

June 29, 2014 by Steve Brandon



Safety and Security in Times of Trouble

Psalm 3

1. Trouble (verses 1-2)
2. Safety (verses 3-4)
3. Security (verses 5-8)

One of the great things about the Bible is how it deals with the realities of life in a straight-forward and honest way. The Bible presents people as sinful. It presents problems as real. It prepares us for life in the real world. At one time or another, all of us will face trouble in this life. There are times when that trouble is small. There are other times when that trouble is big. But, trouble will come. Job said, "Man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

The Bible doesn't back away from these difficult times of life. Rather, it faces them head on.

The question during those times is this: How will you respond? Will you trust the LORD through those times? Will you stay true to the LORD? Will you doubt His ways? Or, will you even rebel against the LORD, thinking that such trouble is not worth following Christ?

As we come to the Scripture this morning, we will see a man who was in trouble. And we will see him finding his refuge in the LORD through those troubles. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to Psalm 3. I have entitled my message this morning, "Safety and Security in Times of Trouble." Because, that's exactly what this Psalm is talking about. This Psalm was written by David, who was facing some great troubles. But, through those troubles, he found his safety and security in God.

David is identified right there in the superscription, "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." You can read about how he fled in 2 Samuel 15. David fled Absalom because Absalom had conspired against him to become king in his place.

It happened like this: When David was reigning as king in the palace, Absalom was out by the gate to the city. When people entered the city, Absalom would speak with them and would plant discontent in their hearts toward David. We read in 2 Samuel 15:6 that "Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel." And when the time was right, Absalom went to Hebron (about 20 miles south of Jerusalem) and planned his coup. He, "sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron'" (2 Samuel 15:10). Soon afterwards, the plan went into effect, and Jerusalem went with Absalom, in revolt against David.

A messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom" (2 Samuel 15:13). And so, with his life in danger, David fled the city of Jerusalem. It was a very humbling experience. We read in 2 Samuel 15:30 that, "David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot." It wasn't only humbling for David. It was humbling for his loyal supporters as well. Those who walked with him each went up covering his head, "and weeping as they went" (2 Samuel 15:30).

So, David will head east into the wilderness, where he will hide in a cave and regroup with his loyal friends. Absalom, on the other hand, will mount his charge and head after him, seeking his life that the kingdom may be his.

And it was in this context that David wrote the words of Psalm 3. They are words of trust in the Lord. They are words of safety and security.

Before we dig in to the psalm, I have a word about the structure. This psalm is naturally divided into three parts. It is divided by the word "selah." We are unsure of exactly what that word means, but the most common explanation is that it is a call to stop and rest. To think about what you have just said or read. So, we will use it that way. We will use it as a call to reflect on the words we have just read, and use it as a dividing point in the psalm.

Psalm 3
O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me.
Many are saying of my soul,
"There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah.

But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.
I was crying to the LORD with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.

I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set themselves against me round about.

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!
For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek;
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.
Salvation belongs to the LORD;
Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah.

My first point is simply this:

1. Trouble (verses 1-2)

I have already described a bit of the historical background to this Psalm. David's son, Absalom has revolted against him. Absalom has set himself up as king in Jerusalem. David is on the run, fleeing for his life. And he is overwhelmed by the greatness of the problem he faces.

And he expresses it in prayer to the LORD. "O LORD, ..." (Psalm 3:1). What a great first response to trouble: prayer. David knows that the problems he is facing are too big for himself to handle. And so, he brings it to the LORD. When you are facing trouble in your life, it would do you well to follow David's example. Simply tell the LORD the trials that you face as you go through them.

Paul's exhortation to us is that we, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And that's exactly what David is doing. He is praying in the moment of the trial. His life was in shambles. Things weren't yet resolved. He had no idea where he was going to lay his head that evening. He didn't know if he would ever return alive again to Jerusalem. But he was praying.

Likewise, this should be our pattern as well. And note that David doesn't tell the LORD anything that He doesn't already know. He simply brings to God what is on his heart. He says, ...

Psalm 3:1
O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me.

God knows that Absalom has won the hearts of those in Jerusalem. God knows that his foes are many. God knows that his foes are against him. God even knows exactly how many foes are against him. Now, in verse 6, David places the number in the thousands. This includes all of Jerusalem and all of David's enemies. David is in a mess of trouble.

To make matters worse, he was being taunted. Verse 2, ...

Psalm 3:2
Many are saying of my soul,
"There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah.

Throughout his entire kingship, David had made his faith in the LORD clearly known. He rose to prominence as a young man, when Goliath and the armies of the Philistines were fighting the Israelites, David defeated Goliath. And in so doing, David made his faith in God the issue. He said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37).

Once David was made king, he began to seek the LORD regarding his military battles. In 2 Samuel 5:19, "David inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You give them into my hand?' And the LORD said to David, 'Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.'"

But now, things were different. Where once David trusted in the LORD and knew victory, his trust in the LORD was seemingly of no help now. He was not gaining the upper hand. He was not winning the war. His son had just taken over his kingdom, and now, David is on the run! And the enemies of the LORD seized the day by mocking him. "There is no deliverance for David now!"

These words sound just like what was spoken to Jesus in the day of His distress upon the cross. Do you remember the day when the arms of Jesus were stretched out, and His enemies were below Him, watching Him die? What did they say?

Matthew 27:39-44
And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

This is nothing more than the expression of what we saw last week in Psalm 2. "The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the Lord and against His Anointed" (Psalm 2:2). Mocking Jesus and mocking David is one way in which this hostility was expressed! But, through it all, neither David, nor Jesus, nor we, need to fret. Because, our God is where we can find our safety.

This is my second point. We see Trouble (verses 1-2). And now, in verses 3 and 4, we see ...

2. Safety (verses 3-4)

Psalm 3:3

But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.

These words here describe how the LORD will cover and protect His people. This imagery goes way back to the time of Abraham, who lived 1,000 years before David. He was facing some trouble of his own. "And the LORD said to him, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you'" (Genesis 15:1). In other words, God is our protection. He is our safety.

Now, when David says that He is "a shield about me," don't think about the little battlefield shield that you can move around to deflect the sword thrusts of the enemy. No, think entire body armor. A shield that would wrap around your entire body. This is what David is saying. He says, "You, O LORD, are a shield about me." You are a shield surrounding me all about. In other words, when God is on your side, there is no place that the enemy can have a successful attack. Oh, the arrows might fly and the swords may strike, but upon God's shield, the blows are blunted. And the attack will never prove fatal.

And David was confident of this. Though he is on the run out in the wilderness, he found his safety in the LORD. And what a good word for us. When your trouble comes, find your safety in the LORD. Trust the LORD. He will be your shield.

But, notice the second phrase in verse 3. David calls the LORD, "My glory, and the One who lifts my head."

Now, when David left Jerusalem, it was a pretty low time in his life. Not only did he face the discouragement that his son had orchestrated a military coup against him. He was also cursed to his face. Perhaps you remember the guy named Shimei. He was a man of the family of the house of Saul (2 Samuel 16:5). When he found out that it was David who was leaving Jerusalem, he came out against David, cursing him "continually" (2 Samuel 16:5). He threw stones at David and he threw stones at all of the mighty men who were with David (2 Samuel 16:6). He said to David, ...

2 Samuel 16:7-8

Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The Lord has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!

And when one of David's mighty men suggested that he go and cut off this man's head, saying "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" (2 Samuel 16:9), David was so dejected that he told him not to. He said, ...

2 Samuel 16:11-12

Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day."

David knew that he deserved everything that was said against him. Shimei's words were true. In fact, if you trace the whole story of David through 2 Samuel, you will discover that the trouble in his house can be traced to his adultery with Bathsheba and his sin of Uriah. The LORD said to David, ...

2 Samuel 12:9-10

Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

Leaving Jerusalem was a sorrowful time for David. I told you earlier that he left the city weeping, with head covered, and barefoot (2 Samuel 15:30). These were all signs of his humiliation. And yet, David knew that the LORD would be the one to lift up his head. "But You, O LORD, are ..., My glory, and the One who lifts my head."

Though his head was down in leaving the city, the LORD would be the one to lift his head later. Troubles may get you down. You may face times of depression and despair because of your troubles. Your countenance may fall because of your pains. Your head may hang in shame because of your sin.

I say this: "Look to the LORD." He is the one who will lift up your head. He is the One who can remove the pain of your circumstances. He is the one who can help you overcome the shame of your sin. You can rest safely in Him.

So, glory in the LORD. Trust in Him. Seek Him. That's what David did. Look at verse 4.

Psalm 3:4

I was crying to the LORD with my voice,

And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.

Psalm 3 records a tremendously painful time of David's life. All around him was crumbling and he was "... crying to the LORD." These words don't indicate a dispassionate prayer, prayed out of compulsion at some prescribed time in temple worship. No, David was describing his passionate prayer of pain. Ascending the Mount of Olives, David was weeping the whole way, pouring out his heart to the LORD.

And God answered him. God answered him from His holy mountain. That's a reference to Zion, to the temple mount in Jerusalem. God answered him from the very place he was now leaving. Now, we don't know the exact answer to prayer to which David refers. But, I trust that it has to do with verses 5 and following. That brings us to my third point, ...

3. Security (verses 5-8)

Psalm 3:5-6
I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set themselves against me round about.

Sleeping is a sign of peace. When you are facing some trouble in your life, how easy is it for sleep to escape your grasp. Financial difficulties come into your life, and you can't sleep, not knowing if there will be enough money in your account at the end of the month. Problems in your marriage are taking place, and you can't sleep, not knowing if your spouse will return to you. Problems with your children erupt, and you can't sleep, not knowing what will happen to them. Some disaster strikes your home, and you can't sleep, not knowing if you can afford the repair on your house. Some deathly illness comes into your home, and you can't sleep, not knowing if your child is going to survive. Things at work are hard and stressful, and you can't sleep, not knowing if you will have your job tomorrow or not. Some crucial event in your life will take place the next morning, and you can't sleep, not knowing how the judge will rule. You are planning for some big event with lots on your plate, and you can't sleep. Your thoughts are too many. There is some uncertainty about the future, and you can't sleep.

This is typical of the way that life works. There are times in our lives when sleep is hard to come by because our minds are anxious. But, such was not the case with David. On the contrary, he said, "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me."

David certainly had many things to worry about. He was spending an unplanned evening in the wilderness. He was facing an unknown future. He would soon be hunted by Absalom's army as a fugitive. He was facing the prospect of a war. He knew he may die in battle tomorrow. His son may die in battle tomorrow. But, through it all, David's testimony was this, "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me."

There are some who find sleep such a problem that they rely upon sleeping pills to knock them out each evening. David's sleeping pill was trust in the LORD. Proverbs 3:24 promises sweet sleep to those who trust in the LORD. "When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet." This Psalm is an encouragement in the sleepless nights of our soul. It is an encouragement to cast our cares upon the LORD and sleep in security, knowing that God loves us and is concerned about us and watches over us.

I'm reminded of Peter and his experience recorded in Acts 12. King Herod was against the church and began laying hands upon the leaders of the church. "He had James ... put to death with the sword" (Acts 12:2). When that gained approval from the Jews, "he proceeded to arrest Peter also" (Acts 12:3). He was thrown into prison, guarded by "four squads of soldiers" (Acts 4:4). I'm sure that Herod's intent was to put Peter to death as well.

We read in Acts 12:5 that "prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God." And "on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward," Peter was sleeping (Acts 12:6-7). It took an angel to awake him from his sleep (Acts 12:7). Surely this is extra-ordinary. My guess is that death row inmates rarely sleep the night before their execution. But, God gave Peter sleep. And God gave David sleep.

We will see the theme of sleep come up next week as we look at Psalm 4. Psalm 4:8 says, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety." The idea in Psalm 4 is much the same as it is in Psalm 3. David was able to sleep in the wilderness while on the run because he found his security in God.

In Psalm 4:6, David says, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me round about." David was secure in God. He wasn't afraid of thousands of people who set themselves upon the task of his destruction. And David's estimate was correct. Again, back in the narrative on 2 Samuel, you read that Absalom's army that gathered to seek David that first day numbered 12,000 men (2 Samuel 17:1). By the end of the conflict there were at least 20,000 in pursuit of David (2 Samuel 18:7). But, David was not afraid. David found his security in God. And Psalm 3 is a testimony of his experience.

Now, this wasn't to say that David simply sat back and played passive. This Psalm is not a call to do nothing, but passively trust the LORD. No, when you read the historical account of what takes place, you find that David hides in a well when Absalom's men come looking for him (2 Samuel 17:18, 21). You find that David and his men march to a strategic position to take up the battle (2 Samuel 17:22). You find that David sets forth his battle plans (2 Samuel 18:1-5). You find that David's men fight against the followers of Absalom (2 Samuel 18:8).

Passive trust is never the call of the Bible. The Bible calls us to trust the LORD and act decisively. And that's what David did. That's what David always did. It's what God's people always do.

This is what Esther did, when Haman's plot was made known to her. She told Mordecai to assemble the people to seek the LORD with fasting and prayer for three days. She and her maidens would fast in the same way. Then she said, "I will go in to the king, which is not

according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). She trusted and then acted, leaving the results to the LORD.

This is what Joab did on the battle field. He gathered his men for battle. He said this to them, "Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight" (2 Samuel 10:12). They fought, while trusting the LORD.

In both cases, the LORD gave victory. This is the victory that David is seeking in verse 7, ...

Psalm 3:7
Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!
For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek;
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.

He's praying for deliverance. He's praying for defeat of the enemies. Perhaps this verse is the substance of which he prayed in verse 4, "I was crying to the LORD with my voice; And He answered me from His holy mountain." Certainly, this fits. We see a passionate prayer. We see an answer given. And what else would David be praying for, but victory from the LORD?

Now, there are some who will question the type of prayer that David prays here. How can you pray for God to do such terrible things to people such as smiting your enemies on the cheek, shattering the teeth of the wicked? But listen. A view of the justice of God will demand such a prayer. To believe in a just and righteous God is to believe in a God who punishes wickedness. To believe in a just and righteous God is to long for and to pray for God's vengeance upon those who would stand opposed to the LORD.

Clearly, Absalom's methods were evil. Sowing seeds of discord. Pulling people away from the king. Setting up his own kingdom. Pursuing David to kill him. David's prayer here is only right.

And in the end, David knew that it was all dependent upon the LORD. Look at verse 8.

Psalm 3:8
Salvation belongs to the LORD;
Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah.

This is the third time in the Psalm that "salvation" has been mentioned. Perhaps you didn't notice the first one, because the word was translated differently. It came in verse 2. "Many are saying of my soul, 'There is no deliverance for him in God.'" Here "deliverance" is "salvation." The second came in verse 7, "Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!" The third comes here in verse 8, "Salvation belongs to the LORD."

These all come from the same Hebrew word, "yesha," from which we get the name "Joshua," which is the name "Jesus." This is why Jesus received his name: "and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

This is what Psalm 3 is about. It's about the salvation of David in his trouble. It's about finding safety and security in times of trouble. And you will only find salvation in the LORD.

So, whatever is causing you to lose sleep--whether it's your finances, difficulties with your marriage or with your children, the flood that comes, or the child that is sick, or the hard place at work, or the neighbor who is suing you or the uncertainty of the future--please know that seeking the LORD is the only way you will be delivered out of these things.

Greater than any earthly problem is the problem of your sin before a holy God. And when it comes to your eternal destiny, you will only find salvation in the LORD. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me." Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Your salvation will come only when you place your trust in Christ and His work on the cross for your sins, trusting that your sin was nailed to the cross. So, believe in Him, and trust in Him today.

This Psalm ends where Psalm 2 ends, with a note about blessing. In Psalm 2, we find, "How blessed are all who take refuge in [the Son]." Here in Psalm 3, we find a prayer of blessing to all of God's people. In the context of Psalm 3, certainly, this is referring to those on David's side, who are the victims of Absalom's wicked scheme. "May God bless them with victory."

How desperately we need the blessing of God in our lives. Apart from God's blessing, we are left to our own ways. But, with God's blessing, we can know the safety and security that He gives.

But, the blessing of God will only come upon those who seek the LORD. So seek Him. And the blessing of verse 8 may be yours, "Your blessing be upon Your people!"

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