

Psalms 3-4 “Salvation Belongs to the LORD”
Psalm 3 and 4
Luke 1:1-25

November 27, 2022

Children,
have you ever had trouble sleeping?
Maybe your leg hurts –
or you have an earache?

You lie there in bed, tossing and turning, calling for mommy or daddy.
They try to comfort you – but they can’t.
Maybe you had a bad dream – and it just won’t go away!
What do you do?

Psalm 3:5 says,
I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.
Psalm 4:8 says,
In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Sometimes it’s really dark.
Sometimes you wonder, “will I really wake up in the morning?”
Will there ever *be* a morning?

Listen:
there was a day when Jesus lay down and slept –
when he died – and was laid to rest in a tomb.
But did Jesus stay dead?
Did he remain in the grave?
No!
God raised him from the dead – he rose again from the dead!

And because Jesus has been raised from the dead,
therefore the power of darkness has been broken.
The Light always shines in the face of Jesus!
And so in your dark nights – when you cannot sleep –
remember Jesus, who lay down and slept, and woke again,
because the LORD sustained him!

Sing Psalm 3
Read Luke 1:1-25

When Gabriel says “your prayer has been heard” –
what prayer is he referring to?

We often think that Zechariah had been praying for a baby –

since the next line is that Elizabeth is going to get pregnant!

But there is nothing in the passage that suggests that Zechariah was praying for a baby!

They had no child – Elizabeth was barren – and now they were old.

Sure – years earlier, no doubt, they had prayed for a baby –

but that was not what he was doing when he offered incense that day.

When the whole multitude of the people came to pray at the hour of incense,
what were they praying for?

They were praying “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!”

Certainly, the baby is the answer to Zechariah’s prayer!

But that was not what he was praying for!

Zechariah was praying something very much like Psalm 3:

“Arise, O LORD!

Save me, O my God!

For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;

you break the teeth of the wicked.

Salvation belongs to the LORD;

your blessing be on your people.”

It helps to look at Psalms 3 and 4 together.

As you can see in the outline in your bulletin,

these two Psalms cover much the same ground:

complaint, confidence, trust, and prayer –

but they cover these themes in different order.

Also, these Psalms share some key themes and language:

There is the language of sleep in 3:5 and 4:8:

There is the language of calling and answering in 3:4 and 4:1

Both Psalms share the theme of a host of enemies who are seeking to destroy me –

but my confidence – my trust – is in the LORD who hears and answers prayer.

And that connects nicely with what Zechariah is doing offering incense in the temple!

Notice the connection between *Memory* and *Prayer*.

Remember what God has done.

Remember that Salvation belongs to the LORD.

If you remember that, then you will have confidence in prayer!

But also,

Pray and call upon the LORD.

Pray in the imperative mood – *demand* that God do what he has promised!

If you pray like that, then you will have confidence in your salvation.

1. Remembering God’s Salvation as Ground for Confidence in Prayer (Psalm 3)

Psalm 3 is titled:

A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

When it says “A Psalm of David”

we don’t know whether that means “by David” “for David” or “about David.”

Does it mean that David composed this when he fled from Absalom his son?

Or does it mean that David composed it years later

reflecting on when he fled from Absalom his son?

Or does it mean that someone else composed it *about David* when he fled from Absalom?

Scripture does not answer these questions!

Rather, the text of scripture – the infallible Word of God –

says that we should *sing this Psalm* remembering how David fled from Absalom.

We usually remember David as the “king after God’s own heart” –

but the central chapters of 2 Samuel reveal a time when David forgot.

It all started with David committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband, Uriah.

And then God told David that he would pay for his sin through his own family.

2 Samuel 13 tells the story of how David’s son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar –

and how Tamar’s full brother Absalom then murdered Amnon –

and how David didn’t really do anything about any of this!

2 Samuel 14 tells how Absalom was restored.

and chapter 15 tells the story of the rebellion of Absalom –

and how Bathsheba’s grandfather, Ahithophel joined his rebellion,

and how David was forced to flee from Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 16 then speaks of the triumph of Absalom over David.

This is where Psalm 3 is located.

David was supposed to be the one who succeeded where Israel failed.

The story of Absalom’s rebellion reminds us that David was too much like Israel.

It’s not enough to think of Psalm 3 as “David’s prayer” during the rebellion of Absalom.

We need to think of Psalm 3 as *Israel’s prayer* because of the rebellion of Absalom.

The rebellion of Absalom reveals that Israel’s king is not all that he should be.

Salvation does not belong to David.

Salvation belongs to the LORD!

a. Complaint: My Foes Say There Is No Salvation (v1-2)

3 O LORD, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

² many are saying of my soul,

there is no salvation for him in God. Selah

Psalm 3 starts with a complaint.

A complaint is addressed to someone in a position of authority or influence
who will be able to do something about the problem.

You need to be a good complainer.

You don't want to be a grumbler – someone who gripes about problems.

You don't want to be a gossip – someone who tells random people about problems.

But you should be a good complainer –

someone who desires to find a godly solution to problems,

and so bring your complaint to someone who can do something about it!

David's complaint in Psalm 3 is that many foes are rising against him –

and so he brings his complaint to the LORD,

the one who is able to do something about it!

We know from 2 Samuel 14-15 that David talked with many wise counselors

as he decided on his response to Absalom's rebellion.

But Psalm 3 reminds us to bring our complaints to the throne of grace!

It's tempting to read verses 1-2 and think of the atheists who tell us that there is no God –

or radical Muslim extremists.

But let's be careful to pay attention to our text.

The title has told us to read this complaint in the light of Absalom's rebellion.

Who were David's foes in Absalom's rebellion?

His son, Absalom.

His closest advisor, Ahithophel.

And his own people, Israel.

When we think about "my foes" nowadays,

we tend to think of people who are distant – perhaps foreign –

certainly we think of them as unbelievers.

But David's foes are his fellow Christians.

In such a time both sides believed that they were following Christ.

Both sides believed that their actions were necessary.

We don't hear from Absalom and Ahithophel in 2 Samuel.

We only hear from David.

We know that Absalom gained many followers by promising that he would bring justice.

Perhaps David's judicial system was flawed and slow.

We know that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather.

Maybe he was angry with David for murdering her husband, Uriah.

Maybe he thought that David had forfeited the crown because of his sin,
and so believed that by setting the son of David on the throne,
the line of David could be preserved.

Or maybe he was upset with his granddaughter
for marrying the man who murdered her husband...

We don't know.

But one thing is clear:

there is no *hint* in the text of idolatry or rebellion against the LORD.

So we need to see Absalom and Ahithophel as "Christians" –
circumcised Israelites who are faithful to God's covenant.

(And if you want to say, "Ah, but treason is not faithfulness!" –
that's true, but neither is murder and adultery!)

In other words, everyone in our story is flawed.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

If you are looking for a heroic good guy whom you can trust at all times –
look at Jesus...

And, well...

just look at Jesus!

And these "many" who rise against me are saying of my soul:

"There is no salvation for him in God."

God will not deliver him!

Think about it.

That makes sense in our story.

Absalom and Ahithophel have every reason to think that God will not deliver him.
David had sinned.

God had even promised that the things that David did in secret
would be done to him in public.

(And Absalom had taken David's concubines and slept with them in public.)

Jesus would also stand surrounded by foes –

surrounded by those who said,

"He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him!" (Matt 27:43)

And who were the ones who said this to Jesus?

The chief priests, with the scribes and elders of Jerusalem.

As it was with David, even so it was with David's greater Son.

The leaders of Jerusalem – his own city – turned against him.

His own disciple betrayed him.

This is why we should not be surprised when our fellow Christians let us down –
when they betray us – when they turn against us.

I'm not saying that it's okay!

We should always *repent* when we sin!
But from the beginning of the scriptures to the end –
we see believers doing things that they shouldn't.
And sometimes, it is other believers who become our "foes."
It was professed Christians who drove J. Gresham Machen
out of his professorship at Princeton Seminary.

And we need to remember that *we are capable of this as well!*
None of us are immune.
Our confidence is not that we are *better* than all these others!

Our confidence is found in verses 3-4:

b. Confidence: But You Are a Shield About Me (v3-4)

³ *But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.*

My confidence is not in myself.

The LORD is my shield, my glory, and the one who lifts my head.
When I am cast down and discouraged
it is the LORD who protects me,
who lifts my head.

The rich and powerful reveal their glory through their entourage –
the fancy cars, the big homes, the fawning admirers.

But the LORD is my glory.
In other words, I don't need all the trappings of power, riches, and fame.
I just need Jesus.

After all, our Lord Jesus himself prayed:

"And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence
with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (John 17:5)
Even for Jesus God was his glory.

Verse 4 reminds us of the previous Psalm:

⁴ *I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah*

In Psalm 2:6, we heard that the LORD established his King on Zion, “my holy hill.”
Now, Psalm 3 reminds us that the LORD answers us from “his holy hill.”
What are you stressed out about?
What are you complaining to God about?
Remember that *everything in your life* is finally decided at God’s holy hill.
We tend to think that we need to manipulate things (or people!)
in order to get things done.
But all the plans and schemes of man are futile – unless the LORD speaks from heaven.

Do not put your confidence in princes – in a son of man in whom there is no strength.
But put your trust in the LORD –
the one who hears and answers us from his holy hill!

And therefore we can sleep!

c. Trust: I Can Sleep Because the LORD Sustains Me (v5-6)

⁵ *I lay down and slept;*

I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ *I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.*

If you were surrounded by thousands of enemies – an army of foes –
I wouldn’t blame you if you had a bout of insomnia!

Of course, the reason why you *can* sleep in the midst of trouble
is because Jesus first lay down in the sleep of death,
and was raised up by the power of his Father!
He woke again – he rose from the dead – because the LORD sustained him.
“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

I don’t think that Jesus slept very much in the night when he was betrayed,
tortured, beaten, interrogated
(he simply didn’t have time!)
but I suspect that he slept very well the night before.

When you are having trouble sleeping,
take that opportunity to draw near to God –
to use that time to bring your complaints to the LORD,
to praise him for how he continues to protect and answer you from his holy hill,
and to ask him to *continue* to do what he has promised –
because salvation belongs to the LORD!

d. Prayer: Save Me! For Salvation Belongs to the LORD (v7-8)

When Israel set out from Sinai, and every time the ark set forth from camp, Moses had said,
“Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered,
and let those who hate you flee before you.” (Numbers 10:35)

Now David echoes these words:

⁷ *Arise, O LORD!
Save me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.*

And just as David was called to succeed where Israel failed –
so now Jesus *has succeeded* where Israel (and David) failed!

It may seem strange to ask God to “strike all my enemies on the cheek”
or “break the teeth of the wicked” –
but think about what these things mean.

What does it mean to strike someone on the cheek?
A slap to the face shames the person who is slapped.

Of course, breaking the teeth of the wicked goes a step further.
The wicked use their teeth to bite and devour.
But the Psalmist says that God breaks the teeth of the wicked.
Not only are they publicly humiliated –
they are also rendered powerless.
No longer can they harm anyone.

And thus Psalm 3 ends:

⁸ *Salvation belongs to the LORD;
your blessing be on your people! Selah*

The song of Jonah in Jonah 2 uses the same phrase –
“Salvation is of the LORD.”

Only God can save.

Only God can bless and bring peace to his people.

Psalm 3 ends with the same theme as Psalm 2 (the same theme that Psalm 1 started with):
“your blessing be on your people.”

Since Psalm 4 deals with all the same themes,
we can move more quickly here.

If Psalm 3 focuses on remembering God’s salvation as our ground for confidence in prayer,
then Psalm 4 sees prayer as the foundation for our confidence in God’s salvation.

In other words, prayer nourishes memory – and memory nourishes prayer.
And you can see how the two work together in 4:1

2. Prayer as Foundation for Confidence in God's Salvation (Psalm 4)

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

a. Prayer: Answer Me! Praying in the Imperative Mood (v1)

4 Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

The Psalmist has great confidence in addressing God.

He uses the imperative:

“Answer me”

“Be gracious to me”

“Hear my prayer.”

David demands that God answer him.

How can David do this?

Because he calls to the “God of my righteousness.”

Origen put it this way:

“The one who calls on the Lord must have true righteousness.

Since Christ is righteous,

the just person, the partaker of righteousness,

must be a partaker of Christ.” (ACC, 27)

And if you are united to Christ – if he is the “God of your righteousness”
then God has promised to hear your prayers in the name of Jesus!

David remembers God's faithfulness in the past –

“you have given me relief when I was in distress” –

and so he comes to God with confidence.

And with that confidence, the Psalmist turns to address those who wrong him.

b. Complaint: the Sons of Men Slander Me (v2)

² O men,^[b] how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah

In Psalm 3, the complaint was addressed to God.

In Psalm 4, the complaint is addressed to those who have wronged David.

What is the difference between the godly and the wicked?

Verse 2 explains that the sons of men “love vain words and seek after lies.”

Remember the blessed man of Psalm 1?

“His delight is in the law of the LORD”

Our problem is that we do not delight in the Law of God –

rather we *love vain words* –
we pursue lies – we chase after them!

Augustine says this well:

“What are the lies you are seeking?
I will tell you right away.
You all want to be happy, I know.
Find me someone who does not want to live a happy life –
let him be a robber, a villain, a fornicator...
up to his neck in misdeeds and crimes of all sorts,
I know that you all want to live happy lives.
But what is it that makes a person’s life happy?
That is something you are not all seeking after.

You are seeking gold, because you imagine you will be happy with gold;
but gold does not make one happy.
Why seek after lies?
Why do you want to get to the top in this world?
Because you imagine you will be happy with honor from people and worldly triumphs;
but worldly triumphs do not make one happy.
Why seek after lies?

And whatever else you may seek after here, when you seek it in a worldly way,
when you seek it by loving earth,
when you seek it by licking the dust of the earth,
the reason you are seeking it is in order to be happy;
but nothing at all that is of the earth will make you happy....
What you are seeking is deceptive; what you are seeking is lies.” (ACC 29)

“Do you want to be happy?
If you like, I will show you what will put it in your power to be happy.
Continue with [our Psalm]:
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?

c. Trust: the LORD Hears When I Call to Him (v3-5)

³ *But know*

“Know what?”

*Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.*

And “godly” is singular.
The LORD has set apart the *godly one* for himself.

“Christ has come to our miseries; he was hungry, he was thirsty, he was tired, he slept,

he performed wonders, he suffered evils, he was scourged, crowned with thorns,
smeared with spittle, slapped around and beaten, nailed to a tree,
wounded with a lance, laid in a tomb;
but on the third day he rose again, all toil at an end, death dead.
There you are, fix your eyes on his resurrection.” (ACC 30)

Therefore, the Psalmist says:

⁴ *Be angry,^[c] and do not sin;*

Remember the complaint of Psalm 4 –

there are people who are turning my honor to shame –

who love vain words and seek after lies.

It’s okay to be angry with those who do evil – with those who pursue lies.

But in your anger, do not sin.

Just because someone else has sinned against you

does not mean that you can sin against them!

That’s why the Psalmist adds:

ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah

This is simply another way of saying, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the LORD.”

If your anger leads *you* to take vengeance, that is not the path of wisdom.

Instead, as verse 5 says:

⁵ *Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.*

What is the “right sacrifice” that we should offer?

Paul says in Romans 12:1,

“present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.”

Jesus is the once-for-all sacrifice that has atoned for sin and made us right with God.

Therefore, the only sacrifice that God requires of us

is that we deny ourselves daily, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

Because we participate in Christ’s sacrifice –

therefore we live a life of self-sacrifice

Psalm 4 concludes with confidence:

d. Confidence: I Sleep in Peace Because You Make Me Dwell in Safety (v6-8)

⁶ *There are many who say, “Who will show us some good?
(who will show us the good life – the happy life!)*

And, of course, the answer is:

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!”

This is the language of the blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6.

“The LORD make his face to shine upon you and give you his peace.”

⁷ *You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.*

⁸ *In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

[Continuing with Augustine]

“In this life you cannot be happy. Nobody can....

But [Christ] came down and ... he took your bad things.....

He promised us his life, but what ...he did is even more unbelievable;

he paid us his death in advance.

As though to say, ‘I am inviting you to my life, where nobody dies,

where life is truly happy....

That is where I am inviting you,

to the region of the angels, to the friendship of the Father and the Holy Spirit,

to the everlasting supper, to be my brothers and sisters,

to be, in a word, myself.

I am inviting you to my life....

We are only going to receive the happy, blessed life,

when we come to him who came to us

and when we begin to be with him who died for us.” (ACC 30)

Jesus invites us to the true feast – to the everlasting supper –

to a banquet more sumptuous and more glorious than any passing fancy

this world could offer.

“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”