

## A Morning Prayer after a Dark Night

### Psalm 3\*

A psalm by David.

When he fled from Absalom his son.

1 *I AM*, how **many** are my foes!

**Many** rise up against me!

2 **Many** are saying of me,

“There is **no deliverance** with God.” selah

3 But you, *I AM*, are a shield around me;

you are my glory, the one who lifts up my head.

4 I cry aloud to *I AM*,

and he answers me from his holy mountain. selah

5 I lay down and slept;

I awoke because *I AM* sustains me.

6 I do not fear the tens of thousands of troops

Who are drawn up against me on every side.

7 Arise, *I AM*!

**Deliver** me, my God!

Strike all my enemies on the cheek;

break the teeth of the wicked.

8 **Deliverance** belongs to *I AM*.

Your blessing be on your people. selah

4:1 For the director of music. With stringed instruments.

#### Meditation #1: Facing the facts (vv. 1-2)

- A. “*Many...many...many*” – David is *outmanned*, the attack is *immanent*, and his *reputation* as God’s son (“king”) is called into question. “The enemies’ taunt “is painful and personal. It strikes at the very heart of the king’s covenant relationship with God.” (Waltke)
- B. Consider a time when you were overwhelmed and outmatched by those who opposed you. How would you give voice to the “*many...many...many*”?

#### Meditation # 2: Finding grounds for confidence – “*But you O LORD*” (3-6)

- A. David is following the example given in Psalm 2 of turning his gaze heavenward in the face of fierce, rebellious attacks and establishing his trust in the One who enthroned him (Ps 2:7-9).
- B. David counters the “*many...many...many*” with 3 metaphors describing God’s covenantal promises: “shield around me” (*inviolable protection*); “my glory” (God preserves his *royal reputation* by delivering him); “lifter of my head” (“David fled Jerusalem with his head covered, but vindicated in victory he returns as king with his *head held high*”).
- C. Note how his confidence is first *anticipated* (4), then *invigorated* (5) and finally *emboldened* erasing all his fears (6).

#### Meditation #3: Praying with confidence (7-8)

- A. David knows his deliverance is sure because is omnipotent and his cause is just.
- B. “Breaking the teeth” signifies that the enemy, who like wild beasts had been eager to devour him, has been rendered harmless and powerless.”

#### Meditation # 4: Reflect how the images and shape of Psalm 3 gave Jesus a voice

- A. “*Many...many...many...no deliverance*” (Mark 15:31-32)
- B. “*But you....shield...glory...lift up my head*” (Rom 1:4)
- C. “*I lay down and slept; I awoke...*” (Ps 16:10-11)
- D. “*Deliver me, my God*” – note change in v. 7 – Jesus is *struck* on the cheek, and head and spit upon (Mark 15:19), but he says, “*Forgive them.*” (Luke 23:34)

\*Translation and quotes are taken from Waltke in Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston with Erica Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 192-209.

### Shall We Pray, "Punish My Enemies"?\*\*

The thirty-five psalms that ask God to punish the enemy are often incorrectly labeled "imprecatory psalms." The label is inappropriate for they do not call curses down upon the enemy, but ask for justice that God avenge, not revenge, the wrong done to the psalmist. The striking contrast, however, between David's petitions to punish his enemies and the absence of such petitions by Christ and his apostles—though they predict judgment upon evildoers and instead instruct the Church to love and forgive one's enemies within the canon—calls for theological reflection. Upon reflection they teach sound doctrine (2 Tim 3:16) and are most holy for the following reasons:

1. These petitions are by saints (especially the innocently suffering king) who have suffered gross injustices.
2. They are **righteous and just**, asking for strict retribution
3. The NT upholds the justice of God and the **legitimacy to pray for justice**
4. They are **just**. The psalmist is seeking to be avenged, not seeking for revenge.
5. These prayers are **ethical**, asking God to distinguish between right and wrong
6. They are **theocratic**, looking for the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness upon the earth
7. They are **theocentric**, aiming to see God praised for manifesting his righteousness and justice in the eyes of all
8. They are **evangelistic**, aiming for conversion of earth by letting all men see that the Lord is Most High over all the earth (Ps 83:17-18).
9. They are "**covenantal**;" a wrong against a saint is seen as a wrong against God.
10. The prayers are **oriental**, full of figures, especially hyperbole.

Though **theologically sound**, however, these petitions for immediate retribution are **inappropriate in our mouth**, because:

1. Ultimate justice occurs at the second coming in the eschaton (Rev 20:11-15); it is appropriate to pray for the destruction of the wicked at that time of judgment and the avenging of the righteous (Rev 6:9-10).
2. Sin and sinner are now more distinctly differentiated (Eph 6:11-18), allowing the saint both to hate sin and to love the sinner.
3. The saint's struggle is against spiritual powers of darkness that he conquers by turning the other cheek and by praying for the forgiveness of enemies through their repentance (Matt 5:39-42).

\*\*Waltke, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 95-98.

### My Psalm 3

As I sat with Psalm 3, I became increasingly aware of an area in my life that had the potential for overwhelming sin and its consequences; I was walking through an intricately planted minefield that could easily blow up my life as I knew it. In the past, I would have simply turned tail and run in the other direction, too afraid to survey the field, too afraid to trust that God wanted to walk me through.

However, I was studying David's journey from Jerusalem to the Judean Wilderness (2 Sam 11-17, Pss 51, 3, 63), and decided to do as David did— to bear witness to the journey, to articulate it in all its tensions, and to offer it to God. Like David, I am never far from thinking the entire journey might end in a debacle, and that God's purposes for me might very well include handing me over to my enemies in order to take me deeper into his grace and truth.

### My Enemies

Oh LORD,

My enemies surround me

before me they taunt, "you have no future."

behind me they mock, "you drip with sin."

to my left they say, "there is nothing for you here"

and to my right they say the same.

Oh LORD,

My enemies hound me

their eyes feast on my destruction

they lick their lips in anticipation

shoulder to shoulder they cut off my escape

my flickering torch is no match for their fangs.

Oh LORD,

I know that You will save me

the question is,

will you save by delivering me

from

or to

my enemies?

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