

Study of the Psalms

An Overview

In churches we use the psalms a lot. What ways do we use the psalms? **Answer – singing, speaking, responses. (The Psalter)**

Psalm – Greek Psalmos – which means “song”. The Hebrew name for the Book of Psalms is Tehillim which means Praises, pointing out that these are songs offered to God in public worship.

The psalms are a collection of 150 poems that express a wide variety of emotions. What kind of emotions are covered? Answer – love, adoration of God, praise, sorrow of sin, dependency on God, fear, trust, thankfulness, confidence of God’s purposes, lament. This sums up life, so it’s an extremely useful series of texts to explore as it helps us understand what the psalmist was dealing with in life. It’s real.

Who wrote the psalms? David is the most common author – he appears in 73 titles. Any others? **Answer : Sons of Korah (11), Asaph (12), Solomon (maybe 2), Moses (1)**

Why do you think many were associated with David? Clue – what was one of his skills?
Answer – he was a musician, he was active in the development of worship.

Sons of Korah served in the Sanctuary. Asaph would have been in charge of singing in the house of the Lord.

There were certain events that happened in David’s life that can be connected to the Psalms. For example : 3 – David flees from Absalom – 2 Samuel 15-17, Psalm 57 – David flees from Saul into a cave – 1 Samuel 22:1.

With the psalms written by different people, we can get a sense of it covering a diverse period in Israel’s History. Therefore the psalms is a collection and gathering.

There are in Hebrew 5 books. The psalm that ends each section has a doxology (Gloria)

So if we look at these verses : Psalm 41:13, 72:18-20, 89:52, 106:48, 150:6 - what do these verses tell us about the overall theme of the Psalms? **Answer : Whatever our situation and whatever we face, God deserves all the praise.**

Clearly we can’t cover every psalm, instead we want to gain a thematic picture (the main themes) of the emotions felt by the psalmist to God. Tonight we are beginning with Psalm 3

Psalm 3

So before we read the scriptures, lets begin with a question

1. What are the things that would keep you awake at night? Imagine you are lying awake at night because you are brooding on something.

Background and context

This Psalm was written when David fled from a coup led by his son Absalom. And we find this story in 2 Samuel 15-16.

Absalom was David's third son, to his wife Maacah. The first we properly hear of Absalom involved his sister Tamar and his half-brother Amnon. Amnon lusted after her and then raped her. Absalom brought Tamar back and nursed her and the hatred she had of Amnon. Then Absalom invited Amnon to his house for a party where he had arranged to have Amnon killed. Absalom in fear of his father David ran away. There was eventually a slight reconciliation between the two but not for long.

Possibly resenting his father's hesitancy to bring him home, Absalom began to undermine David's rule. He set himself up as judge in Jerusalem and gave out promises of what he would do if he were king. After four years of this, he asked to go to Hebron, where he had secretly arranged to have himself proclaimed king.

The conspiracy strengthened, Absalom's followers growing in size, such that David began to fear for his own life. David gathered his servants and fled Jerusalem. And that's the context of this psalm 3.

Let's now read the Psalm through, but let's read it twice. The first time to become familiar with what it is saying, and then second time to grasp specific features.

So let's look now at the opening 2 verses. **What does David see?** – he sees many foes, many rising up against him, many are saying that his soul is lost, God will not deliver him.

So David is not in a good place.

David begins with the words 'O LORD'. Anywhere where you see LORD in small capitals it means the word 'Yahweh' and that is the personal covenant name of God. God revealed Himself to Moses with this name at the burning bush.

So these initial words represent David's personal relationship with God. It's a personal cry for help.

The enemies that are pressing on him are reminding David of his past sins. Remember Bathsheba, now he has the enemy in his own son. And they are making him very aware of it. They are taunting him of it.

There is nothing worse than being reminded of your past, but your past doesn't define your future when you lay everything before God.

Now you may have in your bibles a little word called ‘Selah’. It’s considered to be a musical term. It’s a term that means, take a break, pause. It’s like the end of a movement in a concerto, a chance to breathe. It’s important when we read the psalms to take these Selah moments, to take these opportunities to reflect, instead of rushing right in to the next verse.

Use this Selah moment to consider just for a minute things that have happened in your lives where your past has been brought up against you, or you have felt attack from every side and how it has invaded into you. It could be an attack on your personality or your reputation and it really hurts.

So that’s what David sees in front of him, and what’s in his mind. But now David’s focus shifts away from that. In fact he begins with the words, “But you”

Verses 3-6 focus now on what David believes. **What are the declarations that David makes about God?** This next section shows the Lord to be our shield, our glory, the restorer of our joy, and our prayer-answering God.

Remember the shield of faith from Ephesians 6. God is our protector and defender. But notice also that it’s not just a shield or God’s shield. It’s a shield around him or about him. It’s personalised. Our faith and trust in God has to be personal.

Glory – Our identification with the Lord can be our only claim to glory. Today we are living in an time when all the structures, all the powers are crumbling as a result of a virus. People’s positions and titles mean nothing to this virus. The only thing that we need is to know that we share in Christ’s glory.

Restorer – lifts up David’s head. All crises bring us to a point where our heads are laid low. This expression ‘lifter of my head’ was a Hebrew expression for restoration. By way of application, this refers to God restoring to us the joy that we had before the crisis brought us low. He humbles the proud, but lifts up the humble who cry out to Him, bringing joy to those He restores

David knows he can call out to God in prayer – David knew his past sins. David had been separated physically from his place of worship, but still he knew he could cry out to God anywhere. no matter where we’re at or in what kind of difficult circumstances we find ourselves—even if our difficulties are the result of our own sin or failure—we can cry out to the Lord for grace and know that He will hear and answer according to His purpose.

So David sees what’s in front of him, he knows what he believes, and so how does this affect his sleeping pattern? Verse 5 shows that he sleeps well.

So let’s take that Selah moment again and see how we can stop, breathe, and connect these sections together.

What does David do in order to bring peace to his situation? He believes and has faith in God's provision and power. He lays everything before the Lord in prayer.

There's actually a brilliant verse that this connects us with. Philippians 4:6-6 "Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." David cried out to God in prayer, then he went to bed—not in the palace, but camped in the wilderness—and slept through the night.

The other thing to notice here, is that David says in verse 6 that he **will not** fear. He doesn't say I do not fear. He actively decides not to fear. That's a declaration of the future. It's an event that hasn't even taken place yet – it's declaring that the what if moments in life that may never happen, are surrounded by the protection and reassurance that only God can bring. When the Lord is your shield and the one who sustains you, the odds or numbers against you don't matter.

What is it that enables David to respond to this situation without fear? David had an intimate trust in God and therefore that affected his reaction. How well we know and trust God really does make a difference to how we feel in times of trouble.

Application – **so how do people deal with anxiety?**

David will not fear. He speaks to truth into his own mind which is based on the truth of God's Word. **How can we use this to help our own situations?** Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths. So lay everything before the Lord.

Let's finish with verses 7 & 8. David could have stopped at verse 6. He recognised that in the real world anxiety can very quickly kick back in, and it can do the same with us. One day we trust the Lord, we place everything in his hands, and then the next day something else comes along to worry us. So he uses his language in verse 1 to now turn it on its head as a petition or as a prayer to God.

Verse 1 he says that his foes rise up against him. In verse 7 he uses the same language – Arise O Lord. In verse 2 his enemies are declaring that God will not save him or deliver him. Now in verse 7 he prays that God would deliver or save him.

And David prays believing it was going to happen. He wasn't dependent on his army. He is acknowledging that any victory will come from God alone. The reason why this is important, is that as we cast everything on God, He always gets the praise due to him when he delivers us, rather than us believing that it was something we have achieved on our own.

This teaches us that God can use our worst trials to deepen our trust in Him and to produce praises that will encourage His people. When life falls apart, you can experience God's peace by laying hold of Him in believing prayer. When He answers, He gets the glory, you get the joy, and God's people get the blessing.

There's the Selah moment again. So let's breathe and consider how with the worries or concerns that you and others may face. How can we consider David's final line that blessing may come to his people. Maybe from this to not just pray about our problems, but also to pray for God's greater purpose and glory for His people.

Final Task for the week – is there a favourite verse that you have connected with today in our reading? That may be a verse that God wants to remind you of right now. It might be verse 3 or it might be verse 5 or for this particular time for our country and coronavirus it might be verse 8. Whichever it is, see if you can memorise it.

Reading for next week will be Psalm 16 and the passage that connects it is 1 Samuel 26