

Psalm 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 June 2017

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] How to pray in thick trouble. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us. Father God, we recognize that you are our God. We praise you that you made us.

And we pray that you'd help us as we hear your voice to remember our creatureliness. That we would hear rightly, think differently, and our hearts would be willing to change and follow you.

Amen. So how to pray in thick trouble. Well, in the last couple of weeks, we've seen ways that our world is in thick trouble.

Teenagers in Manchester, some of them at their first ever music concert, targeted by a suicide bomber. Then Londoners enjoying a Saturday night out, eating and drinking in Borough Market, mowed down by a van on the pavement.

[1 : 1 2] And then people stabbed to death. Times like that, lots of us ask, why? Why would God allow these things to happen?

Sometimes people who never really ever think about God ask questions like that, about events like this. It's worth saying if there isn't a God, then events like the last couple of weeks are deeply problematic to try and wrestle with without a God.

But on the atheist worldview, humans don't really have any significance. I remember one of my friends saying to me, I'm struggling in life because I think Darwin was right, was what he said, as in he's an atheist.

And he said, it just means we're nothing more than just ants scurrying across a warm rock. So the universe doesn't know what happened at Borough Market, and the universe doesn't care.

A terrorist bomb is like a solar eclipse. It's all just matter in motion if there's no God. But for the Christian, we believe in an all-powerful, all-good God.

[2 : 2 0] And we're left with questions about why didn't God intervene to restrain the evil intentions of people on those days. And I think it's quite natural of us to have those questions.

But we also need to have humility when we come to God in confusion like that. Because as soon as you allow God to be as big as the Bible describes him, a God who is all-powerful and all-good, we have to be willing to accept that he knows a lot of stuff that we don't, and his ways are not our ways.

And be humble as we come to him. He might have reasons for allowing evil and suffering that we couldn't even grasp today with our limited understanding and experience.

But we do know what the answer can't be. The answer can't be that God doesn't care. And we know the answer isn't that God doesn't care, because he doesn't look at suffering in our world from a distance.

He entered into our world as a man and suffered the worst that humans could give him. So we know he cares because of the cross. But in situations like that, what we must do if we believe in this God is pray.

[3 : 34] We must talk to him. And Psalm 3 is a great lesson on praying in thick trouble. The Psalms are a songbook in the Bible. And this song, Psalm 3, naturally divides into four sections.

It was written by King David. And our first section is about the enemies David faces. If you have a look with me at the heading of the psalm, it says, A Psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom.

So we're told what was going on when David wrote and prayed this prayer. David was God's anointed king of Israel about a thousand years before Jesus. So he is the Christ.

He's the Christ king at the time. Christ David, if you like. And you could say that when you look at the Bible, David is the most clear prequel we get to Jesus, God's ultimate promise rescuing king.

What we read from him and about him in the Old Testament is ultimately a shadow. And when Jesus comes, we see the fulfillment of that. And the location of this psalm is deliberately shocking.

[4 : 38] The first two psalms were like gateposts on your way into the book. It's a big book, 150 psalms. And it's as though as you enter them, you go through these gateposts of Psalms 1 and 2.

The first one was about how you read the book. So it talked in verse 2. Verse 1 promises blessing. Verse 2, it says that you delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night.

And then there was a promise in verse 6. The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction. And I don't know about you, but I think that describes a world that we'd all be pretty happy with.

We want justice in the world. And we're hearing in Psalm 1 that there's this world where God watches over the righteous, but if you're wicked, you perish.

That's the kind of world that we want. In Psalm 2, we then get introduced to the main character in the psalms, the king. It's a coronation psalm. Neil read it for us.

[5 : 36] Sure, there are enemies described there. But God says in verse 6, I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill, reference to Jerusalem. And then the son himself speaks in verse 7, and he tells us what God the Father has said to him.

I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me, you are my son. Today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

So we're told in the final verse, kiss his son. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Take refuge in God's son, this king who we're being told about.

So again, just like Psalm 1, that's a world that makes good sense, doesn't it? If God's got a king, you'd expect that he's going to rule and be in charge, and if someone rebels against him, they're going to get crushed.

When God's chosen king, the Christ, is on the throne, he's a good king. He's going to bless and approve of people who take refuge in him. All well and good. Gate posts into the book.

[6 : 40] I went to see Johan and Lakshmi. If you're a regular at St. Sars, you might know Johan and Lakshmi. They come in the morning. I went to see them recently. They live on the south side. I'm not very used to being around the south side. So I didn't quite know where they lived.

I'm driving along, got my sat-nav in the car, and they've got gate posts at the front of their house. And when I saw these gate posts, I was really relieved. Ah, I'm here.

And as I drove through the gate posts, I was really happy, anticipating seeing Johan and Lakshmi. And then the first thing that happened to me as I drove in was I crashed the car. I could see the hedge.

It was dark. It was dark. I could see that there was a hedge, just about, and it was kind of curving around. What I didn't see was there was a black gate sticking out from the hedge. So when I drove through the gate posts, I scraped the side of the car against this black gate.

It's a bit like that when you get to Psalm 3. It's a nasty shock after you've gone through the gate posts of Psalms 1 and 2. Because verse 1 says, and this is the king we've just heard about, Lord, how many are my foes?

[7 : 49] How many rise up against me? Many are saying of me, God will not deliver him. And you think, what's happened to the king? But that makes this psalm very important because it introduces the broken reality of the world we see today.

The world today isn't a Psalms 1 and 2 world a lot of the time. It's a world that doesn't make sense, where there is injustice. And Psalm 3 takes us right to the heart of it.

The fundamental reason why the world isn't the way it should be is because we don't want God's anointed king to rule. So we rebel against him. That's what happened to King David.

His own son, Absalom, got himself a chariot and horses and a regiment of imperial guards. He used to stand at the city gate in Jerusalem. And when people came into the city, he would butter them up and flatter them and say, oh, if only there was a good king around who administered justice.

Wouldn't that be great? And then he sent messengers throughout Israel and he pulled together an army and he started to head for Jerusalem for a coup. David hears the news and he flees.

[9 : 04] He flees the city of David. It's the city of David, but he's on the run. And he writes this psalm from a place of desperation. His enemies are everywhere. They're growing in number.

They're surrounding him and closing in on him like a boa constrictor squeezing the life out of its prey. So the psalm is about him. But picture Jesus a thousand years later when the crowd turned on him so quickly in those last days.

And he's led away, betrayed, to the high priest's house for a trial by night. And then he's handed over to soldiers who mock and torture him.

Oh, Lord, how many are my foes? How many rise up against me? And picture him on the cross when people mocked him and said, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

Verse 3 of Psalm 3. Sorry, verse 2 of Psalm 3. Many are saying of me, God will not deliver him. True of Jesus.

[10 : 19] And when you become a Christian, you're in a union with Jesus so that whatever happens to him happens to us. The positives of eternal life, resurrection, hope, but also being marked as one of his people in a world where humanity doesn't want him to rule.

So that when the world rises up against God's anointed one, it is his people who suffer. And it can feel as though we have enemies surrounding us and criticizing us.

And sometimes the worst opposition to God's anointed king comes from within God's people or those who are called God's people. Do you see that? That's what's going on for David.

It was his own son, Absalom. This is Israel. This is the people of God at that time rebelling against God's king. Just as the equivalent would be today that people at church, in the institution of church, reject Jesus as king.

Often when you hear today about the persecution of faithful Christians in some parts of the world, often, perhaps not most of the time, but often, it can be the institutional church that persecutes people of real faith.

[11 : 41] There was an Anglican church in America when the denomination rejected the Bible. This Anglican church, as graciously as they could, I think, from what I've heard, said to their diocese, we feel we need to leave in conscience.

We'd like to buy our building off you. And they offered \$150,000 for their building. The diocese refused the offer and gave them an eviction order from the church building and the manse that the minister lived in.

They'd been offered \$150,000 by the congregation. They then sold the building to a mosque for \$50,000 on condition that the mosque never sells it to the church that left.

So the congregation lost the building. The minister lost his home. And the Bible says in 2 Timothy chapter 3, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Thankfully, in Scotland, a lot of the time, we're so protected from that. But when that's you and me, Psalm 3 reassures us this kind of mess is normal.

[12 : 56] And when it happens to us, this is how we should pray. It's remarkable confidence in God, isn't it? That when people save you, God will not deliver him or her.

God's not on their side. Your response is you talk to God, appeal to Him. And the next verses show us where that confidence comes from.

Our second point, the God, David, confesses. If you just think about how you pray, so often we come to God praying and we ask, ask, ask, and we talk about our situation and what we're going through.

We tell God how we feel and then we stop there. But David doesn't stop there. Instead, he tells God and himself about God.

Have a look with me at verses 3 and 4. But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the one who lifts my head high.

[13 : 53] I call out to the Lord and He answers me from His holy mountain. So prayer becomes a conversation. This is the God He knows and it's the God we know as well.

Notice what He calls God, the Lord. Whenever you see that word in the Bible, the Lord, in capital letters, it's the way our Bibles translate God's name, that He gave Himself, Yahweh.

So when we see that term for God, we should always be thinking, covenant God, the God who has bound Himself to His people in promises and gave them this name, Yahweh, so that He would be known by His people.

David's enemies don't know Yahweh, so in verse 2, they say, God. But David calls Him Yahweh because He knows Him by name. And He brings to mind four things about the Lord in verses 3 and 4.

First, that He is the protector. You, Lord, are a shield around me. There's no weak point when God is your shield. He's not a little round shield where you go into battle and you be a bit kind of worried that someone would get round it.

[15 : 03] Or, I don't know if you, I really strongly remember at school, I don't know if you remember this, when you learn about the Romans, that they used to have this kind of tortoise formation with their shields where they'd kind of line up and some of them would hold them above their heads in case anyone attacked from above and others would go forwards and they'd kind of edge forwards in this tortoise thing.

It was pretty cumbersome doing that. But God is far better than that. He's a shield that goes all around you. This is like driving a tank into battle in the days when people just had bows and arrows.

Secondly, the Lord is sufficient. It's the world against David and he's lost all his status before men. But in verse 3, he says to Yahweh, but you bestow glory on me.

He says, my glory, God is his glory, the one who lifts my head high. So David knows that he serves the majestic, glorious, creator of the universe and that that's enough.

Even though the world turns its back on God's chosen king, God gives him all the glory he needs. I don't even remember the tennis player, Tim Henman. He's better remembered by English guys because, you know, Andy Murray is obviously much better but he's Scottish.

[16 : 22] And Tim Henman kind of kept nearly winning Wimbledon. and he got, he came really, really close one year and when he lost, the commentator said to him, how do you come to terms with a defeat like that when you could have kind of been known forever as the guy who had cracked winning Wimbledon and you've not managed?

And he said, well, you know, it is upsetting but I get home and I remember the next day that my mum still loves me. She thinks I'm great and it was very human but it was great because he realized from Tim Henman ultimately his status didn't depend on his performance.

Well, how much more for us to know that God bestows glory on us. Everyone else in the world might think you're mad for being a Christian and worse today, they might think you're immoral for being a Christian.

There's no glory from the world for being a Christian. There's lots of shame but in Romans 8 we hear that if you're a Christian, God says of you, I loved you before I made the world.

I chose you before I made anything else. I justified you by sending my son. I've already glorified you so that in the new creation you'll reign with him.

[17 : 44] Thirdly, the Lord is the restorer. So that next bit he says of Yahweh, my glory and then he says, the one who lifts my head high. So God will restore David's downcast spirit and will restore his status on the throne.

You see, it doesn't really matter if some people don't want you to be king so long as the righteous kingmaker wants you to be king. And there are times when we might need God to lift up our head.

When somebody says, you're not a Christian, are you? You don't believe all that stuff, do you? Or, I was trying to think of other times we kind of get low in spirits.

I asked a friend of mine not so long ago who's not a Christian, would you like to read the Bible with me? And I had this patter I'd prepared about, you know, when was the last time you actually looked at Jesus for yourself?

Why don't we do that together? And I sort of planned it and I prayed and I said, so would you like to read the Bible with me? And he said, no. And it was disheartening. I was crestfallen.

[18 : 50] But we can turn to God and he lifts up our heads. And fourthly, David knows that his God is accessible. You see that in verse 4? To the Lord I cry aloud and he answers me from his holy hill.

Now that is an extraordinary verse in the Old Testament, you see, because in Psalm 2 verse 6, just up in the previous Psalm, we heard that God installs his king on Zion, his holy mountain, right?

But by Psalm 3, David has had to run from the holy mountain. He's far from Jerusalem. Absalom is the one on Zion. So does Absalom now have access to God?

Of course he doesn't. It doesn't matter how far from Jerusalem David has to run. David's God will hear him and answer his prayers. And so picture Jesus again on the cross amidst the agony and chaos of what's going on.

He says to his God and Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. He knows that his God is his protector and won't abandon him forever.

[19 : 58] He knows that his God is sufficient and that doing his will gives him all the glory he needs. He knows that his God is the restorer who'll lift up his head when he needs to.

He says, God, he says, God, he says, he has his head high and high.

He says, enter my eyes, I give you and I'll follow you. Great. Yeah, no, I agree with that.

Can I talk to you about it afterwards? Is that okay? Yeah, great. Great. Great. Okay. Okay. I'll just carry on, okay?

Okay. I feel that I'm sorry this is up here and I think religion is just getting ripped out of hand.

[21 : 00] And I think religion has caused a lot of it because we keep Catholic, we keep practicing. Let's go through.

Okay, why don't we just, we'll just have a moment of quiet just for people to look at Psalm 3. I'll come and talk to you and then I'll carry on. Okay. Let's just take a moment. We'll try and carry on.

So, four wonderful things about God. He's the protector, a shield around me. He's the sufficient one who gives us glory far beyond what we deserve because of Jesus. He's our restorer so that however rejected we might feel, he's the one who can lift up our head.

And he's accessible. It doesn't matter where you end up in the world, your God will hear you if you call to him. Nobody else has a God like this.

And so it's important that when you wake up in the morning and you feel low, you don't just listen to yourself and your own feelings. That's my battle sometimes. I'll get up and I'll feel disappointed or sad about something and I just listen to myself.

[22 : 07] And instead, what David does is he tells God truth about God so it gets into his heart. So now we see how David responds.

The third point, the rest David enjoys. Verse 5, he says, I lie down and sleep. I wake again because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

Now if you were one of David's mighty men or his press officer or something, I wonder if you'd be thinking, what on earth is David doing here? There's a coup against him and he's gone to sleep.

But the I of verse 5 is a direct relation to the you of verse 3. Because you, God, are like this, I'm going off to take a nap. That's how at ease I can feel in this situation.

In verse 5, there's the immediate relief from stress that he can sleep that very night. And then in verse 6, the assurance that in the longer term, he trusts that he will be, he'll get long-term relief from fear.

[23 : 08] And that's a great promise, isn't it? Even when there are times when we feel battered in and we don't know quite what the way out will be, when we fill our mind with what God is like, we should be able to sleep.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm not a very good sleeper. And I need to remember, God can look after his own kingdom. And that means his people can be confident in their ultimate future.

So we move on to the last verse, the help that David expects. There's great confidence in verse 7. Arise, Lord. Deliver me, my God.

Strike all my enemies on the jaw. Break the teeth of the wicked. From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. Now we might find verse 7 quite shocking.

Maybe it doesn't sit well with us in Jesus' command that we love our enemies and we pray for those who persecute us. And here's David, seemingly asking God to smash his enemies' teeth in. But Christians who face serious injustice around the world have far less trouble coming to terms with psalms like this.

[24 : 14] If you're in North Korea or in any country where Christians are being tortured and murdered by a corrupt and evil dictator, it seems appropriate to ask God either to bring that dictator to repent or, if they won't repent, that the law will take them away in judgment.

And even though the language here might sound brutal, there's more to it than that. Because I think when we look at the psalms and we get these verses where the psalm writers will ask God to strike down their enemies, there's always a relationship between what they ask for and what their enemies were doing.

So you see, what were David's enemies doing in verse 2? They were speaking against God's anointed king. And David needs that speaking to stop.

So he asks God to silence them. That's why there's that language to do with their mouths. Then in verse 8, he reminds himself why he's got nothing to fear. He says, from the Lord comes deliverance.

I don't know if you saw on the news this week, but there was a ring that went on sale at Sotheby's. It was bought for a tenner in a car boot sale. It had a massive rock and the person who bought it thought, oh, that's quite fun.

[25 : 29] It's probably out of a fancy dress costume. And they bought it for a tenner. And the lady wore it out and about. She wore it doing her housework. She wore it as her everyday ring for 30 years.

And then one day, after 30 years, someone looked at it and said, I think that's a diamond. And at Sotheby's this week, it went for 600,000 pounds. All that time, her perception was completely different to the reality of what she was wearing.

Well, in the world today, our perception can be very grim and God can seem very far away. But as David reminds himself in prayer of God's character, he can look at things through the lens of reality again.

He realizes that his future deliverance is certain. That was true for David because he was God's king and God had bound himself to David in promises. It's true for us because Jesus is the king and God has bound himself to us if we trust Jesus.

And then David ends the psalm with a blessing. May your blessing be on your people. The same way we sometimes end our church services. It's as though he's saying to God, this isn't just about me and this one situation.

[26 : 40] This is about how all the time, all of your people, what we need from you is blessing. The blessing that was promised at the beginning of Psalm 1, being happy because you know God and he approves of you.

the blessing that was promised at the end of Psalm 2 as you take refuge in Jesus and God gives you that joy in your heart. It's the blessing that we need and if we have that from this God, we don't need anything else.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, Yahweh, we praise you that you are a God who has made yourself known to us.

We thank you so much that you are the protecting God that even when we see people causing your people great physical harm, we know that our souls are secure and we have living hope.

We praise you and thank you that the God David confesses is our God as well, that you are the sufficient God, the one in whom we know we will receive all the glory we need as Jesus says to us, well done, good and faithful servant.

[28 : 06] We praise you and thank you that you are the restorer and when our spirits are low, we pray that you enable us to come to you as David did, the one who lifts up our heads and we thank you that you are accessible.

Help us to remember that wherever we are taken and however far away we feel from you, you are a God who can listen from everywhere and so we pray you'd help us to pray like this when we're in thick trouble that our spirits will be restored for Jesus' name's sake.

Amen. Amen.