

The Morning After

Psalm 3



O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me.
² Many are saying of my soul,
"There is no deliverance for him in God." *Selah.*
³ But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.
⁴ I was crying to the LORD with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy mountain. *Selah.*
⁵ I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.
⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set themselves against me round about.
⁷ Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!
For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek;
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.
⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;
Your blessing *be* upon Your people! *Selah.*

Main idea: God's protecting, sufficient, restoring, sustaining grace can be found in times of trouble.

The Psalter is so strategic in its layout that it creates great anticipation about what comes next. The first two chapters stand before us like double-doors that usher us into the worship of God. Psalm 1 tells us *to settle our commitment*. Psalm 2 tells us *to get a clear view of the kingdom*. Then what comes next? Psalms 3 and 4 tell us, "here comes trouble, and this is what to do in the *morning* and in the *evening*."

Outline:

How do we pray with confidence when things seem to be as bad as it gets?

- A. David's Predicament (vv.1-2)— Bring your complaints to the Lord.
 - 1. He told God what his enemies were doing (v.1)
 - 2. He told God what his enemies were saying (v.2)
- B. David's Peace (vv.3-6)— Place your confidence in the Lord.
 - 1. God is a protecting God. (v.3a)
 - 2. God is a sufficient God. (v.3b)
 - 3. God is restoring God. (v.3c)
 - 4. God is a prayer-hearing God. (v.4)
 - 5. God is sustaining God. (vv.5-6)
- C. David's Prayer (vv.7-8)— Give your conflict to the Lord.

Introduction:

Does it ever happen to you? You are out and about, and you hear a song being softly played in the audio system, and the music gets “stuck in your head.” John Piper is one of our generations most prolific theologians, pastors, and poets. He loves to paint pictures with words, and in a recent interview, he made a statement that has been “stuck in my head” since I heard it. He said, *“Sometimes you wake up in the morning, and it just feels like the devil has sat on your face!”* Now, I’ll give you a moment to process *whatever* you think that means, but I think *we all know* something of *that awful feeling* on certain mornings. Perhaps, you feel it after a rough night or a stressful day which did not yield that “REM” sleep. You know those mornings where you would just rather pull the covers up or put the pillow back over your head, and snore as hard as you can! Psalm 3 is a “morning” prayer song for those who have had a rough night and face an uncertain day. Could you use a word from God in the morning to help you fight the battles of the day?

Background:

It is morning in David’s life, but the last 48 hours have been very tumultuous. David is on the run. A coup has taken place in the capital city of Jerusalem. A surprising and violent attempt to oust the king from the throne, seize his reign, and murder the king and his cabinet has happened. The leader at the head of this cold-blooded revolt is David’s own son, Absalom. Talk about dysfunction in the family!

The conspiracy all started when his son stole the hearts of the people and raised a rebellion in the nearby town of Hebron. The background to the story is found in 2 Samuel 15-18. It was so sudden that David had no recourse but to flee Jerusalem with a small band of men and the clothes on his back.

As David and his men raced down a back alley leading to a steep descent from the capital, they crossed the Kidron Valley and made their way over to the Mount of Olives. Finally, they came to the temporary safety of the desert.

The narrative in 2 Samuel tells us that when David left the city, he was weeping with a broken-heart and barefooted, with his head covered in sorrow (2 Sam. 15:30). To compound his shame, he was openly cursed by a man from the old regime of Saul named Shimei who said,

“Get out of here, you murder, you scoundrel!” he shouted at David. “The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul’s clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer.” (2 Sam. 16:7-8 NLT)

That’s the messy situation out of which this third Psalm was written. But there is another angle we dare not forget. This was not merely about *Absalom’s rebellion*; at the back of this trouble *was God’s judgment* on the King for his Bathsheba-Uriah fiasco (Cf. 2 Sam. 12:10-12). God said He would raise up evil against David out of his own house, and here it is. This raises for us the core truth of the Psalm, and it is this: *How do we find confidence in prayer when the deep trouble we face is connected to our own sin? What does God want His people to know about His character and His ways that will give us courage, the morning after?*

Exposition:

Let me place before you three handles that will help us pour the application into our lives.

A. David's Predicament (*vv.1-2*)

How do we pray with confidence when things seem to be as bad as it gets?

Bring your complaints to the Lord.

- ¹ LORD, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me.
² Many are saying of my soul,
"There is no deliverance for him in God." *Selah.*

A military tone is found throughout this psalm. Notice the terms, "*My adversaries*" in verse 1, "*rising up*" verse 1, "*a shield*," verse 3, "*ten thousands of people*," verse 6, "*arise*" verse 7, "*smitten all my enemies on the cheek...*" "*shattered the teeth of the wicked...*" verse 7. All these words take us to the field of military battle. Now you may not be facing a military battle, but when you wake up most mornings, you are facing a battle. Your battle may not be with weapons, but you face open warfare with *words*. You know how it is—the cutthroat environment at work, the cliché-ish groups at school, and sad to say, even the self-righteous folk at church. They don't use guns and knives, but their weapons are their words. They insinuate, gossip, start rumors, make innuendos, misrepresent, and sometimes just flat out lie!

David found himself in this kind of war, and not merely with opposition soldiers, but with his own son. We can all identify with this in some way. Perhaps you've experienced the betrayal of a *spouse*, a *sibling*, a *relative*, or even a *child* who you thought was an ally. But now they stand against you as an army arrayed for battle. What do you do? You could fight back with petty words and anger or even silence. Or, you can do what David did. What did David do?

1. He told God what his enemies were DOING.

- ¹ LORD, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me.

There is a note of surprise and astonishment here—'O *Yahweh!*' The exclamatory "**how**" occurs only once, but it governs the next two lines as well. The enmity is real and strong. "*How many...how many, how many...*" The word "**many**" is repeated twice in verses 1-2, which tells us that the opposition rising up against David seemed to *swell* much larger than he expected. Absalom had been at work for a long time, and now an alarming majority of formidable foes had risen against David—the greatest, most influential men of the realm, as well as the common citizen on the street. Escalating higher, higher, and higher, it now exploded into a full-blown attack. The revolt was great *within* Israel, but the dagger in the heart came from *within his own household*.

David did not run to a fortune-teller, the Jerusalem Press, Twitter, or Instagram to voice his complaints, but he turned to God with his problems. Is that what you do when trouble comes? You say, "Why tell God what they are doing? Doesn't God already see it? And in this case, isn't He allowing this?" Yes, *God already knows—He doesn't learn anything or gain new information*. And yes, *He is in control*, but He still invites His children to "tell Him all about it." The old black Baptist pastor, Cleavant Derricks, followed David's lead and taught us to do the same when he wrote,

(Now let us) have a little talk with Jesus
 (Let us) tell Him all about our troubles
 (He will) hear our fainted cry
 (He will) answer by and by
 (When you) feel a little prayer wheel turning
 (And you) will know a little fire is burnin'
 (You will) find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.¹

2. He told God what his enemies were SAYING.

- ² Many are saying of my soul,
 "There is no deliverance for him in God." *Selah*.

The ranks swelled, but also the rhetoric grew slanderous. There is some question as to whether the best translation is "...to my soul" as opposed to "of my soul," but either way, what is being said to his face about his life *affected his heart* and *pierced* him down to the center of his being (soul).

Notice, what they were saying, "*There is no deliverance for him in God.*" They DID NOT mean that God "*cannot*" help David, but rather, God "*will not*" help David...because this was actually God's judgment upon him. Were they right?

Whatever you are going through at this time in your life, the writer's intention is not to unravel all of the "theological knots" of why you are going through the difficulty. He tells us exactly what he wants us to do with the one word off to the right-hand side of your Bible. Do you see it? It is the word "**Selah.**" It means to pause and reflect or meditate. Professor Davis called them "snow globe" moments. It's what happens when you shake those tiny globes, and it looks like you're in a winter wonderland. You often pause and imagine being there yourself. David interrupts his poem and calls us to pause and reflect.

What King David heard sounded a lot like the slander his descendant, the Greater King—the Lord Jesus—endured on Calvary when the disdainful leaders said in Matthew 27:43,

- ⁴³ HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'

C.H. Spurgeon once said, "It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God."²

Application: Words hurt, but they do more than that; they "grate" the soul into shredded cheese. There is a reason propaganda is used in wartime.

One of the most gripping temptations that David faced, and we face it as well, is that of DESPAIR. What if it is true Lord? What if you will not deliver me, because You are judging me? Will you not help me, because You are the one who is really dealing with me? "Despair is the perfection of unbelief...and bold enterprises and a holy life have no worse foe."³

¹ Cleavant Derricks, *Just a Little Talk With Jesus*

² James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms Volume 1*, p.31

³ William S. Plumer, *Psalms*, p.55

As a Christian, you may not be able to stop the *slandering rhetoric*, but you must know what actions to take. Between the first stanza and the second stanza, much happens. The crisis of verses 1-2, shifts to confidence in verses 3-4. The predicament is met by peace. From the crucible of crisis and predicament, we now see...

B. David's Peace (vv.3-4)

- ³ But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.
⁴ I was crying to the LORD with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy mountain. *Selah*.

How do we pray with confidence when things seem to be as bad as it gets?

Bring your complaints to the Lord.

Place your confidence in the Lord.

A 180-degree turn takes place in the tone of the song. David turns from "*many....many...many*" to "**But You, O LORD,**"

The Hebrew is emphatic! "*But You, O Jehovah*" Whether it is a *quiet turn* or a more vocal one, it does not matter. *Something* has happened which has produced this change. What is it? The answer is that *David has taken his eyes off the enemies, and he has turned them toward the God who knows!* This is step one in dealing with a troubling day.

Application: Dear friends, here we learn a simple principle that we discover throughout the Scripture, and that is, *whenever we think about our enemies or obstacles for too long, they begin to appear bigger and stronger than they really are.* The challenge begins to overwhelm you. The prospect begins to squeeze the life right out of you. People and problems can take on a larger than life persona. But true faith is not a "psychological mind-trick," but "a deliberate choice," "a spiritual ability" to look to Someone else, who you *truly know* and *love*, who can help.

Do you remember Joshua and Caleb, 2 of 12 spies sent into Canaan before the conquest in Numbers 13? They came back with a report to Moses, and the 10 give this report:

- ²⁷ ... "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified *and* very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan."
³⁰ Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." ³² So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of *great* size. ³³ There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

What was the difference between Joshua and Caleb and the others? They saw the *same land*, the *same giants*, the *same obstacles*, but the others *only saw those things*. They forgot about God. Joshua and Caleb *remembered who the Lord is*.

That is precisely what David has done. He places his *confidence* not in *himself*, his *abilities*, or even his *friends and alliances*, but *he looks to the Lord*. And in doing so, he tells us five things about the sort of God we have as Christians. What sort of God is our God?

1. God is a protecting God. (v.3a)

³ But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,

This is precisely the kind of God you need when your enemies are all around you. "God, you are a shield about me..." Borrowing the language of the battlefield, David says, "God, you are my impenetrable defense!" David knew what it meant to use a shield to protect himself from deadly arrows, swords, and spears, and now He says, "But You, O Lord are not an armor-bearer, you are the full-body Armor itself for those who trust You."

The word "**about**" literally means that God covers you on every side. The same idea is captured in the very first of the Ten Commandments.

- **Exodus 20:3**—You [singular] shall have no other gods before Me.

The prepositional phrase "*before Me*" is a multi-dimensional word which means we are to have no gods "*over against Him*," "*above Him*," "*below Him*," "*in front of Him*," "*behind Him*," or "*around Him*." No gods are allowed to be anywhere around us to claim *obedience* or *affection*. In the same way that we are not allowed to have any gods around us, God Himself *surrounds* or *covers* us on every side. He is our God!

- **Psalms 5:12**—For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield.
- **Psalms 28:7**—The LORD is my strength and my shield;
My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart exults,
And with my song I shall thank Him.

2. God is a sufficient God. (v.3b)

³ My glory,

The word "**glory**" conveys the idea of *weightiness* and *substance*. It was often used to describe the worth of a person's wealth. David has, at that moment, lost all earthy "glory," but his real glory remains—in the surrounding presence of Yahweh. David is saying, "although my throne is being taken from me, my real worth, my real substance, my glory is in Yahweh Himself. If Yahweh is my glory, I have all I need."

- **Psalms 62:7**—On God my salvation and my glory *rest*;
The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.

God is not only *a protecting God* and *a sufficient God*...

3. God is a **restoring** God. (v.3c)

³ and the One who lifts my head.

David's head was covered in sorrow and bowed down when he left Jerusalem, but even in the desert of his sorrow, he knows God as one who "*lifts up the head*." This idea is found in Genesis 40:13, 20-21 when Pharaoh lifted up the head of his cupbearer and restored him to his office.

- ¹³ within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer.
- ²⁰ Thus it came about on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand;

In the flight and fight of his life, David still has a song of hope in his heart. We can expect God to do this for us, even if we don't see Him doing it right now. *God is a protecting God. God is a sufficient God. God is a restoring God.*

4. God is a **prayer-hearing** God. (v.4)

⁴ I was crying to the LORD with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy mountain.

The kind of prayer that David describes here is that *desperate, vocal prayer* that bursts out of our lives when we find ourselves overwhelmed with trouble and heartache. "**With my voice**" describes how David is spelling out his prayer in his own words, coming personally to Yahweh and telling Him the whole story as he knew it. This is how we are to pray in the troubled day. Spell it out. Talk to God. In your own words, sincerely and personally.

The verbs "**crying**" and "**answered**" are translated in the past tense. But in the Hebrew, both verbs are future. If the past tense is taken, we find David encouraging himself by looking back on God's answers to prayer. If the future is taken, David is expressing his confidence in God for the days to come. Either way, the doctrine taught is still the same. God is a prayer-hearing God.

What is fascinating here is that David is *leaving Jerusalem*—the site of the tabernacle—and although distance is being put between himself and God's holy hill, his prayers reach God when he has no physical access there. In other words, God is accessible, and with God, "hearing is answering."

At this point, another "snow globe" moment is given. **Selah**. We would do well to follow these inspired cues. Pause and meditate.

- Since God is a **protecting** God—"If God be for you, who can be against you?" (Rom.8:31)
- Since God is a **sufficient** God—and "*In His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore*" (Ps.16:11), what am I looking to, to find my identity and fulfillment?
- Since God is a **restoring** God—is there any burden too heavy for Him to lift? Your failures are not fatal.
- Since God is a **prayer-hearing** God—Is there a distance that you can go that is too far for God to hear you? No, dear friends. You may feel that you're in the far country of sin, but you're just a prayer away from restoration if you call out to God.

There is one more thing that we need to know about the God in whom we can place our confidence.

5. God is a sustaining God. (vv.5-6)

- ⁵ I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.
⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set themselves against me round about.

This whole “sleeping and waking up business” has to do with *the peace we can enjoy now* and in *the future*. Prayer is not only good preparation for sleep, but knowing that God is a protecting, sufficient, restoring, and prayer-hearing God, enables us to lay down and get some rest! The word “**I**” is emphatic and expresses David’s peace in this way, “Imagine me, placed as I am in this position, getting a good night’s rest! I laid down and slept and how well I slept!”

In Mark 4, there is that dramatic account of Jesus leading the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee, and suddenly they were arrested by a massive storm that was filling the boat with water, but Jesus, Mark writes, “...*was in the stern, asleep on the cushion*” (4:38a). Little did they know that Jesus led them *into the storm* and was testing them *in the storm*. The same can be said of “our troubled day” right now.

In a panic, they woke Jesus up and said, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38). What Jesus did and then said become a New Testament “Selah/snow globe” moment.

- ³⁹And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. ⁴⁰ And He said to them, “Why are you afraid?”

[In other words, “Is it not enough to know that I am here beside you?”]

Do you still have no faith?”

[Ouch! In other words, “Don’t you believe that I am adequate?”]

⁴¹ They became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

David knew who Christ was even before He came in His incarnation. David knew Him as the Son of Man in the furnace, the Lord of glory, the God of the storm, but for us, we know Him as the Son of God in the humanity of our lives, and God on the journey with us.

The reason David was able to go to sleep in the storm was that He knew His Father controlled the storm; this is what David had come to recognize. Have you?

“*I lay down and slept...*”—he is looking back in amazement.

“*I awoke, for the Lord sustains me*”—he is taking nothing for granted.

“*I will not be afraid...*”—as he looks to the future.

In *Flags of Our Fathers*,⁴ James Bradley tells of the famous photograph of the Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima in 1945. It appeared in numerous papers, including a hometown Texas newspaper being perused by Ed Block, home on leave from the Air Force. His mother, Belle, walked by, glanced at the photograph, pointed to the marine thrusting the pole down in the ground, and told Ed that was his brother Harlon. Ed refuted his mother: there was no side view, just the back of a marine; besides they didn't even know if Harlon was on Iwo Jima; there's no way she could know that that fellow was her Harlon. But Belle was sure; as she strode into the kitchen, she simply said, "I know my boy."

Actually, that figure was identified as Henry Hansen. But Belle Block was still unmoved. Sadly, the family soon received word that Harlon had been killed in action on Iwo Jima. But in 1947, after additional testimony, they received notification of a correction: Henry Hansen had not been in the picture; the lad aiming the pole into the ground was Harlon Block. Belle Block was hardly surprised: "I know my boy."⁴

- **Psalm 9:10**—And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,
For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.

When we know *who God is*—not just of Him through general revelation, but know His character—because we have experienced His mercy and grace in Christ—we know that God is a Father that we can place our confidence in today, and every moment of every day. Even in times of trouble.

How do we pray with confidence when things seem to be as bad as it gets?

Bring your complaints to the Lord.

Place your confidence in the Lord.

C. David's Prayer (vv.7-8)

Give your conflict to the Lord.

- ⁷ Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!
For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek;
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.
⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;
Your blessing *be* upon Your people! *Selah*.

I think we can lose the punch of this closing prayer of David by parsing too many verbs, but there are two things worth noting which help us to retain the "flavor."

1. David's prayer is in the past tense as if his enemies *are already dealt with*, but we know that Absalom and Company are still on the loose and out to kill him. Absalom may have seized Mt. Zion on earth, but Yahweh is still on the throne! So, why is he praying this way? Because, David is so certain of God's rescue that he describes it as if *it had already taken place*. This shows us that *God can give you peace, although your problems are still there*—and that peace is an assurance that salvation is yours.
2. "Smiting all his enemies on the cheek, shattering their teeth," one translation renders this, "Slap them in the face!" (NLT), and this may all sound so brutal and violent, but the gist or principle of David's prayer is this: God does not have to move you to protect you. He can knock the teeth out of the

⁴ Excerpt from *The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life*, Dale Ralph Davis

enemies' mouth so they can't harm you. God can make those who oppose His chosen like a "toothless tiger." All noise, but no real danger.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. God will give you victory if you belong to Him. These troubles are not just yours *individually*; they belong to God's people. David closes his prayer, that runs beyond his personal concerns, and includes God's people. This is what true faith always does. It operates in a community of faith. Upon your people, David prayed, "Your blessing, Yahweh!" Are you in the family or still outside? The blessings for those inside.

Conclusion:

- **Bring your complaints to the Lord.**
- **Place your confidence in the Lord.**
- **Give your conflict to the Lord.**

It closes with another **Selah** "snow globe" moment. Let us pause and meditate.

In a predicament? Consider God's sovereign hand. What is He seeking to teach you?

In need of peace? Bring, place, and give your life to the Lord.

How do you pray? (You just) have a little talk with Jesus.

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