

## **Psalm 3 When the going gets tough, who do you turn to? (18.11.12 am)**

If you've been at Park Hill for a while will have heard me tell stories from my childhood. We used to live at a **station** house, right next to the railway, and we used to see giant steam trains going right past our front door – at times it felt like they were coming **through** the house. **Behind** our house was a field full of hay – great for hiding in. The **other** side of the track were some trees to swing on, and beyond that apple trees to relieve of their fruit, and fields of sugar beet to get well and truly plastered with mud in. **Paradise** for us kids.

One day me and my elder brother were playing in the trees – he was 8 and I was 5. And I climbed out sloth like – hanging underneath – along one of the lower branches. The only thing **was**, as I got further along the branch it was gradually bending down, and right below it was a massive clump of nettles. I got to a point when I couldn't go **on** because I'd end up in the nettles; but I couldn't go back **either** because I didn't know how to climb **backwards**. I was well and truly stuck. My **brother** couldn't help because he couldn't reach over the nettles.

So when all else fails, who do you turn to when you get into trouble like that? That's right, I shouted for my mam! My **mam** could help – she could **always** help in times of trouble!

But as **Christians**, who should we turn to **first** in times of difficulty? Let's see who **David** turned to and **why** as we read Psalm 3 together.

David was in **masses** of trouble. The introduction to the psalm tells us that he was escaping from his own **son** Absalom. You'll remember that in his darkest time, David committed adultery with beautiful Bathsheba, and he'd then gone on to commit **murder** as he had her husband Uriah killed on the battlefield. And because of **this** he faced God's judgement: in 2 Samuel 12:11 we read, *'This is what the Lord says: "Out of your **own household** I am going to bring calamity on you."*

In fulfilment of God's words, Absalom was trying to kill David and his followers. David was in real trouble. Absalom was one of the rulers talked about in Psalm 2:2, *'The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.'*

Absalom was trying to unseat the king that God himself had appointed over his people. David's in trouble. He flees. But then he turns to pray to his God.

Now the world would say, 'You've got a problem – deal with it!' The world would expect you to be able to deal with your own problems, and sort them out. The world would see prayer as a weakness – you can't cope with difficulties – you're failing to deal with reality. They'd tell you to get real and do something to sort your problem out.

But just like the problem is so real, so is his response here – he turns to God in prayer. Thomas Watson, the 18<sup>th</sup> century preacher, said this about prayer: *'Prayer is the Christian's gun, which he discharges against his enemies.'* Prayer is the real way, the practical way, the most effective way to deal with our problems, troubles and difficulties. James urges his readers, *'Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.'* James 5:13. Don't turn to your own devices, don't turn to your friends or your mam or dad: Turn to your heavenly Father in prayer. That's the real thing to do. Because it works – it worked for David, it worked for James, it works for us too. Do you believe that?

Let's go through this Psalm, then, by looking at each pair of verses: In verses 1 and 2 we see the enemies that David is dealing with. The immediate threat is his son Absalom, but he's by no means the only one. And we see that by David's repetition here in these 2 verses: *'... how many are my foes! How many rise up ... Many are saying of me, ...'* David's enemies are many, there are lots of them, they're all over, they're all round him. How many there are.

But he doesn't talk here about what they're doing or trying to do to him; verse 2 says, *'Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."* It's what they're saying that is really hurting him at this time. They're saying that God won't save him, not that he can't, but that he won't.

Words hurt, don't they? A cruel word, or some lie, or something said in a wrong way, can really hurt. And there's a lot more hurt being caused by words nowadays: with the arrival of texting and social networks like Facebook and Twitter, people are saying things which are really hurtful, it's somehow easier to say cruel things, when you're not facing the person you're speaking to. And there are lots of misunderstandings, because you can't see how the other person is taking what you're saying. Lots of hurt caused by words.

It's what people were **saying** that was hurting David here. We see an example of this in 2 Samuel 16:8, words said round about the time of this Psalm, after David had been on the Mount of Olives, weeping that the people in Jerusalem had turned **against** him.

Someone said to him, *'Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to **ruin** because you are a man of blood!'* David was a warrior king and had shed much blood. He knew that. So what the people were **now** saying – that God wouldn't deliver him – would really hurt.

And David may well have been tempted to think, 'Yes, I **have** done wrong, yes I **have** killed people as my kingdom has been established, perhaps it's **right** what people are saying. I don't **deserve** God to save me. My sins are so bad. Why would God want to save **me**?' He **could** have been tempted to think like that, because it's **true**. Why would God want to save one who's done **wrong**? Why **would** God want to save such a sinner as David?

[Pause]

Why would God want to save such a sinner like **me**? I **certainly** don't deserve his mercies. [Pause] **None** of us deserve his mercies. Not **one** of us deserves his love. Not a single **one** of us deserves his salvation. **None** of us does – that's the truth of the matter. It's all of grace, **undeserved** love. 'Amazing grace, that saved a wretch like me.'

Like David, we shouldn't get all depressed and leave it there and think there's no hope. David didn't just go away and hide and curl up in a little ball and hope to die. We **pray**. We tell **God** about it. David flees to God, to the One they say wants nothing to **do** with him – who else **is** there to go to? In times of trouble go to God, pour out your heart to **him**, fall at the feet of the God who **cares**. *'Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.'* 1 Peter 5:7. There's no-one **else** to go to. Go to God. Am I speaking to you?

As we move onto verses 3 and 4, we see **the God that David is dealing with**. David turns his focus from the many enemies of verses 1 and 2, to *'But you ... O Lord'* of verse 3. He comes to God, he **focuses** on God. In the face of so many enemies, **God, only** God, the **one** and only God is his focus, and he reminds himself of what he **knows** about his God.

We can follow David's example in times like this. We feel the whole **world** is against us. We tell our workmates we're a Christian and since then they make **fun** of us, or **ignore** us; we fall out with friends because we don't like what **they** like; we're not getting on with family because of a silly argument; our daughter's at **war** with us because she wants to stay out late at night. So many enemies! How many enemies?! Like David we have to say, *'But you, O Lord'* When facing trouble, we focus on what we **know** of God.

Firstly David remembers that his **God is a shield**, verse 3. But he's not like a shield which you just hold out and it protects you from things in **front** of you. **God's** a shield which is **around** David. He's protected from attacks from **any** angle. He's thoroughly protected from **anything** his enemies can throw at him. This is God's **promise**. And it's a promise God gave his people right at the beginning when he called **Abram**, Israel's first ancestor. In Genesis 15:1 God says, *'Do not be afraid Abram. I am your **shield**, your very great reward.'* God **protects** those who know him. Psalm 91:14 says, *'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, I will **protect** him; I will **protect** him, for he acknowledges my name.'* God **protects**.

The next phrase in verse 3 reads in my version of the NIV, *'my Glorious One.'* But I've found **other** words in translation of this – for example in more **recent** NIV versions, it's translated as *'you bestow **glory** on me,'* and in the Revised Standard version and the English Standard version it reads simply, *'my glory'*. **God is my Glorious One, or is my glory, or bestows glory on me.**

David finds **sufficiency** in God. God is all he **needs**, because God is his **Glorious One**, God is his **glory**, God bestows glory on **him**. Although his earthly glory as king of the people of Israel might be **dim** at the moment, although his splendour and reputation as a majestic king in Jerusalem may be **destroyed** at this time, David isn't dismayed because his God is his **glory** and bestows glory on **him**. He has all the glory he **needs** in God. God is **sufficient** for him at all times. Isn't it amazing that David has such an **understanding** of his God, **before** Jesus, **before** God's ultimate revelation of his glory in Jesus?

Remember Jesus' prayer in John 17. Jesus says he wants his people to **see** his glory, the glory God the Father had given to him. Isn't that **great**? But we read **more** in John 17:22, Jesus prays for all believers, and says there, *'I have **given** them the glory that you gave me.'* Jesus has **given** his believers his glory. **Jesus** is our Glorious One, **Jesus** is our glory, **Jesus** bestows glory on us.

**Jesus** is our sufficient one. We find all we need in **him**. Shouldn't this **help** us in times of need? Doesn't this **comfort** us? Jesus our **sufficiency**, our all in all.

David then goes on to say God *'lifts up my head.'* **God is a restoring God.** David needs God to **restore** him. God **appointed** him to be king of his people. At the **moment** David has been unseated from his throne, but David trusts God to **restore** him again.

The picture of 'lifting your head' meaning being restored is seen back in Genesis chapter 40:13. You'll remember Joseph was in Pharaoh's prison with two other prisoners – a cupbearer and a baker. They both had dreams and Joseph **interpreted** them. As he told the cupbearer about **his** dream, he said, *'Within 3 days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position.'* The baker had **his** head lifted in a very different way!

But this is the picture here, that God will lift up David's head, and will **restore** him as king, to his position of leading God's **people, knowing** his God, **servicing** his God, **pointing** to his God. God is a **restoring** God, and he wants to restore people to their rightful position before him, **knowing** him, **servicing** him, **pointing** to him. That's where God wants **you** to be – restored to a relationship with him, knowing, serving, pointing to **him**. Where do you stand this morning? Have you been restored to that vital relationship with God?

In verse 4 we read that David cries out to the Lord, *'and he answers [him] from his holy hill.'* **God is accessible.** David's prayer reaches God, and he answers him. The tabernacle – symbolic of God's presence with his people – was in Jerusalem. So **far** away from David. But God could still be reached, he could still **hear** what David had to say. God wasn't confined to that tabernacle, he was readily accessible **wherever** David was. He cried **out** to the Lord, he knew he was **heard**, because God **answered** him.

God's **there**, he's **accessible**. He's got lots to do, lots of people to listen to and answer, but he **can**. He's **God**. Never think God's too **busy** to **help** you. When you phone a busy or popular office and you want to speak to the person in **charge**, isn't it amazing that they're **always** in a meeting, or just on the other line. God's **never** just on the other line. God's **accessible**, and ready to hear the prayers of his children.

So David's in trouble, but he focuses on the character of God. He **knows** his God. And even in the midst of trouble, his eyes turn to his **protecting, sufficient, restoring** and **accessible** God. Let's follow his example, and when we face trouble, remind ourselves of the God that we're dealing with. Our **Glorious One**.

On to verses 5 and 6. We've looked at the many enemies that David is dealing with; we've looked at the **God** David is dealing with; now we move on to find **the peace that David enjoys**.

David lies down and sleeps. How **can** he when facing such great enemies? Would **you** sleep soundly if you knew there was an army after you just wanting to kill you?

**David** can because he knows his **God**. Even in **this** situation he can lie down and **sleep** because he knows and trusts his God. How many nights have we spent tossing and turning, worrying about different situations, or problems, or difficulties, or uncertainties? We can't **change** the situations etc., so why do we worry? Why not leave them in the capable hands of our God? Do **we** know him that well? Do **we** trust him that much?

We're encouraged not to worry by Jesus in Matthew's gospel: He says, '*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ... do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.*' Matthew 6:27, 34. If we had **that** attitude, we'd **all** sleep soundly in our beds at night, wouldn't we? I know it's easier said than done, and I'm just as bad at this as anyone, but if David can sleep when his own son's **army**'s trying to kill him, **my** problems fade into insignificance. There's a great **challenge** to each of us here. How **well** do we know God? Do we enjoy God-given peace?

In the original Hebrew, the verbs are in different tenses: the lying down and the sleeping are in the past tense – he laid down and slept, because the Lord sustains him. But the tense of the **sustaining** is continuous, giving a sense of **continuing** sustaining – David is saying 'the Lord **keeps** sustaining me', God goes **on** sustaining him. So as well as saying God sustained him over **that** night, he's saying that he can **keep** sleeping well at night, because God keeps sustaining him. David can **continue** to have a peaceful night's sleep, because the Lord will continue to sustain him, even with an uncertain future.

God isn't saying that we'll have peace **from** trouble, but that we can have peace **in** trouble, because he'll sustain us. Doesn't Paul say in Philippians, '*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*' Philippians 4:6,7. That is what David's talking about here – **peace** knowing that God will sustain you. A good night's sleep without the need for sleeping tablets!

God will look after the affairs of his kingdom. God will protect and sustain his people, because he **loves** them. David **knew** his God. He'd **experienced** his God. And this enabled him to walk by **faith** and not by sight. How are **we** measuring up here?

We need to move on to verses 7 and 8, where we read about the **help David expects**. Because of what David has remembered in verses 1 to 6, he is **assured** that God will answer his prayer, and so he prays boldly for God to arise and deliver him (the ESV has 'arise and save').

Again there are slight differences in phraseology in different versions: in my version of the NIV we read, '*For you have struck all my enemies,*'; more recent versions of the NIV have a continuation of the **request**, '*Arise ... Deliver ... Strike my enemies,*'; the ESV has '*You strike my enemies*'. But **all** of them indicate David's **expectation** of God's help. It hasn't happened yet, so he **asks** for it; God does deal with David's enemies; God's help is so **certain** that he uses the past tense to **stress** that certainty – he's **requested** God's help, he's so **certain** of God's help, it's as if it's already **happened**. David believes so strongly that God will destroy his enemies that he writes about it in the past.

How certain are **we** that God will help us? Perhaps we think, 'Oh I'll ask for help, but he may not answer. There are so many others in **more** need of his help. He's helped me before, but I can't **keep** asking him to help me. Does God really want to help me **this** time?'

God's concerned about every **single** aspect of our lives. David says in Psalm 139, '*You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.*' He knows us **completely**. He **cares**. His son Jesus **died** for us, to deliver us from sin and death; do you think he won't do all he can to maintain our relationship with him? Be **certain** that God **wants** to help you, he wants to **deliver** you. That's what God **does**.

He has compassion, he has mercy, he cares, he loves, he helps, he delivers. He's the God of **salvation** – ultimate deliverance from **all** our enemies. But he's also the God of deliverance from **all** the troubles and difficulties in life. And when Jesus talks of this, he too uses the past tense; he says in John 16:33, *'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I **have** overcome the world.'* Jesus has **conquered** sin and death and the evil effects of this world as he rose victorious from the dead, but the victory will only be **fully** complete when Jesus comes again. **Then** our enemies will be totally destroyed. But the victory is absolutely **certain** and he uses the past tense to say so.

In verse 8 David says *'From the Lord comes deliverance,'* – some versions say 'salvation'. God is our **Deliverer** and **Saviour** from sin and death, but he **also** delivers us from all the troubles we face in life. Over and over again he helps those who **know** him, **love** him and call **out** to him.

We have to call out to God in times of trouble, but more than **that** we have to believe that he is the God who **delivers**. We have to **expect** him to respond, we have to expect him to **help** us, we have to expect him to **deliver** us, to **save** us. If we're doing God's will, living for him, serving him, wanting to give him the glory, we certainly **can** expect him to help us. This is what **David** expects.

**Here's** the challenge – is our God a God that we **expect** to respond to our prayers for help? How **real** is your God? How much do you rely on **God** in times of trouble? Do you trust him **then**? Let David's faith **challenge** you – how do **you** measure up?

We **have** to ask ourselves these questions, because in the second part of verse 8 David prays for **us**, he prays, *'May your blessing be on your people.'* David's praying for **all** who believe in the God who is a shield, who is sufficient for all our needs, who restores our relationship, who we can call to when we face problems, who gives peace that passes all understanding, who we can expect to respond to our requests made in faith.

Is this the God **you** know? Be **inspired** by David; be **challenged** by David. Instead of looking at the enemies that are many, let's look to God alone.

*'But you are a shield around me, O Lord, my Glorious One, who lifts up my head. To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.'*