

God Our Shield

Psalm 3

In King David's tumultuous life, his flight from Absalom was one his darkest hours. It looked like his sins had finally caught up with him and he would die an outcast who lost everything. God takes us into the darkness in order to reveal His light. When arrows fly from the enemy, then we thrive under the protection of His shield.

Great Troubles

Absalom was a wicked and treacherous son who plotted to take the kingdom from David. He rose early and met people coming from all over Israel to David for justice, flattering them and casting aspersion on his father: "Then Absalom would say to him, 'Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you.' Moreover Absalom would say, 'Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice'" (2 Sam. 15:3-4). He sent spies throughout Israel, gathered men to himself, and finally hatched his treasonous plot. David fled to avoid his death and the slaughter of many in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:10-14). He sent Zadok and Abiathar the priests and the ark they carried back to the city, along with Hushai the Archite who would be his spy to defeat the traitorous counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:27-37). Absalom's coup worked, and it fulfilled the consequences prophesied about David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 12:11-12). David had fully repented and been restored, and yet he had to deal with these troubles brought by an ungrateful and evil son. He had 600 men with him while Absalom would have sent 12,000 men to crush him (2 Sam. 15:18, 17:1). That's what he means by "many had risen up" against him; they all thought God wouldn't save him (vv1-2). We don't know for sure when David wrote this psalm, but it sounds like he is flight. The first of 73 uses of Selah in Psalms occurs here, and it may mean consider, or occasion a shift in volume, a silence or a pause. Regardless, it seems to emphasize what was just said. David invites all of God's people to stare at mountain of trouble bearing down and the verdict of his enemies: "There is no help for him in God" (v2). *Selah*

From His Holy Hill

"But You, O Yahweh, are a shield for me, my glory and the one who lifts up my head" (v3). God is bigger than the mountain of trouble, bigger than Ahithophel's 12,000 men, bigger than Absalom's treason, and bigger than David's own adultery and murder. Think of David's single-minded focus on God and what is actually true according to His word against the pressing circumstances. Even though David deserves far worse than he is getting, he trusts God to guard, restore, and shine on him (v3). Right now the mantra "You are enough" is popular, even tragically in the church. But you're not, which why Christ had to rescue and redeem you from slavery to sin. David was not enough. God's grace is the thing that's sufficient, and He is more than enough save you. He is the only one who can save from actual troubles, as well as all the troubles you think you have. David calls out to God who heard from His holy hill (v4). The ark came out with Zadok but then returned to Zion, and that is where God heard Him. David couldn't be there, but God could be with Him. David couldn't see His glory in the tabernacle, but God's glory was with him in exile, and it was that glory that would lift up his head. We have not come to a mountain that can be touched, to a tabernacle, to a building that can be touched, and not really to a parking lot, but to "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24). God hears us now and He will answer. *Selah*

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Sweet Sleep

David wasn't delivered in a day. He says his prayers, calls out to God, trusts that He heard, and then goes to sleep. He wakes up; God sustained him (v5). Sleep is a picture of death and resurrection, and so we cast our cares upon and trust the Lord as we enter that vulnerable state. This is what the peace of God looks like, surpassing all understanding: "When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet" (Prov. 3:24). David could think all night about what was going on, but he chose not to. You could worry all afternoon and for the next ten years, and what would come of it (Ps. 127:2; Matt. 6:27)? The one who has to worry thinks he gains control by doing so, but really loses focus on the one thing he can control: to trust God with a clean heart and clear head. Make your plans, take decisive action, work until you are exhausted, and then go to sleep. To try to do more than this is to try to be God, and we are not very good at this. Twelve thousand almost came to snuff David out, but he woke up fresh ready to face them without fear (v6).

Salvation is the Lord's

David has named God as his shield and glory, the one who lifts up his head (v3), but He still hasn't done it. So David cries out, "Arise, O Yahweh; save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly" (v7). He calls for deliverance at the same time he declares God has already done it. We speak of the already/not yet aspect of theology. Christ has saved us by dying on the cross; He is saving and sustaining us now; we "eagerly [wait] for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). We look for the resurrection of the dead. David did this also, and he cried out for salvation in the pressing trouble he faced. The soldiers of Absalom come to devour innocent life and will not stop until their teeth are broken. God will strike them on the cheekbone and break their teeth (v7). David was a man after God's own heart who had incredible self-control to not touch Saul even when he was trying to murder David (1 Sam. 24:12). He prays for God to deal with the violent, which must happen if the innocent are to be protected. This is not engaging in personal vengeance but rather trusting vengeance to God. David finishes his psalm stating that salvation is the Lord's. It doesn't matter if he is in Jerusalem on the throne or fleeing for his life, God's blessing goes with God's people: "Your blessing is upon Your people" (v8). This is unmovable encouragement in crumbling times.