

Week 3 – Psalm 3

An Individual Lament

A Typical Psalm of Lament

- Usually, the psalm is a first person, direct appeal to God.
- The basic theme of the psalm is a petition for the Lord to hear or help the psalmist.
- There is usually a description of the trouble.
- There are usually statements of reason that describe why God should help the psalmist. These statements often focus on God's character and the petitioner's relationship to God.
- Often there are statements of trust that God will act on the petitioner's behalf.
- A promise of sacrifice or praise may conclude the psalm (Mays, 21).

Psalm 3:1-2 – The Present Crisis

- Psalm 3 is attributed to King David during the time of Absalom's revolt (see 2 Samuel 15).
 - o Mays notes connections between the Psalm and David's life: "David was beset by multitudes (2 Sam 15:13), spent a night of danger (2 Sam 17:22), and through all was concerned about the welfare of the people (2 Sam 16:5-14)" (53).
 - o There are also incongruities between the Psalm and that story including David's attitude toward Absalom and the description of Jerusalem as God's holy hill – a title that arose after the construction of the Temple.
 - o The Psalm works as both a lament of a king in distress or for the average person living through a crisis of faith brought about by a season of isolation and opposition.
- The Psalmist feels under attack from many enemies. The word many is repeated three times for emphasis – there are many foes, many who rise up against him, and many who either mock or lament God's failure to deliver him.
- Part of the crisis is the fact that it does not look like God will act to save him since the consensus of the "man" is that "God will not deliver him" (v 2).
 - o This may be said in a mocking way meaning, "He's done for."
 - o It may be said sympathetically. In the case of David, maybe even his friends are saying, he has lost favor with God, God will not deliver him.
- The Hebrew for deliver is often translated salvation.
 - o It can be translated deliver, help, or save.
 - o Davidson notes, "It covers a wide range of meanings, indicating deliverance, liberation from any kind of restraint or oppression, physical, mental or spiritual. It points to a life of wholeness and freedom under God, a life in which people have the space to be who God intended them to be" (p. 20).

Psalm 3:3-6 – The Reason for Faith

- Amid the crisis, the Psalmist declares his faith in God.
- God is "a shield" around him (v 3).
 - o A shield was an important tool of protection for a soldier in battle.

A Song for Every Season: A Study on the Psalms

- Understandably, it becomes a favorite metaphor for God who protects those who trust in him (see Psalm 5:12; 7:10; 18:2; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; etc.)
- God is his glory (v 3).
 - In this context, glory means a person's standing in the community.
 - All may have turned against the Psalmist, but God sustains his place in the world.
- God lifts his head high (v 3). This phrase speaks of God's ability to vindicate the Psalmist and restore him to his former status.
- In the past, the Psalmist called on God and the Lord answered from his holy mountain (v 4).
 - The way this is phrased makes it clear that the psalmist trusts God will answer this cry for help, as well.
 - That God answers from his "holy hill" may also indicate that the Psalmist has gone to the Temple to pray. If this is the case, this Psalm is somewhat like Psalm 73 where the act of worship helps reassure a person in the middle of a crisis of faith.
- Goldingay sees an implied answer to prayer in verse 4. God has not acted, but he has spoken, assuring the Psalmist of his help (p. 112).
- That the Psalmist awakes to a new day confirms God's promise to sustain him (v 5).
- The gift of a new day reshapes his perspective. The enemies remain but the fear is gone (v 6).

Psalm 3:8-8 – Continued Prayer

- The absence of fear does not mean an absence of prayer.
- The Psalmist continues to petition the Lord for help.
 - He asks God to "Arise!" This may recall the Ark going before the Hebrews in battle and Moses's prayer, "Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered and your foes flee before you" (Numbers 10:35).
 - He asks for help or salvation again.
 - He asks God to strike his enemies on the jaw, an act of "contemptuous dismissal" (Davidson, 21).
 - He asks God to break the teeth of the wicked – a metaphor for taming a wild animal and rendering it powerless (Psalm 58:6; Job 29:17).
- The Psalmist concludes with an assertion of trust that salvation comes from the Lord. His statement of faith contrasts the doubts of the many (v 2).
- The Psalmist calls on God to bless not only himself, but all of God's people (v 8). This is a reminder that our lives are a part of a larger community. Our individual struggles are a part of the larger community's life.

Other Individual Psalms of Lament

- Psalm 38 – The Psalmist laments the consequences of his sin and asks God not to forsake him.
- Psalm 69 – The Psalmist cries out to God to rescue him from troubles that threaten to overwhelm him like the waters of a rising flood.
- Psalm 88 – The Psalmist encounters the loneliness of God's absence. He attributes his troubles to God's own hand.

Sources

A Song for Every Season: A Study on the Psalms

- Davidson, Robert, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
- Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2006).
- May, James L., *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1994).