

## IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT SEEMS

## Psalm 3

Psalm 3 introduces a series of firsts in the book of Psalms. It is the first psalm with a superscription. In most of your Bibles, you will find these words above verse 1: A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM HIS SON ABSALOM. This heading presents several more firsts. This is the first psalm that is called a psalm. It is the first psalm that identifies its author. In this case, it is David. And this is the first psalm that states the occasion of its composition. David wrote it when he fled from his son Absalom. Likewise, Psalm 3 is the first psalm that records the enigmatic word, *Selah*. It occurs three times in this psalm – following verses 2, 4, and 8 – and 71 times in the Psalms. It is generally agreed that *SELAH* is a musical notation. But no one knows for sure what it indicates. It may be a call to sing or play louder. Or it may be a call to stop playing and to think about the meaning of the words. The tone, content, and background of this psalm argue for the later, as there is much here to meditate on.

Psalm 3 is also the first of a category of psalms called “THE SONGS OF LAMENT,” in which the psalmist sings the blues, lifting the sorrows of his heart and complaints about life to God in prayer. This is what David does in this psalm. He laments, “*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.*” Some object to this psalm being categorized as a song of lament, because David’s complaint ends in verse 2. The remaining six verses reflect confident trust, not personal sorrow. But this shift of mood does not change the nature of the psalm. It directly addresses it. David’s change of attitude does not deny the bad situation he found himself in. It declares that it was not as bad as it seemed. That is the message of this psalm: Things are never as bad as they seem to be, when the Lord is on your side. Psalm 3 teaches us how to pray with confidence that things will get better when they seem to be as bad as they can get.

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## I. BRING YOUR *COMPLAINTS* TO THE LORD.

The historical background of this psalm is recorded in 2 Samuel 13-18. David’s son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. In defense of his sister’s honor, Absalom killed Amnon and started an insurrection against his father David. Because of Absalom’s beauty, charisma, and shrewdness, many people forsook David and joined the revolt. David finally had no choice but to flee Jerusalem. It was during this exile that David wrote Psalm 3.

The sweet singer of Israel had the blues. The king whose reign led to international peace was on the run from his own people, who were led by his own son. The man after God’s own heart was at a place where it seems that God has turned his back on him. So David complains. You would too. But to whom would you complain? In verses 1-2, David brought his complaints to the Lord. The heart of this complaint is found in the word *many*, which occurs three times in these two verses.

David's troubles were real, growing, and insurmountable. But he prayed and told the Lord what his enemies were doing and saying.

A. HE TOLD THE LORD WHAT HIS ENEMIES WERE *DOING*.

Verse 1a says, "*O Lord, how many are my foes!*" It was enough that David's beloved son became his declared enemy. But many of David's people also turned against him and joined this Absalom's rebellion. People David knew, loved, and trusted were now determined to end his reign and his life. Everywhere he looked, friends became foes. And David found himself surrounded by enemies. This can happen to you. Life can bring you to a tight place where you are surrounded by evil intentions. People you know, trust, and love can work to hurt you rather than help you. Verse 1b says, "*Many are rising against me.*" This is military language. David was outnumbered. And the opposition was growing. More and more people were switching allegiances and taking a stand against David. David responded by telling the Lord what his enemies were doing.

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B. HE TOLD THE LORD WHAT HIS ENEMIES WERE *SAYING*.

David's heart was broken by what his enemies were doing to him. But his broken heart was stepped on by what his enemies were saying about him. In verse 2, David complains, "*Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God.*" I have seen people go through things that were so bad that I thought, only God can save them. But I have never seen someone go through something that was so bad that I thought that not even God could save that person. But this was the word on the street about David's situation. CHARLES SPURGEON said it well: "It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God."

*"Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God."*

This reference to David's *soul* indicates that this personal struggle, family dispute, and civil war were really a spiritual warfare. And the words "*for him*" indicate that God – who is more than able to help, rescue, and deliver – was not willing to do so for David. David's circumstances led onlookers to conclude that God had turned his back on David. This was a logical conclusion. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah. When he repented, God forgave him. But David still had to face the consequences for his sin. In 2 Samuel 12:11, the Lord said, "*Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house.*" This ominous promise came to pass through Absalom's insurrection against David. And it caused people to conclude the Lord had forsaken David. There is an important warning here: The Lord will forgive our sins. But he may not remove the consequences.

A little boy continuously rebelled against his parents. To teach him a lesson, his father told him he would drive a nail into the door of the barn every time he disobeyed. After seeing the nails add up on that door, the son repented of his rebellion. To demonstrate his forgiveness, the father removed the nails from the door. Later, the son returned again with tears in his

eyes. The Father asked what was wrong. The son answered, "The nails are removed. But the holes remain."

So it is with sin. When the sin is forgiven, the consequences may remain. Psalm 3 warns us that the scars of our sins may remain after the wound has been healed. It also warns us not to commit spiritual malpractice by misdiagnosing other people's troubles. Those who witnessed David's situation concluded there was no salvation for him in God. But the doctor to whom they referred was David's personal physician. Rather than drawing false conclusions from what people were doing and saying, David brought his complaint to the Lord. So should you. Be like Elijah Hoffman and say to your soul...

I MUST TELL JESUS, ALL OF MY TROUBLES.  
I CANNOT BEAR THESE BURDENS ALONE  
IN MY DISTRESS, HE KINDLY WILL HELP ME  
HE EVER LOVES AND CARES FOR HIS OWN.

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## II. PLACE YOUR *CONFIDENCE* IN THE LORD.

In the opening verses of this prayer, David complains about what his enemies are doing to him and saying about him. In verses 3-6, David shifts his focus to the Lord. This is the only sure way to face the overwhelming battles of life. JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE comments: "When a believer gazes too long at his enemies, the force arrayed against him seems to grow in size until it appears to be overwhelming. But when he turns his thoughts to God, God is seen in his true, great stature, and the enemies shrink to manageable proportions." This is what David does. He does not respond to the schemes, deeds, and threats of his enemies by getting emotional. He gets theological! He reminds himself who his God is and what his God had done for him. This is what you should do.

### A. PLACE YOUR CONFIDENCE IN WHO THE LORD IS.

Many people had concluded that the Lord had forsaken David. David responds defiantly in verse 3: "*But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.*" Notice the personal terms with which David describes God: *A shield about me. My glory. The lifter of my head.* These are not the words of one who is forsaken by God. They are the testimony of one who has a personal relationship with the Lord. Is this your testimony?

THE LORD IS MY SHIELD. Abraham defeated the enemies of Sodom and Gomorrah. But he did not take any of the spoils of war, lest the heathens accuse him of robbing them to get rich. But in Genesis 15:1 God says, "*Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.*" This is the confidence of those who trust in the Lord. He is a shield that protects us in times of battle. Psalm 84:11 says, "*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.*" A *shield* is a round military instrument a

warrior would hold in one hand in battle to deflect the arrows, swords, and spears of the enemy as he fought with the other hand. But a shield could only provide limited protection. To shield yourself on one side was to leave the other side unprotected. But the one who trusts need not worry about that danger. The Lord is a shield about me. He covers every side. We have sovereign, complete, and unfailing protection in God. Psalm 115:9-11 says, *“O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.”*

THE LORD IS MY GLORY. The word used here for *glory* is the word that typically refers to the glory of God. When used in reference to humans, it speaks of dignity and honor. David is saying here that his sense of self-identity and self-worth is rooted in God. Being banished from his throne and exiled from his city by his own son dishonored David. Yet David declares that his honor was not in his throne, city, subjects, armies, or riches. The Lord is my glory. Literally, David says, “I am somebody – not because I am a king – but because I belong to the one who is the true King of heaven and earth. The Lord is my glory.” Psalm 4:2-3 says, *“O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.”*

THE LORD IS THE LIFTER OF MY HEAD. 2 Samuel 15:30 reports that David fled to the Mount of Olives weeping and barefoot, with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads. The grief, pain, and shame David experienced caused him to cover his head. There was nothing he could do to lift his head in victory. But the Lord was the lifter of his head. In the ancient world, subjects would bow before a monarch as he judged their case. If the monarch sided against the subject, he would put his foot on their neck, to express his condemnation. But if the monarch sided with the subject, he would vindicate him by lifting his head up. David says, “I have presented my case to the Lord. And I am confident that when he hears my case, he will lift up my head.” That’s what God will do for those who trust in him. He will lift up your head.

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#### B. PLACE YOUR CONFIDENCE IN WHAT THE LORD HAD DONE.

What gave David such confidence that the Lord was his shield, glory, and head-lifter? David based his confidence on what the Lord had already done for him. David had a faith file to remind himself of the faithfulness of God in his life. This faith file reminded David of three things the Lord had done for him.

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER. Verse 4 says, *“I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill.”* This is a powerful testimony of God’s gracious answer to believing prayer. David prayed to the Lord. Notice how he prayed: *“I cried aloud to the Lord.”* This expresses the fervency of David’s prayer. There is a time for quiet, contemplative prayer. And there is a time to cry out to the Lord. Your prayers will not mean anything to God until they mean everything to you. David cried out to the Lord. And the Lord answered his prayer. Psalm 34:6 says, *“This poor man cried, and*

*the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.*" CHARLES SPURGEON said it well: "We need not fear a frowning world while we rejoice in a prayer-hearing God." Notice from where the Lord answered David's prayer: "*from his holy hill*" – the place of the Lord's sanctuary, where the presence of God dwelt with his people. David had been banished from his throne by his enemies. But his enemies had not banished God from his throne. God was still on the throne even though David was on the run.

GOD SUSTAINS. Scholars couple Psalms 3 and 4 together on the basis of theme, content, and background. Psalm 3 is called a morning psalm and Psalm 4 is called an evening psalm. Psalm 4 is called an evening psalm because of verse 8: "*In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*" That's a good psalm to go to sleep to. You can go to sleep in peace when you know that the Lord will keep you safe – not guns, guard dogs, bar doors, alarm systems, or security guards. Psalm 3 is called a morning psalm because of verse 5: "*I lay down and slept; I woke up again, for the Lord sustained me.*" With the increasing trouble David faced, you would think David would be up pacing the floor all night. But David was able to lay down. But he did not lay down with one eye open, watching for his enemies all night. He lay down and went to sleep. In this vulnerable position, David's enemies could have launched a sneak attack and taken his life as he slept. But David lay down and went to sleep and woke up the next morning. How? The Lord sustained him. This is the proof that has been there for you: You are still here! You laid down and went to sleep and woke up again because the Lord sustains you.

GOD RELIEVES FEAR. Verse 6 says, "*I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.*" In verses 1-2, David repeatedly speaks of the many enemies that rose up against him and predicted his doom. Now he describes his many enemies in more concrete terms: *Many thousands of people had set themselves against him all around.* This is not a hyperbole. Thousands of people had set themselves against him. But David was not afraid. This does not mean that David did not have anything to be afraid of. He had plenty of reasons to be afraid. But because he knew who his God was and what his God had done for him, David determined that he was not going to allow fear to dictate how he responded. Courage is just fear that has said its prayers. The Bible calls it faith. Trust in God relieves fear. It does not matter how great the opposition may be. Numbers are not everything. If God is on your side, you are in the majority. Psalm 27:1-2 says, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.*"

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### III. GIVE YOUR *CONFLICT* TO THE LORD.

Psalm 3 is a prayer. But it not until verses 7-8 that David actually makes any requests. He first brings his complaint to the Lord. He then places his confidence in the Lord. Now in the closing verses of this psalm he gives his conflict to the Lord who is ready, willing, and able to fight for us and give us the victory.

## A. GOD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU.

In verse 7 David prays, *“Arise, O Lord!”* This is a war cry in which David calls on God to act on his behalf. This was also Moses’ war cry as he led the children of Israel through the wilderness. Numbers 10:35 says, *“And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, ‘Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.’* Israel perpetually trusted that the Lord would fight their battles. Psalm 68:1 says, *“God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!”* Then David prays, *“Save me, O my God!”* In verse 2, the people are saying that there is no salvation for him in God. But David refused to believe the report of unbelieving people. He went to God for himself and called him, *“My God.”* On the basis of his personal relationship with the Lord, he prayed that the Lord would save, help, rescue, deliver, and liberate him.

David’s bold request was based on two realities: *“For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.”* This is another first. Psalm 3 is the first Imprecatory Psalm. In laymen’s terms, an imprecatory prayer is a “get ‘em, Lord” prayer. The words are harsh. But David does not take matters into his own hands. He is asking God to fight his battle. Striking the cheek pictures insult more than pain. David asks the Lord to put his enemies in their place. Breaking the teeth pictures the wicked as ravenous animals. But David does not ask God to kill them. He just asks God to knock their teeth out, so they can’t devour him. Mark it down: God does not have to move you to protect you. You can be surrounded by predators. But God can knock their teeth out so they cannot harm you.

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## B. GOD WILL GIVE YOU VICTORY.

Verse 8 says, *“Salvation belongs to the Lord.”* Many people said there was no salvation for David in God. But they did not have the last word. Salvation does not belong to man. It belongs to God. Jonah 2:8-9 says, *“Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”* This is arguably the most important statement in the Bible. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Scholars call this Monergism. Synergism is when different elements work together to produce a greater result. Monergism means God does not need any elements to help him produce salvation. God alone saves. The only thing we contribute to the process of salvation is the guilt of our sin. God does the rest! Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Then David prays, *“your blessing be on your people!”* This final benediction makes it clear that this personal testimony is not just about David. It is for all who trust in the Lord. There is no secret what God can do. What God did for David, God can do for you. God will give you the victory. The Lord is faithful to bless his people.

The story is told of Mr. Yates, who owned a farm in Texas. The Great Depression came and he was having trouble keeping up with the payments on his farm. The bank began to press Mr. Yates and gave him thirty days to pay his back payments or face foreclosure. With three weeks left to go, a man came to Mr. Yates door. He worked for an oil company. He asked Mr. Yates to give the company a lease to drill on his farm for oil. Yates knew he was going to lose the farm anyway, so he decided it couldn't hurt. Well, that oil company did drill and hit a gusher – eighty barrels of oil a day. Mr. Yates immediately became a multi-millionaire. When did Mr. Yates become a millionaire? When the oil company struck oil? Nope. Mr. Yates was a millionaire the moment he bought the farm. But he lived in poverty because he did not know what was underneath the ground. Likewise, the moment you put your faith in Christ, you were blessed. Are you living in spiritual poverty because you don't know what you have in Christ? Start digging! If you are in Christ, you are blessed!