

Psalms 3-5, David's long weekend. January 14, 2018

Shall we open our bibles this morning to Psalm 3.

The book of Psalms is the second book in a series of books that are known as the Books of Wisdom and poetry in the Old Testament. They run from the book of Job through the Song of Solomon, and they are unique by a couple of reasons. Number one, they presume you're interested in your relationship with God. So they write to you in the -- in terms of helping you to draw near. Second of all, they are interested in present tense relationship, not the past or the future, although those are both mentioned, but they're interested in you coming and looking at how intimate is your knowledge of God and your relationship with him today. And so you get to listen in on the prayers of the saints, folks in different circumstances, and learn how saints in the past brought their concerns to the Lord and what they comforted themselves by.

This morning we'd like to try something new. We're going to try to look at Psalms 3, 4, and 5. They go together. The historical setting for them is found in 2 Samuel, chapters 15 through 18. You will find there if you go back to read it David in his old age, fleeing from the palace in Jerusalem in the middle of the night with his family, with his friends. His own son Absalom is leading a rebellion to overthrow his father's government. Years earlier David had fallen into sin with Bathsheba. It had been forgiven by the Lord certainly, but it precipitated in the family much suffering. In fact, there was just a real difficulty in this relationship amongst the family of David. One of his daughters, Tamar, had been raped by a half brother named Amnon, and dad had done little about it, feeling guilty over his own sin. Absalom, his

other son, finally took it into his own hands and killed Amnon. It brought a rift between his father and son. Eventually Absalom was exiled. He left the city, the country. He was eventually brought back, kind of with reticence, but he did come back, and now he has been plotting this coup to overthrow his father.

David is doing fine now. He's walking with God. He is back in that place where we would expect him to be, but his heart is broken, sin has left a trail of sorrows, and here's the latest one now as his son gathers an army to come and physically overthrow him.

David leaves Jerusalem, he crosses the Kidron Valley. He climbs up and over the Mount of Olives. He heads out towards the Jordan to a place called Mahanaim, and there he waits to see what will happen. His troops are scattered all over the country. There's really no way to bring them together so quickly. He wants to see what God will do. He had left the city simply to save lives. He didn't want that battle against his son to be the cause of people's lives being lost. So there's terror and sadness and uncertainty as he writes these Psalms.

We know from Psalm 3 that it was written in the morning, after David had gotten there in the middle of the night, had a few hours of sleep; that Psalm 4 was written that same day in the evening; and then that Psalm 5 is written the following morning as well.

So a man in grief, forgiven but facing consequences, seeking God with uncertainty. Pretty good lesson for us on how we can trust the Lord when we're not sure what

he's up to, and what maybe you're facing this morning.

Notice that this is the first Psalm, although we're only in Psalm 3, so it's not a big deal I guess, with a superscription, meaning there's those words that are there before the first verse. Ready? A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son. The word Psalm there means melody, but the root word means to prune off excess branches or to cut back. I guess when you're making a speech you can be long-winded, but when you're in trouble you get right to the point. And David is getting right to the point.

Also I want to just point out to you verse 2, verse 4, verse 8, the next I think Psalm 4 verse 2 and 4 as well, you'll find this word "selah." And it's a word that you're encounter a lot in the Psalms. It literally means to exalt or to sing praises. It was use in music to be like a rest note where you pause. It is used in the Psalms to say, hey, before you read any further, think about what you've just read. So you find these selahs like an invitation, before you just plow right through, to consider what has just been written.

Verse 1, "Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are those who raise up against me. Many are those who say of me, there is no help for him in God."

David had fled in full flight the last many hours as he ran from the city with his future in doubt. He had gone to sleep that night setting a guard that he told him, again according to 2 Samuel, watch towards Gilead. That's where Absalom or the troops will be coming. Joab his general had woken in the morning to see the king sitting down and maybe writing this Psalm, and David maybe looked to him and said, "What do you think, Joab? God forsaken us? Has the Lord really forsaken us?"

Notice the selah there. They're saying to me, God isn't going to help you this time."

Absalom was winning the youth of nation. He was very clever. He was charming in personality. He had won over many others. David was certainly aware of the fact not everyone was with him like they once were. His ratings were down, if you will. He's an old guy. Maybe David remembered in verse 2 that fellow, that descendant of Saul's. You can read about him there in the historical account. His name was Shimei. He had come out and thrown rocks at the king and cursed him and said, this is it for you, buddy. And he had mocked him and lots of his soldiers had volunteered to go kill the guy. But no, just leave him alone, David says. And he hangs his head and he goes out. There were a lot of people who really felt that this was the end for David. The God he had trusted had now had enough.

Now, understand this: Because David is walking with God, he knew this is a lie. This isn't true. But this is what is being thrown at his feet. Imagine that, he says, that god would forsake us. That he would turn upon us. And David was indeed a failing, stumbling saint in so many ways, but he knew God wouldn't forsake him. He trusted in him. And yet that didn't mean that this wasn't hurtful or difficult or terrifying all at once. So Lord, you see how many have gathered against me and what they're saying, but verse 3, you Lord, you're a shield for me. My glory, you're the one who lifts up my head. I cry to the Lord with my voice and He hears me from His holy hill.

Notice the word Lord all in caps. If you're new to the Bible or maybe you haven't heard, whenever the Lord is all in caps in the Old Testament, it is a translation of the word Yahweh or Jehovah, the name that God chose for himself. Just means the

becoming one. He becomes all that you need. I'll be all that you need. It's the name that he uses when he makes deals with you, covenants with you, promises to you. It is a name that you can depend upon. Sometimes you'll read the word Lord with small o-r-d. It is a translation of the word Adonai, which is just a word of position. You're the boss, I'm not. You're in charge, I'm not. You're over me, if you will. But this word is the word Yahweh, God is the one who keeps his word.

And David as he begins to pray on that night after he'd ran and slept a couple of hours, Lord, I know that you're my protection and shield and glory. I know you're the one that has made me promises. David wasn't just running on emotion. He was really clearly standing on God's word. He might be running, but God is ruling. And he's pretty exposed. David remembers, notice in verse 4, the times that the Lord had answered his prayer. You might remember from the Old Testament when God called David to be the king. For a while only one of the tribes recognized him, and then one and a half. For the next seven and a half years he would run from Saul, who was still king, though the Lord said he was going to replace him. And David had to do a lot of praying and running, and he began to learn that God would take care him. You've been my glory. You've been the one that lift up my head, *selah* indeed. Think about how God had been faithful.

We read in verse 5, "I laid down and I have slept. And then I've awoken, for the Lord has sustained me. I won't be afraid of the ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. So arise, Lord." Jehovah, again Yahweh. "Save me, oh, my God." This word "Elohim." "For you have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; you've broken the teeth of the ungodly. And salvation belongs to the

Lord. Your blessing is upon your people." And then again, selah.

After sleeping a few hours, David awoke with great faith and great boldness and he encourages Israel to cry out, save us Lord. Come and help us. No toothless enemy can harm me. You've rendered them harmless, if you will.

The first night. Now, the circumstances were still dire. But here's something that happened: Absalom didn't show up and it's been all night. His forces didn't come. I would say to you if you read this historical account, that had Absalom come immediately, I think David wouldn't have stood a chance. Obviously God could have protected him any way he wanted, but in terms of physicality, his army wasn't there. He was a sitting duck. There was no protection. They didn't plan for this. They just had to get up and run.

As God would have it, David had left one of his buddies behind in the capital, his name was Hushai, and Hushai was David's friend, but Absalom, his son, also had a counselor. His name was Ahithophel, and Ahithophel hated David, and said, We should attack immediately. In fact, if we go now, there's no way your dad lives. They're in disarray, they're on the run, they're scattered everywhere. We'll easily wipe them out. And Hushai comes along and said, well, wait a minute. Let me give you the other side of the story, Absalom. If we go attack -- and your dad's a tough guy. He's got some pretty loyal friends. And you're going to go after him like a caged -- or a cornered animal. If you attack and you lose initially, you're also going to lose the popular support that you have now. Better that you just wait a little bit, organize clearly. He's not coming back, he's on the run. We'll take care of him, but

we'll do it in a decisively way, and then we won't have to worry about losing the support. All that to say Absalom turned and listened to David's friend Hushai, and it gave David some time to plan and wait for his Army and to eventually defend himself.

So Psalm 4 is written the evening of that day. He ran all night, slept a few hours, got up in the morning with great confidence, and then that night he wrote this Psalm. We read that -- as you get to verse 8, I'm going to lay down to sleep again. And then in verse 3 of chapter 5, in the morning he gets up and prays again. Kind of all follows one for the other. So he says this in that day, that second day, "Hear me when I call, oh God of my righteousness, and relieve me of my distress. Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer. How long, oh sons of men, will you turn my glory into shame and how long will you love worthlessness and how long will you seek falsehood?"

I think that's something to be said about philosophy in the sense that I think all of us Christians have a philosophical outlook on life that could sometimes be very different for what we will say we believe when it is practically have to be applied. For example, we all say we just trust the Lord, until you have to trust the Lord. Oh, God will provide, until God has to provide for you. There's sometimes between philosophy, isn't there, and faith.

The best story I ever heard about the distinction -- and I'd love to tell you the pastor that told it to me, but I don't remember. But it wasn't me. But he talked about two guys going to the beach together one day, and one of the guys liked to go out and mess around in the water, the other guy didn't like to get in the beach at all

so he'd lay out in the sand and read. But the fellow in the water couldn't swim, and so he'd never go in very far. But one day he got pulled out by the current and he got stuck in a place where his feet couldn't touch and he started to freak out and he started to yell out, "Help! I can't swim! I can't swim!" And the guy that was laying on the beach said, "Look, I can't either, but you don't hear me making a big fuss about it." I think that's perfect, right? It isn't a problem until it's your problem.

And David finds himself there asking the Lord to relieve him in distress, to hear his pray, and to pray how long, Lord, are you going to allows these -- you know, this coup, if you will, driven by lies and hatred and worthlessness, that are shameful in their are behavior, how long are you going to let this go on?

Notice in just the first couple verses here in Chapter 4 that David prays personally. It's hear me, it's relieve me, it's have mercy upon me. You can read it there. David prayed for deliverance and the silencing of his enemies who loved Absalom and who believed the lies that he was telling.

And then he said in verse 3, but know that the lord has set apart for himself those that are godly. And the Lord will listen when I call to him. I like -- I want you to notice the difference. David understood the principle. God listens to those who lives for Him. The word set apart is the word sanctify. It means to commit something to one use. It is only for one use. Our dog bowl is only for the dog. It's sanctified for the dog. Your life aught to be sanctified for the Lord. It's for His use. That's the way it reads.

David was sure of himself in his relationship with God. I know that God will listen to those who have dedicated their lives to Him, and David believed that he had. And so in this difficulty and unknown, the Lord will hear me when I call. I know that the Lord listens to the righteous and I know that He'll listen when I call. He applies that understanding to himself. He's not saying I earn this or I deserve this, but what he is saying is that he's confident that God would listen because he's separated himself to the Lord. In fact, the word righteousness itself means that I do what God likes. That's the simplest definition of righteous. I do what God accepts. I do what God is pleased with. I act in a way that it pleases the Lord.

So he goes on and he said, "So I should be angry but not sin, and meditate in my heart, on my bed, and just be still, and offer the sacrifices of righteousness, putting my trust in the Lord." The word "angry" here is not one that you might initially grab hold of, because it's the word for to stand in awe or to tremble. It isn't so much you being angry with God as it is you're understanding that who you are talking to is amazing and you are far beneath him in terms of, you know, you're not on par with him. He's almighty God. And so David in his dilemma, he believes that he's walking with God and he's doing what he needs to do, but in his understanding of who God is, David lays down in bed that in communion with God and he can just be still. I know who I'm serving, I know who he is. Notice the *selah* both in verse 2 and in verse 4 are pretty meditative comments, if you will. In the Old Testament the offerings that the people brought were basically two categories: One was to cover your sin with the blood of the sacrifice, the other was for fellowship. One was to bring you to near to God, the other was to bless your time with God. And so whatever those offerings were, burn offerings and meal offerings, other than the sin offering, but

the peace offering, they were to bring the righteous, those forgiven, back into fellowship with God.

David says in verse 5, using the same language, what God is really looking for is the sacrifices of a life that does what He wants. That's what the word "righteousness" means. He just puts his trust in the Lord. He lives his life in such a way that it pleases God. So you can walk away from listening to David's prayer by saying David took an enormous amount of comfort in the fact that before this trouble came, he was walking with God. He didn't try to get his act together right then. He didn't say, well, I better straighten up because man, I'm in trouble. No, no, his life with God was one of comfort now when he was facing the difficulty that he hadn't planned on. So God had brought David to the place where he had trusted in the Lord and he was standing by God's grace, and he knew it. "There are many," verse 6, "who say to me, who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us, for you have put gladness in my heart more than in the season that the grain and the wine is increased. So I'm going to lay down in peace and I'm going to sleep, for you, Lord, alone have made me to dwell in safety." Now, though the enemy had not attacked, David's camp was distraught. There were still a lot of people who looked around. They said, our armies will never get here in time. We're cooked. He shows up today, tomorrow, or the next day, we're hosed. We're not going to survive this. No one's here to help us. We got no one to call, No one to turn to. We're on our own and there's no hope. But David realized that night that the Lord was in charge. And notice he prays for those with him that the Lord would turn on the light, his countenance, his presence, with those who are struggling with who's going help us? That they might have the same confidence that he had. There was no

gloominess in the camp, certainly fear at the conspiracy of Absalom. He seemed too strong. There's no way we can stop him. Who's going to show us any good? But I want you to notice verse 7 and verse 8, because they're an amazing statement to make. They're a great verse if you pull them out. They're even more amazing in the context, because here's David saying, I have never been happier than this in coming to the conclusion that you're the Lord. In fact, I am happier now than I've ever had joy when the harvest came in.

Now, he says that in light of a son who's got an Army who's coming to destroy him. And pretty much everything thinks this is it and David somehow finds the rest in God's care to say this makes me more happy in heart, gladder in heart, than my paycheck and the vacation pay or the bumper crop or the great year I've had. All of that would, you know, celebrate in the world, but I'm celebrating the fact that I know you're going to take care of me. And David found greater joy in God's care and his oversight. And it was more sure to him than money in the bank and food in the refrigerator and reserves at the ready. Victory in faith was the best thing he could ever have found. So for us. That God would bring us to that point. The reward of faith is a peace that allowed you to know that God's in charge.

And so David goes, I'm going to sleep. Night two. I'm going to go to sleep. He'd arrived the night before, exhausted, gotten a few hours sleep, wrote down Psalm 3. Now the day has passed, Absalom has not yet shown up, David says at the end of chapter 4, I'm going to sleep. In Jerusalem, just go back and read the account, there's this stirring, this agitation as they try to get their armies together to get ready for the big assault. Everyone's running and hoping that this was going to be

the knockout blow. There was busyness amassing an army. They hoped that this would work. It was going to take a few weeks actually before it was accomplished. But they were just -- they couldn't rest.

And here's the hunted, David, the man of God, who finds tremendous ability to just say, Lord, good night. I'm going to sleep. This is your problem. Nighty-night. It is always good to go to bed and figure out the Lord's staying up that night, isn't it? I'm going to sleep, Lord. You keep a watch. I think it was Spurgeon who oftentimes used the word "they slumber sweetly whose faith rocks them to sleep." And David went to sleep.

Well, the next morning he wakes up again and writes Psalm 5. Again I should tell you it's before the resolution of the battle. He still hasn't seen his circumstances change one iota. They're still on guard. It's only been 36 hours. He's confident that God is going to work. The outcome to most other people is still in doubt.

I can cheat for you and tell you that in 2 Samuel 18, that eventually the battle does take place. By the time they get there to fight though David has all of his army back, and the Lord has assembled a strong and faithful bunch of men to fight. Absalom will be killed in the battle, his son. David will be restored to his rightful throne in Jerusalem. But for now the only light he has going for him is the confidence of knowing God. That's all he has. He doesn't have any proof. He doesn't have anything to point to other than a life of relationship with God that has proven God to be faithful. But the second morning he gets up -- he was pretty bold back in verse 5 and 6 of Chapter 3. He even sound bolder here when he awakes.

Sleep seems to do good for his spiritual life I think. He said this: "Give ear to my words, oh Lord, and consider my meditation. Give ear to the voice of my cry. You're my king and my God and to you I will pray. My voice you'll hear in the morning, Lord." Yahweh again. In the morning I'm going to direct my prayers to you, I'm going to look up.

The word "give ear" is an interesting Hebrew word, because it literally means lean forward and put your hand over your ear. It doesn't mean not to listen, it means to try to cup your hand so that you could hear better. He says to the Lord, pay close attention, Lord, to what I'm praying. Please hear what I have to say. You're the king of my life. You're the one that I come to. And notice in verse 2 even that David is bringing pretty heavy duty burdens to the Lord and he's fervent about his prayer, but he comes here just having considered what God is doing and who he is and the position that he finds himself in. He uses the word consider my meditation. It's only used in one other place in the Old Testament, this word. It's in Psalm 39 verse 3 where it's translated to muse or, if you will, to think about. The word by itself means to whisper into the ear. It speaks about a longing of the heart that maybe only God can hear.

I don't know about you, I have a dog that hears stuff I never hear. He barks at stuff I've never heard. I'll open the door and go, "see, it's nothing, idiot. Stop." And then he's back at it again. I think in that sense -- that's maybe a poor example, but in that sense, Lord, hear what only you can hear; right? See what only you can see in my life. So he prays and he cries out and he directs his cry to the Lord. The words in verse 3, direct my prayer, is a word that means to lay it out in order, like he

just didn't come emotionally distraught, he came with I've thought this through, Lord, and here's what I'm facing and here's what I know about you. And David came to speak to the Lord, and then he says in verse 3, I'm going to pray in the morning and then I'm going to expect you to answer. I'm going to look up. I'm Not going to pray and leave, I'm going to pray and watch. I'm going to pray and wait. I'm going to pray and seek.

He said in verse 4 about his son and those who were with him, "You are not a God who would take pleasure in wickedness, nor would evil dwell you with you. The boastful, they can't stand in your sight. You hate workers of iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehoods and you abhor the bloodthirsty and the deceitful man."

Absalom and his friends were pursuing the throne, but God never said to do that. This was something they were doing on their own. I read somewhere -- and I wish I could tell you all these references. I should probably have written them down. But anyway, I remember reading, "The wicked have short wings and their flights are soon over." And I think that's what David was saying about this coup. This can't last, God, because in -- for it to be successful you'd have to embrace what drove them and you can't and you won't and you never have. They have no footing. They have a following now. For the time glib Absalom seemed to have the upper hand, but there's no future in this. So David stands away from it and says in verse 7, "But as for me, I'm going to come into your house in a multitude of your mercy and in fear I'm going to worship towards your holy temple. So lead me, Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies and make your way straight before my face."

When David had left town back in 2 Samuel and taken his family and his friends and the city was under attack, someone had brought out to him the ark. That place of worship, right? The one that they had carried through the wilderness. That place where God's presence was. And they said, "David, take the ark with you." But David realized that God had put his name in Jerusalem, not out in the wilderness somewhere where David was headed. And he said, no, no, no, take the ark back where the Lord says it should be. And if he is for me, I'll come back here and worship one day, and he'll bring me back to the place of worship. David didn't grab the ark as some kind of an icon or rabbit's foot or lucky charm. He knew that the Lord was going to go with him. But he wanted God to be the one that brought him back, and so he declares it here in verse 7 and in verse 8, in fear I'm going to worship towards your temple. I'm going to come back into your house in the multitude of your mercy. The word "mercy" is interesting. It means I don't get what I deserve. David probably felt as he looked back over his life, plenty of reasons for me to suffer for this, but because of God's mercy, I'm going to be all right. He's going to bring me back. And so he looked forward to going back again.

He said in verse 9 again of his detractors of the coup, "there's no faithfulness in their mouth. Inwardly they're destruction. Their mouths, their throats are like open tombs. They flatter with their tongues. Lord, pronounce them guilty and let them fall by their own counsel. And cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions. They've rebelled against you." I like the fact David didn't take it personally in the sense that he didn't take it as an onslaught against him. You know, he was king because God made him king. He didn't go candidating for it. He didn't try to put himself there. He was where he was because God had put him there. So

he saw any attack upon him as an attack upon the Lord. So Lord deal with them. Death is in their lives. Open sepulchers that is in their tongues. Absalom was a lying, hustling guy, and he'd been hustled. You know, Hushai, David's buddy, had turned the counsel of Ahithophel around. The deceiver had been deceived. Poetic justice, if you will, and this prayer of David will get answered. But he ends saying this: "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in you. Let them ever shout for joy, because you defend them. But also those who love your name be joyful in the Lord, for you, Lord, will bless the righteous, and with favor you'll surround him as with a shield."

Back in Chapter 3 he had spoken about the Lord being his shield. "You're a shield to me." Now he ends with the same word. Now, there's plenty of different shields in the Bible. One of them is a kind you carry when you fight, you know, like hand-to-hand combat, but there was one, a large one, that was carried into battle so when the arrows flew, you just shoved it into the ground and you put it at a 45 and you hide behind it and it would take all the arrows coming your way. That's the word that's used here. God, I want to hide behind you. You take the hit. You take the offense. Let me just follow you into battle and follow you into victory. And indeed, he does. So from Lord, you're my shield in verse 3 of chapter 3, to the last verse of chapter 5, Lord, I want to rest in you. I'm going to shout for joy. You're going to defend your people. And indeed he did.

It's a good Psalm, isn't it? What a beautiful picture of how we might go through life. Hey, you're going to face stuff that's hard, difficult, unfair, overwhelming, but if you can just find comfort in this: You're walking with God. You're seeking to

please him. If you love me, you'll keep my commandments. Do that, and then when trouble comes you'll be able to stand. You won't have to try to make up ground. You'll be standing right where you're supposed to. And David survives this because of that, mentions it several times.