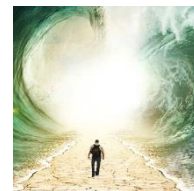


Deliverance Psalms

Psalm 3

June 2, 2019



Back in 1997 Rich Mullins made the 1st recording of a song called “My Deliverer.”¹ The song begins by telling about a time in history, early in Jesus’ life, when Joseph/Mary/Jesus needed to escape to Egypt. It was right after the Magi had visited Jesus. Jesus’ family was escaping from King Herod, who was attempting to find and kill Jesus.² The song then jumps back to reflect on a difficult time in Israel’s history, when God’s people were pleading with him to DELIVER them from the oppression of the Egyptians. Acts 7:34-36 reminds us of when God spoke to Moses about this, “I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’ ...[Moses] was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself...He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.”³

During my sermon prep this week, I came across an inspiring picture. It’s based on the historical event of God parting the Red Sea and allowing Moses and the Israelites to cross over on dry land.⁴ This modernized picture has a guy wearing a backpack. He’s on a journey down the road of life, and in front of him and all around him, God is parting the waters and delivering him. The chorus of Rich Mullin’s song echoes over and over, “My Deliverer is coming.... My Deliverer is standing by.” Debbie and I used to listen to this song quite a lot. Right around this time, our oldest daughter, Callie, was about 5 years old. She listened to this song right along with us. Only, she didn’t quite catch the theological significance of God as our Deliverer. She thought that the song was referring to the delivery of a special package that was coming in the mail. In fact, she called Rich Mullin’s song, the “Mailman Song.” When will that mailman come with my delivery? My delivery is coming, but it’s taking soooo long for this deliverance to come! Sometimes, that’s how deliverance feels though doesn’t it? The long period of waiting. Sometimes losing sleep. Often growing more and more anxious. Will deliverance EVER come!? In Psalm 3, David writes about deliverance of a much more serious nature. And he gives God’s people some very good advice about waiting for deliverance. We’re going to talk about this today.

Please turn in your Bible to Psalm 3. Psalm 3 is just one among many psalms that are focused on God’s deliverance. For example, the very next psalm, Psalm 4 also talks about deliverance, deliverance from slanderous accusations. Psalm 5 talks about deliverance from malicious lies. Psalm 9 – deliverance from hostile nations. Psalm 10 – deliverance of the helpless from the wicked. Psalm 38 – deliverance from serious illness. Psalm 69 – deliverance when life becomes overwhelming. Well, you get the idea. Scattered throughout the book of Psalms, we find a variety of hurts and struggles. The writers of these psalms are very honest with God about how they feel, how they are suffering, and how much they need him to DELIVER them from the struggles that we face in this life.

Psalm 3 begins with the title, “A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom.” Now, not all of the psalms have titles, but many do. We should note, that these titles, are somewhat debatable in terms of their reliability.⁵ That said, they can be helpful to reflect on, which is what we will discover today in Psalm 3. The story of Absalom is one of the saddest in King David’s life. You can read about it more fully in 2 Samuel 13-20. A few highlights include a terrible assault on Absalom’s sister. This tragedy upsets Absalom greatly. It leads Absalom to kill her offender, who was another one of David’s sons. These events drive a wedge between Absalom and his father, David. They have a falling out for years, then a limited reconciliation, and then Absalom betrays his father and leads a conspiracy

¹ The Jesus Record 1998.

² See Matthew 2:1-18.

³ You remember the story, for 400 years the Israelites were in bondage as slaves to the Egyptians. That is until God sent in Moses to deliver them. Many of you have probably seen the powerful, animated movie, the Prince of Egypt, which recounts this story.

⁴ See Exodus 14:29.

⁵ See discussion in *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 842-843.

against him. Absalom actually wins over the Israelite people and turns them against his father, KING David. At this point in the story, David needed to flee. And it is this point in history that is addressed in Psalm 3. 2 Sam. 15:14 records, "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...."

Family conflict. Have you ever asked God to deliver you from family problems? Problems with your spouse or your kids or your parents or your extended family? That's part of what caused David to write this Psalm. For David, this not only caused him to consider family conflict, but also conflict with many other enemies, who were now rising up against him. Therefore, the advice we find in Psalm 3 actually covers a broad spectrum of enemies that we face in life. Psalm 3 teaches us about deliverance. Specifically, that waiting for God's deliverance means we need to...

1. Guard our thinking. Psalm 3:1-2 says, "LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him.'" It's easy to lose hope in the midst of our struggles. As we are waiting for God's deliverance, and time goes on and on, it's easy to ask ourselves, "will God EVER deliver me?" So, when the voices of people around us, start to say things like, "God will not deliver him" or "God will not deliver her," we are often already contemplating the idea. Negative messages that rob our hope are one of our enemies' strategies. So, we need to guard our thinking! We can learn about this if we study the techniques of psychological warfare. For many years now, aircraft have dropped leaflets over enemy territories, trying to break down the will and resistance of the people. Long before the invention of the airplane though, way back in David's day, enemies were attacking David's thinking. They were using their words to put ideas in his head: just give up! God is not coming to your rescue!⁶

To put it another way, our mind is a battlefield.⁷ Romans 12:2 urges us to, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind...." That's exactly what David does in Psalm 3:3, "But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high." He reminds himself, out loud, WHO God is. God is often referred to as a shield, especially throughout the Psalms.⁸ I realized something this week about this verse that I'd never really thought about before. This is NOT a simile. God is not LIKE a shield, rather he IS our shield.⁹ When we picture our spiritual armor in places like Eph. 6, we tend to think of various objects that we put on; and that's ok actually. But we need to realize, that this shield in Psalm 3, is not an inanimate object or a thing. The armor is the Living God.¹⁰

Here's another thing that's really encouraging: This shield was AROUND David, not just in front of him. In other words, "God's shield surrounds David, in contrast to ordinary shields, which only protect us from an attack from one direction."¹¹ If you're an old-school Star Trek fan, you might describe God as a shield, more like the forcefield that surrounds the USS Enterprise. Or, if you're a gamer, a good friend of mine told me that you might describe this shield as something like Winston's bubble or Zarya's shield.¹² In David's time, they would have used a typical battle shield that you hold out in front of you. But Psalm 3 teaches us that when God is our shield, He surrounds us on all sides. There is a famous prayer attributed to St. Patrick called the, "breastplate prayer," which includes the words, "...Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, ... Christ beneath me, Christ above me..."^{13 14}

⁶ Another psalm of David says it this way in Psalm 22:6-8, "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." See also Psalm 10:9-11 and 71:10-11.

⁷ In the midst of Job's grief and pain, after he had lost his fortune and lost his children, he received this counsel in Job 2:9, "His wife said to him, 'Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!'" In 2 Samuel 15:13 we learn that, "A messenger came and told David, 'The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.'" In other words, some people had come to the conclusion that God is no longer on David's side, therefore they were saying "God will not deliver him."

⁸ See Psalms 5:12; 7:10; 18:2, 30, 35; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:11; 91:4; 115:9-11; 119:114; **144:2**. And also Deuteronomy 33:29 and Proverbs 30:5.

⁹ And having a shield means you're a realist. You are preparing for an attack because you know it's coming.

¹⁰ Ben Patterson, *God's Prayer Book*, Tyndale, Carol Stream, IL, 2008, p. 32.

¹¹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 980.

¹² Rather than Reinhardt's frontal shield. From the game Overwatch.

¹³ Ben Patterson, *God's Prayer Book*, Tyndale, Carol Stream, IL, 2008, p. 34.

¹⁴ Psalm 3:3 also mentions that the LORD is "the One who lifts my head." In 2 Samuel 15:30 we are given a picture of a very dejected King David as he is fleeing from his son Absalom. He is leaving the city of Jerusalem. "But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up." He, and all of the people with him, covered their heads as a sign of sorrow and grieving. The phrase is Psalm 3:3, "Lifts my head high," "refers to exalting kings.... Here David is expressing confidence in God's favor in the face of his enemies." (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 980.) In other words, even though

In Psalm 3:4 David then reminds himself, of God's faithfulness, "I call out to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy mountain."¹⁵ What David is declaring is that God is reliable. He WILL answer when we call. How do we know this? Because God has a consistent track record of being faithful throughout all of human history. He answers when his people call out to him.¹⁶ Earlier, we considered God's deliverance in the book of Exodus at the parting of the Red Sea. This amazing miracle that was accomplished in history is STILL celebrated even today!

Here's something else worth pointing out: God answers our call, even when the deliverance that we need, was caused by our very own sinful disobedience. For example, after Jonah refused to obey God and go to Nineveh, he called out from the belly of a huge fish. God heard him and delivered him onto the shore. Jonah 2:1-2 tells us, "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said: 'In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.'" Here's the point, God has a written track record for hearing AND answering when his people call out to him! Just like David, this should bring us peace and confidence in our times of trouble.

In addition to guarding our thinking, Psalm 3 also teaches us that deliverance means we need to...

2. Choose deliberate responses. Psalm 3:5 goes on, "I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me."¹⁷ This idea of "sleeping or waking" is a way of saying that "God's faithful care sustains the godly day and night whatever the need or circumstances."¹⁸ Once we understand that God is truly watching over our concerns, we can rest peacefully, because of his sustaining power. In war movies we often see scenes where one person sleeps while the other person keeps guard. They often take turns and sleep in shifts. That way one person is always awake and watching for the enemy. David surely understood this as a soldier. He had likely often taken turns either keeping watch, or sleeping while he entrusted the watch to someone else. What David is saying in Psalm 3, is that we can choose this deliberate response: I will rest in God's sustaining power, because he is keeping watch.

David goes on in Psalm 3:6, "I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side." David faced this very exact threat from his son Absalom. In 2 Samuel 17, Absalom is counseled to attack David while he is weary and weak, to send out 12,000 troops against him. But a different counselor then says that 12,000 is not enough. So Absalom decides to send out literally tens of thousands of troops against David. Despite this very real and potentially overwhelming threat, David declares, "I will not fear [EVEN] though tens of thousands assail me on every side." He doesn't say this in an arrogant way (I'm not afraid of you!) or because he's feeling overly confident in his own prowess. David says this because he knows that God will be faithful to judge justly and to carry out whatever future He deems best. He has learned to choose this deliberate response: I will NOT fear!

You and I know that God is good, but we also know that sometimes things in life don't feel good.¹⁹ Life is filled with ups/downs, and sometimes it feels like there are a lot more downs than ups, and the downs sometimes seem to last a REALLY long time. Rather than respond by feeling overwhelmed or defeated, we need to make deliberate choices: I will not fear! And I will rest in God's sustaining power!

times were tough, David is guarding his thinking, by reminding himself of God's loving favor and watch care over him. God had not abandoned him. God had chosen him to be the king of his people. He was special to God, even though his current circumstances were grievous to the point of weeping. Even God's chosen people will face struggles at times, but that doesn't change the fact that God has chosen them and still cares deeply for them. David might say it to us this way in 2019, "keep your chin up. You don't need to slump down or hang your head in defeat or weariness. As God's child, you have every reason to hold on to hope."

¹⁵ This holy mountain refers to Jerusalem, a very special city. Jerusalem is the place where David was installed as king and the place where the Ark of the Covenant symbolized God's presence with his people.

¹⁶ Consider Matthew 7:7-11 urging us to ask, seek, and knock because our Heavenly Father loves to give us good gifts.

¹⁷ Also note Psalm 4:8. The hymn, Be Thou My Vision, has a line in it: "waking or sleeping, thy presence my light."

¹⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 858.

¹⁹ Check out the song "Thy Will" by Hillary Scott.

The final thing that Psalm 3 teaches us, about waiting for God's deliverance, is that we need to... **3. Trust that deliverance WILL come.** David is sure of this, so he states it clearly in Psalm 3:7, "Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked."²⁰ There's a bit of a poetic "play on words" between vv. 1 and 7. "Just as David's foes were 'rising up' against him [in v. 1], he now calls on God to 'rise up' against them" in v. 7.²¹ Certain places in the psalms seem pretty harsh, even inappropriate. Particularly places like Psalm 3:7, "break the teeth of the wicked." This seems out of place for God's people, who are called to be peacemakers and to turn the other cheek. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*²² gives some helpful explanation as to why David's response is appropriate.²³ 1st of all...

1. David was appealing to God's nature as a righteous judge,²⁴ so he is asking him to punish evil. In other words, David's prayer is "asking God to rouse himself and act against the wicked" but David himself was not taking revenge into his own hands.²⁵ A 2nd consideration is that...
2. Poetry uses highly figurative language. We shouldn't necessarily always take it literally. Therefore, "break the teeth of the wicked" could be more for poetic affect than actual intent. A 3rd thing that helps explain David's words is that...
3. These harsh statements are often intended to turn people back to God. In other words, there is usually an opportunity for repentance and for seeking God's mercy.²⁶ Therefore, the concerning words in places like Psalm 3:7, are mitigated by our knowledge that God will ALWAYS render a perfect and just decision. And then, unless they have repented, God will enforce a just sentence on each person.

David concludes Psalm 3 with a final thought that moves well beyond just the refuge of God as our shield. In fact, it moves even beyond God's deliverance. It ends with an appeal for God's blessing.²⁷ Psalm 3:8 says, "From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people." David wraps up this Psalm of Deliverance by looking beyond just his own concerns, and he includes an appeal for God's blessing on all of His people.²⁸ In a powerful expression of confidence, David declares in faith that deliverance will come and blessing will follow. It's a confidence in God's character and His faithfulness, to not only hear us but also to respond to us: deliverance WILL come from the LORD!²⁹ Paul's words to the Christ-followers in Corinth are particularly applicable for us today³⁰: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. **He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us!**" Amen.

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²⁰ Psalm 5:10 says, "Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you."

²¹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 980.

²² Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1070.

²³ And in other psalms as well like Psalm 69:22-28 for example.

²⁴ Consider Genesis 12:3. See also Psalm 139:19-24 where David ends by asking God to examine his own heart to make sure that his own motives for wanting God to act aren't impure or offensive.

²⁵ "David showed great personal restraint against Saul, for example, and refused to take vengeance against him even when he had the opportunity." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1070. See 1 Samuel 24 and 26.

²⁶ For example, Psalm 83:16 says, "so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. Cover their faces with shame, LORD, so that they will seek your name." We could also add a 4th reason: David's response shows "a proper outrage at sin... David was justified in showing his outrage at people violating God's standards." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1070. Consider Jesus righteous zeal in Matthew 21:12-13.

²⁷ See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 71.

²⁸ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 71.

²⁹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 860.

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.