

HOPE IN UNCERTAINTY

A study of Psalm 3

Good morning! My name is Patrick Gibbs, and I am one of the pastors here at MVBC. Pastor Bob has the morning off.

A quick scan of today's news reminds us that our country is in a state of uncertainty. A new party in Washington with great hopes, but no money. Two wars that have drug on longer than most of us would have imagined. An economy so volatile it makes an amusement park log ride look like a lazy river. Well this morning we're going to look at a Psalm- Psalm 3- that David wrote during a time of great uncertainty both nationally for Israel and personally for David. And my prayer this morning is that this Psalm will provide as much hope for us as it did for David. Let's begin by looking at verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 3. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:1** A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom. O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! ² Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

I don't want to spend a lot time on history, but a little context might be helpful as we study what David wrote for us. This Psalm actually has a description of when David wrote it: ►

...When he fled from his son Absalom.

David is King of Israel. Absalom (who is one of David's sons) is upset over some family business that David had mishandled. So, Absalom plots to overthrow David as King and is successful. 2

Samuel 14-19 records the entire story, but this Psalm was written around the time of 2 Samuel 15:13. ►

^{NIV} **2 Samuel 15:13** A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." ¹⁴ Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. . . ."

And David flees. ► It is in the midst of these uncertain times that David writes Psalm 3. Notice how David describes his current situation. First he says, ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:1** O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!

It is difficult to notice in this translation, but the phrase "how many are my foes!" actually means that David's foes are increasing. Another translation of the Bible renders it this way, "how my adversaries have increased!" (NASB)

Have you ever felt that way? Like those out to get you were increasing and rising up against you? Maybe right now it's making the mortgage payment; the enemies are increasing. It is getting harder to pay the bills and buy food; the enemies are increasing. Maybe you are a commission only sales person; the enemies are increasing. The bill collectors keep calling; the enemies are increasing. My spouse and I aren't getting along; the enemies are increasing. My kids don't seem to care about God; my enemies are increasing. My ailing parents need my help; my enemies are increasing. And they all seem to be rising up against me at the same time. Who, right now seems to be rising up against you?

Things get so overwhelming we feel like we have to run away to survive. And if we can't run away physically, we definitely run away emotionally and spiritually.

And David adds to the uncertainty in verse 2. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:2** Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

Not only are my enemies overwhelming me, but God may not help me. Sometimes we hear that from people. Maybe it's a spouse or child or friend who doesn't see God in the picture.

Sometimes it sounds like, "You just need to work harder or try harder." And maybe it's our own head telling us that God will not help; that God isn't there; that God doesn't care; or maybe even that God is punishing me for my sin. David committed 2 sins that led to his current crisis. He had an affair that put his family into turmoil and he ignored the rape of one of his daughters by one of his sons. David had to be wondering if God was showing up this time. ►

Can you feel David's anxiety? The knot in the stomach, the heart beating a little faster, the confusing thoughts about what to do next. The devil on one shoulder yelling, "God's not going to help you" and God on the other shoulder quietly saying, "Trust me." Can you feel the uncertainty? Most of us can probably identify with what David must be feeling.

And then we come to verse 3 where David changes gears by using the word ► "but." "But" indicates a contrast. Verses 1 and 2 may be true, but other things are true also. And the other truth is all about God. It is true that my enemies are increasing. It is true that my enemies are out to get to me. It is true that there might *seem* to be no hope. But there is more to the story. So, in verses 3-6, David reminds himself -and us- to see some things about God. It doesn't negate the truth in verses 1 and 2, but it completes it. So, let's look at the rest of the story. In verses 3-6, we see 5 things about God.

Number 1. ► God protects. Look at verse 3.

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:3** But you are a shield around me, O LORD . . .

That is to say, we have the protective power of God. Notice David isn't asking God to be His shield. He says, "But you ► *are* a shield around me. . . ." David knows that God is His shield and he is just saying what he knows to be true. This might be a case where David is saying something he *knows* is true, but doesn't *feel* at this present moment. Remember, he has been dethroned and run out of his city. And yet, while David's foes seem to be winning, David knows that God will not allow anything to happen to him that would derail his plan for David. Sure our foes may sometimes seem to be winning. They may seem to be overwhelming. But God is a shield around us. No one has the power to ruin your life. No one has the power to do to you what God cannot and will not use for his purpose.

The picture that comes to mind for me comes from the discovery channel. Have you ever watched during shark week? ► They stick a guy with a camera in a steel cage, cover it with meat and submerge him where the sharks are. And sharks attack. The shark rattles the cage and tosses it around. The diver gets bumped around, his heart is racing, and he utters words they have to bleep on TV. But he is safe. The cage provides a shield of protection that prevents destruction. We have confidence that God will protect us from anything that messes up His plan for our life. He is our shield. He is our protector.

Number 2. ► God provides. I get this from the middle of verse 3.

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:3** . . . you bestow glory on me

What does it mean to bestow glory? The Hebrew word for “glory” here also means honor or wealth. David is acknowledging God as his provider. Any honor or wealth that he had or will have in the future comes from God. The “stuff” he has is from God. David is saying, “God you are my provider.”

Number 3. ► God encourages. Look at the end of verse 3.

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:3** ... you bestow glory on me and *lift up my head*.

Oftentimes, those things that trouble us have a way of discouraging us. We walk around with our head down as though we have failed or been defeated. And if it isn't obvious externally, we certainly know what it feels like internally. When the bill collectors call and we bow our head in shame, God encourages us. When your boss says your services aren't needed anymore and you hang our head in failure, God encourages you. When your child ignores your wisdom and makes life altering choices, we are tempted to hang our head in sorrow. But God encourages us. When your spouse says things that hurt you deeply, God encourages you. As David processes his own uncertainty he looks to God as his encourager. It is God who lifts our head. And no matter how “victorious” our enemies seem to be today, God lifts my head with confidence because he is protecting me and He is providing for me. Instead of looking defeated by my foes, God lifts my head with confidence in the face of my foes. He encourages.

Number 4. ► God answers. When I pray, God answers.

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:4** To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.

David was confident that God answered when he prayed. He may not have given David every answer he wanted, but he did answer. And we can have the same confidence that David had. God will answer me when I pray. And like David, we may not get the answer we want. But God will answer.

But notice where the Lord answers from. He answers from his holy hill. For David, God's holy hill represented the place where God dwelled in what was called the Ark of the Covenant. God's holy hill is where God provided his presence for the Jews. But, as Christians, we don't have a holy hill. We don't have the Ark of the Covenant. Where does God's presence reside today? Let's look at the New Testament for a minute. ►

^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 6:19** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (or God's spirit), who is in you, whom you have received from God?

God's presence resides in believers. When you believe in Jesus for eternal life, God's presence comes and resides in you. God's answers for most of us will not come in dreams or an audible voice or a funny shaped cloud in the sky. God could answer us that way, but he doesn't need to because He already resides in us. And most of the time, the answer will come from within. I don't know about you, but it's difficult for me to sit quietly or wait. And it feels weird. Just sitting? Just listening? But I think we might pray differently if we thought God answered in our spirit.

For instance, if I am in a money crisis, I can ask God for \$1000. He either provides it or He doesn't. But, if I ask God for wisdom in solving my money crisis, He may answer with wisdom or ideas or \$1000 or renewed focus on finances or courage to ask for help. God answers when we pray.

Number 5. ► God sustains me.

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:5** I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

Every day we wake up is another opportunity for God to provide the courage, strength and hope to face another day. This new day may bring a new set of obstacles or challenges. Or this new day may look a lot like yesterday's obstacles and challenges. Or it could be a day of relief from our enemies. It could be a chance to see God win. It could be a chance to make a difference.

Whatever the circumstances of today, we know that God sustains us this day. He can keep us going. He gives strength where no strength exists. He gives hope where life seems hopeless. He wins when winning seems impossible. He sustains us.

► So, God protects and provides and encourages and answers and sustains us. I also see 2 results of believing these things about God.

The first result comes in verse 5. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:5** I lie down and sleep;

The first result is ► more peace. In fact, David had enough peace in his circumstances to sleep. Have you ever laid down to sleep, and sleep didn't come. Your mind races with everything that's going on: the people, the circumstances, the struggles, the economy, the marriage, the kids, the school, the job. Sleep becomes intermittent and interrupted. I'm sure most of us have been there before. No peace often leads to no sleep. The truth from verses 1 and 2 make sleep difficult.

But focusing on the 5 things about God in this Psalm, David says he lies down and sleeps. He has a peace about his circumstances that lets him sleep. And nothing is as bad in the morning after a good night sleep as it was when we went to bed the night before. We awake with a renewed and refreshed mind, the courage to face another day; the hope that comes from who God is, not what I do. More peace; I'll take it.

► But David mentions a second result of knowing who God is. Look at verse 6. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:6** I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.

As knowing God provides more peace, it also provides ► less fear. And in the midst of our growing enemies- weather it's from our own mistakes, or outside influence or our family or our job or the bill collectors or the news reports, God doesn't want us responding out of fear. The moment we recognize we are afraid, we ought to stop and pray this psalm. David started with what was happening to him, and now he concludes with, "Bring it on. You can attack me on every side with your best shot; I will not be afraid." Where does that hope and confidence come from? It comes from knowing, believing, reciting and practicing the things about God that David mentions. Less fear; I'll take that too.

So, how should we respond to this? Is this one of those "just stop being afraid" talks. Or "if I know it I'll be peaceful and fearless. And since I don't have peace and I am fearful, I just must need to learn more about God?" I don't think so.

In verse 7, David does actually ask for something. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:7** Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God!

He asks to be delivered. Nothing wrong with that request. Lord, please deliver me from my enemies or whatever is overwhelming me. Even Jesus prayed that. On the night before his death, Jesus prayed: ►

^{NIV} **Luke 22:42** "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me;

He wanted to be delivered from the anguish He was suffering. But Jesus and David tempered their request for deliverance with God's will. Jesus' request is pretty clear. ►

^{NIV} **Luke 22:42** "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

For David, the request is more subtle, but still makes sense. Let's look at verse 8. ►

^{NIV} **Psalms 3:8** From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.

David recognized that deliverance came from God. Sure, he could go fight the battle with Absalom, but he recognized God's will in his deliverance. The Lord will provide the deliverance necessary for him to bless his people. David and Jesus knew there was a grander picture. There was more at stake than their personal battle.

But there seems to be a second thing David prayed for; David prayed that God would fight for him. Look at the second half of verse 7. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:7** Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked

How many of us would like God to break the teeth of our enemy? the bill collectors that won't stop calling? the person abusing us right now? our boss? But I really think what David is asking for is God's help. He wants God to fight his battles. I know that doesn't sound real manly. I don't need anybody to fight my battles. I don't need anybody's help. I can do this myself. And that self reliance usually has the exact opposite result of relying on God. As we continue to fight by our self, we experience less peace and more fear.

As David reminds us, deliverance comes from the Lord. More peace and less fear comes from letting God fight our battles. "Lord, I need you to somehow provide for my family. Lord, I need you to heal my broken and overwhelmed heart. Lord, I need your wisdom in this decision regarding my spouse. Lord, please deliver me from this debt."

So, that brings me to my ► response. What should I do with this? There is a phrase in this psalm that stood out to me in glaring neon lights. The phrase is found in verse 4. ►

^{NIV} **Psalm 3:4** To the LORD I cry aloud,

Our response is to ► pray out loud. To pray out loud. David didn't pray this prayer in his heart. He prayed it out loud. He said these things with his voice. He not only thought them in his head, he said them out loud with his mouth. When your enemies are overwhelming, pray this psalm out loud. When the pressure comes and you aren't sure God is there, pray this psalm out loud. When it seems like people are out to get you, pray this psalm out loud. When your own emotions seem so overwhelming, pray this psalm out loud. When you think you can't handle another

thing, pray this psalm out loud. We you need the peace that God provides, pray this psalm out loud. When you are afraid, pray this psalm out loud.

Oftentimes we try the opposite; we pray backwards. We quietly speak in our mind, and we look for outward answer. Maybe we should pray out loud and look for the answer where God resides- in our heart and mind.

I think it helps our heart to not only think these things about God, but to hear ourselves say them. Pray out loud.

And we'd like to help you do that. On your chair this morning, or on a chair by you, you should see these little cards. Find one and grab it for me. They fold in half so they look like a business card. And on this card is Psalm 3. I hope this card is small enough that you might be compelled to carry it with you- in your wallet or your purse or your pocket. And when your life seems so overwhelming, you can pull this out and pray it out loud, with your voice, to God. Or maybe you might want to memorize it. And that by doing so, we may experience more peace, less faith and hope in a God that sustains us.

PRAY

