

September 29, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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CONFIDENCE IN THE FACE OF FEAR Psalm 3

Some of our people have had to endure the agony of divorce. It is always such a messy thing with accusations being leveled both ways. Generally, divorce results in a relationship that once thrived being shattered forever, despite what they say in Hollywood.

Some of our people go to work every day to a situation too similar to stepping into a pit of cobras. As long as you keep the cobra charmed, work is tolerable. The problem is that you never know for sure when the cobra is going to have a bad day. You know that person, or those particular people, despise you. You have tried to be kind and tolerant. But, they are not about to like you. How do you deal with that kind of stress every day?

Others have endured, or still endure, the pain of a child who has rebelled against you and, more accurately, against your position of authority in their life. You love the child, but the child acts tolerant of you at best, and clearly doesn't care for your company. This is especially painful when the rebellion is carried on into adulthood. You long for good communication and a favorable relationship. But it isn't about to happen as far as the rebel is concerned. How do you deal with the stress that comes from that set of circumstances?

David is our friend. He shows us how to handle the stress. He endured this kind of pain on a level we cannot even imagine. I really cannot comprehend the agony and sorrow David would have endured as his beloved son Absalom rebelled against him, schemed to kill his brothers, shrewdly won over the majority of the citizens, and then with careful planning came after Dad to remove him from the throne – yeah to kill him.

How did David respond? How do we deal with that kind of stress? What do you do when someone you love becomes your enemy? Do you continue to love your enemy, as Jesus commands us to do? Do we pray for those who spitefully use us as Jesus also commanded? Or do we pray, not for the agitator's welfare, but that God would *strike all my enemies on the cheek; break the teeth of the wicked (v.7)?*

The answer is, "Yes." We deal with the stress of everyday enemies by praying that God would work in their hearts so that they would be our friends. We also pray for God to give us sustaining grace so that we can endure when they refuse to be our friends. But, it is also right to pray that God will level any vengeance that He in His infinite wisdom deems fitting for an enemy of His servants. The key is in what **we** do. We pray for grace so that we can rest in God's will. We submit any actions against the enemy to God's will also, rather than cooking up vengeful schemes ourselves.

A Discouraging Circumstance (vv.1-2).

The situation behind this psalm is fairly well identified by the title of the psalm. *A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON*. Obviously, this is the heart of David while he was fleeing from his rebellious son. Make no mistake that even though Absalom was in rebellion against his father, David loved his son. In fact, David might have loved him to a fault which limited his rebuke against rebellion. We know that David blessed Absalom even when he knew that he was in rebellion (2 Samuel 13:25). David longed for his son when he was absent (2 Samuel 13:39). David brought him home and gave him freedom when he shouldn't have (2 Samuel 14:33). And in the end when it came down to Absalom being destroyed or David being destroyed, David begged his army to "deal gently with the young man" (2 Samuel 18:5). Finally, David wept bitterly when Absalom was killed (2 Samuel 19:4).

That David loved Absalom is not in question. But despite David's love for Absalom, the boy rebelled against God-ordained authority, that is his father and his king. Here is an important reminder that people who are rebelling against God will strike out at their God-ordained authorities.

Not only did his beloved rebel against him, but all of David's foes increased. *O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me (v.1).* It is pictured as a growing conspiracy. *And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing. And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom" (2 Samuel 15:12b-13).* Some of David's generals, his trusted guards, his closest counselors had all forsaken him and chosen to side with his enemy against him.

Why would God allow such trouble for His chosen servant? Was God being unfair? That would seem to be an impossible conclusion in light of the story about Jesus sounding quite similar. Psalm 22 is considered to be a poem about the suffering Messiah, Jesus. See if it sounds familiar. *Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet (Psalm 22:11-16).*

Enemies can be downright nasty. That was especially true in David's case. Consider what he said about the painful accusations. *Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God (v.2).* God's enemies rebuked God's servant with words that slandered God. For example, Shemei confronted David on the way out of town and "cursed continually" (2 Samuel 16:5). In time, David was told that Ahithophel, one of his most trusted counselors, was among the conspirators (2 Samuel 15:31).

Ahithophel recommended that Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house" (2 Samuel 16:21). What in the world kind of advice was that? Why did he say that? Ahithophel had an axe to grind with David. He was Bathsheba's grandfather. Bathsheba's father was Eliam who was the son of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 23:34). Ahithophel's advice was a graphic way of bringing up the memory of David's sin (especially adultery). In the enemies' accusations there were plenty of reminders, living proof of David's unwise choices. But still David was the LORD's servant.

Even former friends must have wondered if God had not forsaken David. People who had been his friends might have concluded that David's past was catching up with him and God was done with him. His worst enemies would use these words as a taunt: *There is no salvation for him in God.* That was to say that God is not faithful to deliver. This is one of our enemy Satan's primary slanders against God toward us. He asks you, "Why are you praying?" He accuses, "God isn't going to do anything."

It is helpful for us to stop to consider how Jesus handled such slander. Hear the rabble at the foot of the cross saying, *"He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43).* *And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (Luke 23:35-37).*

Jesus' response was consistent throughout His trial. *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).* That is our standard. That must be our goal. It will be revealed in our prayer in the face of trouble.

The Prayer of Confidence (vv.3,4).

When you pray, remember who God is. *But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head (v.3).* Remember with David that the LORD is a shield. Notice that the little word "but" points out the great contrast. The enemies grow in number and are ruthless in their accusations and slander. But our loving Heavenly Father is a shield around us. Our problem is that we keep trying to run in front of the shield.

More than being our shield, the LORD is also my glory. Therefore, we pray with confidence that the LORD would vindicate and restore His servant's glory or honor. He can have confidence that despite the attacks, the LORD would again exalt His servant.

And as we pray, it is good to remember that God hears and answers. *I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his*

holy hill (v.4). When we are serious about praying, we cry out to the LORD. Confidence that the LORD will hear is motivation to cry aloud to Him. This isn't a trite meaningless prayer like we pray before we eat or go to bed. This is the beautiful, most wonderful picture of the troubled soul emptied of self, flat on his face before God begging for deliverance. Flat on your face in prayer is a blessed condition!

In that position, know that the LORD will answer. Even before the LORD answers, we can express the result in past tense. The Lord will answer our prayers with a "Yes," or a "Later," or "No." But He will answer.

The Expression of Confidence (vv.5,6).

In the face of relentless enemies, we cry out to God with confidence. Having done that, we ought to be able to rest in God's care. David confessed that despite increasing enemies, *I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me (v.5)*. This is the great promise that the LORD gives His beloved sleep. In another psalm we read, *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 (Psalm 127:2)*.

We can rest securely in the LORD's care because we know that the LORD holds on to His beloved. To *sustain* is to hold on to or to grasp. The word describes the offerer of the sacrifice placing his hands on the sacrifice as a demonstration of identification. In the same way, the Lord identifies with His stressed-out people. We should love to read the contrast in God's actions. *For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous (Psalm 37:17)*. *Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand (Psalm 37:24)*.

And while we rest in the LORD's care, we refuse to fear people. *I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around (v.6)*. David was familiar with fearlessness against great odds. He showed confidence in God and no fear when he faced a lion or bear. He showed no fear when he faced down Goliath. *Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel,*

whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45). We can have confidence in God and show the same kind of fearlessness when we need to face our fears or the people who cause fear.

Such fearlessness is possible because we fear God. To fear God is to possess an awesome respect for the person, character, and work of God. Our respect for God tempers our attitude and is obvious in our words, actions, responses.

The Confident Expectation (vv.7-8).

David's prayer in the face of stress is a request based on certainty. *Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked (v.7)*. Why ask for salvation if you doubt the source? There is a great literalness of this request. See God getting up and going to work on David's behalf. Do we fully expect God Himself to rise up in our behalf against the enemy?

Okay, but is it right to ask for vengeance against our enemy like David did? Does Jesus allow that? It is true that we should pray for the benefit of our enemies based on what Jesus said: *"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44)*. That means that we should pray that God will save them. We should even pray that God will work in and through them to bring peace to the conflict.

But always we pray for God's will to be done. When the disciples asked Jesus for instruction about how to pray, He said, *"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'" (Matthew 6:9-10)*. We are to pray the same way whether we are thinking about enemies or not. Pray for God's will to be done.

What is God's will about sin, wickedness, evil? He desires its destruction. What is God's will regarding the safety and well being of His servants? He desires to protect us like the apple of His eye. What is God's will for those who make themselves enemies of God's servants? God desires the sinner's regeneration first, but eternal judgment where it is absent.

The God to whom David prayed for protection and deliverance, made this promise: *"Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time*

when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.” For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free (Deuteronomy 32:35-36).

So how did it all turn out? Did God answer David’s prayer? We would assume so since, *salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people (v.8)!* We pray to the LORD because He saves. It is certainly true that eternal salvation, forgiveness of sins is the LORD’s gift to give. But the context of this passage is about literal, actual deliverance from real enemies, real people. Many of the psalms are set in this kind of a context. If you have ever been faced with the adversity of a human enemy, you should rejoice to know that deliverance from that enemy is God’s gift to give.

Now let’s consider how God gave the gift of deliverance to David in accordance with David’s prayer. Ahithophel committed suicide. *When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried in the tomb of his father (2 Samuel 17:23).* The wording seems like such a simple and succinct verdict.

When Ahithophel saw that Absalom chose to follow Hushai’s advice, it was clear to him that the game was up. He knew that Absalom would be defeated. Did Ahithophel realize that God was against him at this point? His case was like Haman’s situation. Haman was riding high and was quite sure he was gaining the victory over his enemy and God’s servant Mordicai. But when God turned the tables and began to let Haman harvest what he had sown, everyone suddenly knew the party was over.

What about Absalom—the key rebel. While he was riding on a donkey, passing under an oak tree, his head caught firmly in the branches which made him a sitting duck for Joab’s spears (2 Samuel 18:9). What is the chance of that happening? What people would call a freak accident was actually the miracle of God’s vengeance.

Shimei who had cursed David when he was fleeing had to eat his words. He was humiliated before David in the presence of friends and family who had witnessed his rebellion against God-ordained authority. *And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he*

was about to cross the Jordan, and said to the king, “Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. Do not let the king take it to heart” (2 Samuel 19:18b-20a).

Ultimately, God killed Shimei for his continued rebellion against God-ordained authority. Solomon required him to swear an oath that he would not leave town (1 Kings 2:42). Three years later Shimei broke his promise and sealed his death sentence (1 Kings 2:44). The beauty of it all is that David did not personally level vengeance on any of these enemies. David put the matter of deliverance and vengeance into God’s hands and God took care of it.

The LORD blesses His people. God has promised to bless us with blessings both material and spiritual. But in the face of stress, do we remember the promise? When the pressure is on, we need to remember this blessing: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).* Spiritual maturity through trials is one of God’s great blessings to us.