follow him against David. And they do! (2 Samuel 15:10-13)

When David realizes that the uprising is at hand, and the followers of Absalom are marching on Jerusalem, he flees.

When you read the narrative in 2 Samuel you want to scream at David to stand and fight against Absalom. But 2 Samuel remains neutral, just giving the facts as they see them. (2 Samuel 15:14-17, 23)

One wonders if this is the same man who stood against Goliath as a boy.

David is abdicating his throne without a fight.

As he is leaving the city, the priest brings to David from the temple the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was the symbol of God's rule. The priest is obviously siding with David and wants him to have the symbol of authority.

Again, David surprises us by telling the priest to take the ark back into the city. What is fascinating is David's reason for doing so:

2 Samuel 15:25-26 ²⁵ Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city.

**If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD,
he will bring me back
and
let me see both it and his dwelling place.**

**²⁶ But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,'
behold, here I am,
let him do to me what seems good to him."**

If God decides to save me, He will bring me back into Jerusalem.
If God no longer has pleasure in me, then let God do what He wants with me.

Have you ever spoken to your own heart in this way?

David continues his departure from the city, weeping as he goes, and he passed right through the Mount of Olives on his way.

To add insult to injury, as David is departing, he is cursed by a man named Shimei, who had remained loyal to King Saul. Shimei throws stones at David and basically tells him that the LORD has ripped the kingdom away from David because David wrongfully ripped the kingdom away from Saul.

He accuses David of being a man of blood. Ironically, David is not guilty of this with King Saul, but he is guilty of this with Bathsheba's husband Uriah.

One of David's commanders (Abishai) wants to take the head off of Shimei, but David will not allow it.

He strangely speaks that it might actually be the LORD who has sent Shimei to curse him.

And so, David endures these curses, and the stones that Shimei throws at him. (2 Samuel 16:9-14)

And the king, and all the people who were with him, **arrived weary at the Jordan.**

This is the life situation out of which David writes Psalm 3...

I am convinced that he may have composed the psalm later. But the psalm expresses the inner thoughts and emotions of David at this moment.

It is not by accident that the writer of 2 Samuel records: **And there he refreshed himself.**

When Absalom arrives in Jerusalem, the people flock to him.

That first night while David is camped at the Jordan, it is a real possibility that Absalom would immediately send an army to crush David.

I hope this gives you a better sense of the chaos of David's predicament while he is camped that first night by the river Jordan.

His enemies are increasing.

He is faced with mocking that God's favor is no longer with him.

He fears that God has indeed abandoned him.

The beautiful promises of Psalms 1-2 no longer apply to him.

Verse 2 ends with "Selah". The best way to apply this term is to see it as a reminder to pause and reflect upon what has just been said.

David was facing the very real question "Is there salvation "for me" in God?"

Knowing the depth of David's sin and the hopeless situation in which he wrote this psalm is helpful to us because it helps us to not think that our situation is more terrible than David's.

The psalmist wants you to supply your situation to the psalm. I cannot tell you what it is in your heart that most accuses you. I know something of what things most accuse me. But you have to insert yourself into the feeling of the psalm.

The rest of the psalm tells us what David does with his fears and doubts.

3 But
 you, O LORD, are a shield about me,
 my glory,
 and
 the lifter of my head.

It is in the face of all his fears and doubts, that David chooses to continue believing that he will be saved by his covenant LORD.

He says directly to his LORD in prayer:

You are a shield about me. In other words, “I am still trusting in you to protect me.”

Whatever it may look like to the world, I am continuing to believe that you have not left me and remain my shield.

David’s faith goes beyond being protected.

He declares, “You are my glory”.

He can only mean that he believes that he will share in God’s glory. Instead of being left in this pitiful state by the Jordan River, he will experience the glory of sitting on God’s throne. The glory described in Psalm 2 will continue to be his.

And David’s faith goes even deeper. Instead of David raising up his own head and pulling himself up out of the mess that he has made, he believes that the LORD will “lift his head.”

David does not have the strength to lift his own head. But he continues to believe that God will be the lifter of his head.

I love this refusal of David to let go of his faith in the promises of God.

In the first three verses, David gives us a model of how to pray to God when we are in the pit.

In verse 4, David gives us a model of how to think about our prayer.

4 I cried aloud to the LORD,
 and he answered me
 from his holy hill.

Selah

Strangely, David speaks here as if he is looking back on the experience years later. I am not sure that he is. The end of the psalm still has David crying out to the LORD to save him.

I think it is a poetic way of speaking of David’s confidence in God’s faithfulness to deliver him, and the means by which that deliverance will occur.

God answers from a place. Where is that place?

His holy hill.

The reference is to the Temple, and in particular, the Holy of Holies and the Mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant. This is the location of God's throne upon the earth.

Remember how David sent the ark back into the Temple. Had he kept the ark, he might have rallied people to himself and prevented Absalom from taking the city. People had a belief that whoever possessed the ark would win in battle.

But David was not looking to establish a human reign by his own human strength. He would trust in the strength of the LORD to bring him back to Jerusalem. And that deliverance would flow from the mercy seat in the holy of holies.

Our holy hill is the cross on which Jesus hung and paid for all our sins. Take away that cross and we no longer have any hope of deliverance. "Jesus keep me near the cross. There a precious fountain."

Again, we are brought to a pause – Selah.

David has won the victory.

He has continued to believe.

And so, David has continued to cry out to the LORD.

And in God's mercy, from His throne of mercy, he believes that his prayer has been heard.

It was right to pause and reflect upon the greatness of the despair.

Now, it is also right to pause and reflect upon the certainty of mercy.

What we have in vv. 5-8 is a contrast between what David does and what God does.

David does nothing.

God does everything.

⁵ I lay down and slept;
I woke again,

for the LORD sustained me.

He is at the Jordan River. And there is a real possibility that the army of Absalom will come upon him and destroy him.

In the face of this looming threat, what does he do?

He goes to sleep.

This is more than a statement that he was calm enough to get some sleep.

It is a statement as to who is doing the fighting.

It is not David who is strong enough to fight against his foes.

It is God alone who is his deliverer.

David does nothing but go to sleep.

What we see here is a very different picture of David than when he stood against Goliath.

I must admit that I am much more comfortable with the David who faces Goliath than the David I find here.

When he faced Goliath, he went out and met his enemy face to face. He was doing so in the strength of the LORD. But David was doing the brave and courageous fighting.

Here, David needs the LORD to do the fighting. There are many reasons for this, but one is that David needs to know that it is the LORD who is fighting for him, and not just his own human strength.

Are you resting in the LORD to deliver you?

Or are you trusting in your own strength?

It is in the lowest points of our life that we must rely upon God's grace alone to save us.

In verse 6, we see another way in which faith expresses itself – the overcoming of fear.

I believe verse 6 is David talking to himself.

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

David is determined to not allow fear to consume him.

He has many reasons to fear, thousands of reasons.

They are coming at him from all sides.

This is not so much a statement of the physical location of his foes.

It is a statement of David's perception that his enemies are too numerous, and attacking from too many directions at once, for him to be able to fight them off.

I am a bee keeper.

For the most part, I get along well with my bees. I try to take care of them. And they provide me with honey. But they do not like it when I disturb the queen. I try not to do this very often. But I vividly remember one hot day several years ago opening up the hive for inspection. I had on protective gear, but it obviously had some chinks in the armor. The bees are doing their normal thing of swarming around my head. They are getting more and more angry the longer I am disturbing their home.

If you have never experienced this it is quite surreal to have so many bees flying around you. All you can do is hope that the protective gear works. Well, all of a sudden, the bees found a place on my arm that was not well protected. I know that bees do not talk as we do, but they certainly communicated to one another at that moment. Because it was like they all concentrated their firepower on that one spot. In a split second, I had multiple stings in that one place.

It did not take me long to spring into action. When you have multiple enemies coming at you from directions you cannot even see. There is only one thing to do: Run! I ran as fast and as far as I could until the bees finally gave up the chase.

I know, fear certainly got the best of me in that moment.

But after I got calmed down, I had a decision to make.

Would I leave the hive with its frames open or would I go back and finish the job and close things back up?

I did the best that I could to close up the weak portion of my protective gear. And then I went back over to the hive and quickly finished the job.

Was I still afraid? Of course.

Did I only do what I absolutely had to do to close up the hive? Absolutely.

David is not saying that he is impervious to fear.

God is the only being in the Universe who is impervious to fear.

He is the One who sits in heaven and laughs.

Our foes are not a laughing matter to us. But our trust in God drives us to not be consumed by our fears.

We are continually striving to trust in God and not ourselves.

We are called by David to not live our lives such that fear has dominion over us.

The certainty of the love of God towards us drives out our slavery to fear.

When David is fleeing Jerusalem, he has many enemies, and fears.

There is the army of Absalom that threatens him.

On his way out of town, a man loyal to king Saul accuses David of wrongly usurping the throne. And now, he is getting what he deserves.

David's own commander, Joab, thinks that David is acting in a cowardly manner, acting out of weakness.

It would be hard to have your friends think you were being a coward - being weak.

David refuses to give into his fears.

He is willing to risk looking cowardly and weak.

He is placing his trust in the LORD and refuses to be driven by fear.

I used to think that David's faith after Bathsheba was weaker than his faith before Bathsheba. I no longer think this way.

David's faith may have looked on the outside as weakness, but Psalm 3 gives us a picture of what was happening on the inside. And it is what is happening on the inside that matters to the LORD.

David, by the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit within him displays a faith to which we all should seek to emulate.

Again, the psalmist wants you to insert your fears into the psalm. Your life situation is very different from David's. But is it worse than David's? If David can choose to live by faith in God's mercy, you can as well.

What are the fears that constantly surround you?

Are you resting in God to deliver you in the midst of those fears?

You cannot magically eliminate the fear itself.

But you can cast all your anxieties upon the LORD knowing that he cares for you. Jesus has died for you on the cross to remove the curse of God that stood against you.

Through faith in Christ, you have peace with God. He is no longer your enemy. And if God is for you, who can stand against you.

It is important to see that David's commitment to "not fear" occurs before the cause of fear is removed.

We usually want God to remove the cause of fear first.

The first battle is the battle to believe.

This is the most important battle.

But it is not wrong to ask God to remove the cause of fear.

This is what David does in verse 7.

7 Arise,
 O LORD!
 Save me,
 O my God!
 For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
 you break the teeth of the wicked.

“There is no salvation for him in God” has been replaced with “Arise, O LORD... save me, O my God!”

David has determined in his heart that he will continue trusting in his covenant LORD, even in the face of all the accusations to his soul.

David continues to trust in the promises of Psalm 2.

David is God’s anointed king. God has adopted him as His son.

God has promised to give to him as an inheritance all the nations.

But how can David continue to trust in these promises if he has failed to be the man of Psalm 1?

Because David knows that he is not the one upon whom the promises depend.

The Anointed King to whom the promises are made is still to come.

It is that King who is David’s Lord.

We know him to be the LORD Jesus Christ.

And David’s hope that the God would defeat his enemies is wrapped up in his faith that God would defeat all the enemies of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, Psalm 3 beautifully parallels the experience of Jesus Christ.

Did not his enemies rise up against him?

Did they not mock him saying, “If he is the chosen One, then let him save himself.”?

Jesus had no sin of his own for which to feel guilty.

But on the cross, he did feel the weight of our sin upon His soul.

And He most certainly felt the disruption of His fellowship with God, such that He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!!!”

And it was on the cross that Jesus continued to entrust Himself to the LORD to save him, to lift up his head.

Jesus did not sleep, by the Jordan River. But is it not true that laid down his life and slept in the grave and then woke again to new life only because the LORD sustained him?

Is it not true that Jesus did not fear his enemies or even death itself?

And is it not true that the LORD has and will strike all the enemies of Christ on the cheek and break the teeth of the wicked?

And because of all that Christ has done in his life and death, is it not true that Salvation belongs to the LORD and upon us because of Him.?

This entire psalm points us to Jesus Christ.

This is important to see, because we do not hope that God will directly destroy our personal enemies.

We are not at the center of all our prayers of deliverance.

Christ is the One whom God sets on the throne.

Our hope of God's saving us from our enemies is that we are included in God's defeat of all of Christ's enemies.

You can have confidence that God will arise and deliver you because you have faith in Jesus Christ.

God is conquering all of Christ's enemies.

And because you are in Christ, he is also conquering your enemies.

Walk away from Christ, and you can have no confidence that God will destroy your enemies.

Abide in Christ through faith alone, and you can have every confidence.

If v. 7 speaks of the confidence of the King, God's Anointed One, v. 8 makes clear that the king's victory will result in salvation and blessing for all of God's people.

⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;
 your blessing be on your people!

Selah

David understands that the deliverance of God's anointed king is not only for the king.

And we too should understand that the deliverance of God is not only for us as individuals.

God's purpose is to bless His people, all His people.

God is the One who will accomplish this salvation.
David says that it “belongs to the LORD”.

But it is the people of God who will receive the benefit of the King’s victory over his enemies.

Jesus’ victory is not merely for Himself, it is for all who place their hope in Him.

But let’s be clear that this deliverance is not a victory that will work out perfectly in this life.

Do not think that if you trust in Christ everything will work out the way that you want.

David never experienced the fullness of his deliverance “in his lifetime”.

God would be faithful to bring David back to Jerusalem.

Absalom’s reign would be brief.

But David died, not having received the fullness of the promises. His final deliverance awaits the resurrection. He will only enjoy the fullness of blessing along with us, and all believers of every age.

David’s confidence is not in partial and momentary victories.

His confidence is in full and permanent overcoming of every foe.

Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?

To save or not to save?

If you are trusting in Christ, then the answer is clear: to save!

Your enemies cannot ultimately win against you.

Even while those enemies are beating you down and mocking you and telling you that there is no salvation in the LORD, you can continue trusting in His salvation.

We are to live our lives by faith.

“How strangely the Christian’s blessings come to him. His strength comes out of weakness, his fulness out of emptiness, his joy out of sorrow, his life out of death.”
Plumer 62.