

Psalm 3---Betrayed

David wrote Psalm 3 about his experiences and feelings during his flight from his rebellious back-stabbing son Absalom. The story of David's trouble with Absalom began in 2 Samuel 13. David had at least six wives from whom he had children. The Old Testament patriarchs and kings were very bad examples of not fulfilling God's original intent and purpose in marriage being between one man and one woman. They took advantage of their position to have multiple wives. We as the students of the Bible can't help but notice that this never turns out well. In David's case it created Peyton Place times ten. In his family, incest, rape, murder, and rebellion were the norm. In 2 Sam. 13, David's son Absalom by his wife Maacah, had a sister named Tamar. David's son Amnon, by his wife Ahinoam lusted greatly for his half sister Tamar. Through deception, Amnon tricked David into sending Tamar into Amnon's bedroom. In 2 Sam. 13:14, we are told that Amnon "was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Amnon's own guilt and shame for this crime caused him to hate her afterwards, so he threw her out and treated her like trash. How did David's family get along? P.T. Barnum used to have an exhibit in his carnival entitled "The Happy Family". It was supposed to be a pictorial of the Kingdom of God as depicted by Isaiah 11:6 "the lion will lay down with the lamb". Barnum put some lions and tigers in a cage with some lambs. The press asked him if it was working out, and he replied, "Apart from replenishing the lambs daily, they get along very well together."

Absalom must have read Shakespeare about "revenge is a dish best served cold" because he acted like he didn't care and waited two full years to get revenge (I know Shakespeare was 2600 years later). At that time, Absalom hatched his own devious plan to kill Amnon which his servants carried out at Absalom's orders. Now earlier, David should have intervened to punish Amnon, but didn't. Then Absalom used David as a sap in his plot to murder Amnon. In both cases of the crimes committed by David's sons, they deserved the death penalty, but David did not follow through out of misplaced love and compassion for his sons. Absalom went into banishment for a while, but David let Absalom come back home in 2 Sam. 14:21. After Absalom was reunited to King David, he used David's kindness to pull off a coup d'etat. Absalom hired a bunch of political "spin miesters" to travel around in chariots constantly telling the people propaganda promoting Absalom and denigrating David. Absalom would also stand at the gate in Jerusalem, where everybody would be coming and going, and say, "If I was the king I would give you what you want or rule in your favor on any suit you had, I would give you justice." In this way "Absalom stole away the hearts of the people". This sounds too much like our elections, but I guess human nature was the same then as now.

Absalom sent spies out across Israel to prepare the way for his rebellion against his father. When David finally discovered the plot against him, he fled Jerusalem with his servants and a remnant of faithful followers. As David walked up the Mt. of Olives he wept openly as he was deeply grieved because of the betrayal by his beloved son Absalom. As if things were not bad enough, a low life guy named Shimei came out cursing David and threw stones at the deposed King of Israel. This guy was really

unfairly “piling on” David. One of David’s men, Abishai, offered to go over and remove the guy’s head, but David told him not to. Then David said something very profound, “Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing” (2 Sam.16:12). In this context David wrote Psalm 3.

Blindsided, Sucker Punched

David woke up one day as usual in Jerusalem to all his kingly duties to carry out all his normal activities of serving the nation and his family. Suddenly, out of nowhere he was blindsided, betrayed by his own son Absalom whom David had done so much for. David had forgiven him, pardoned him, and helped him, but now David’s heart was ripped out and trampled on. Most of the army and citizens had gone over to Absalom who promised them “pie in the sky”. How did David feel? How did he pray? What did God answer? In Psalm 3 we get to read David’s diary (so to speak).

The Plight and Complaint of a Broken Hearted Father

In Ps.3:1-2, David wrote that his adversaries were increasing, they were all against him. It seemed overwhelming to him. One time I said something similar to v.1. I said, “Everybody is against me!” A nearby smart Alec said, “No they are not, because everybody doesn’t know you yet!” David’s generals, counselors, and soldiers were going over to Absalom. David was desperately seeking a way out, but he saw only his ever increasing enemies pressing closer, and seeking to kill him. In v.2, his enemies were harassing him by boasting that God had forsaken him. This had credibility with David because he had been so convicted of his sin with Bathsheba. I can’t imagine any trial that you or I might have to go through being as bad as David’s, but maybe someone you loved betrayed you. Maybe your spouse left you, or your children disappointed you. Maybe a business partner you trusted cheated you. These kinds of betrayals leave a hole in our heart that only God can repair. We can relate to David’s pain. Can you imagine the humiliation for a truly great man like David with immeasurable accomplishments to be run out of town by a vain scoundrel like Absalom?

Selah

At the end of verse 2, the text says Selah, and then there is a gap in the verses. No one knows for sure exactly what it means, but it conveys the idea of a pause for effect. Some of my Seminary professors used to suddenly announce SELAH. When they said this everybody looked up and paid attention. They announced earlier that whenever they said this, what came before and after would be on the test. The Psalmists used that word like that also to get our attention, and get us to dwell on what he was saying. The next two words in v.3 are always a great blessing, “But God”. His circumstances seem terrible, but God is a shield to him, and God lifts up David’s head. You can imagine David’s humiliation, guilt, and shame as he walked away from Jerusalem, but God lifted him up. David’s faith and prayers kept him going, and God was faithful to protect him. In v.4, David said he was crying out to the Lord, and God answered him. We have a pivot from fear and anxiety in v.1-4 to peace and confidence in v.5 and 6.

Peace and Confidence

In the midst of great turmoil, how is it possible to have peace, freedom from anxiety, and a good night's sleep? David simply said, "The Lord sustains me." I can't help but think that this is what Paul was describing in Phil.4:6-7, "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds". It is a supernatural peace that only God can give. I'm sure he began by worshipping God, recalling God's character, remembering all that God had done in the past, as well as what God promised for the future. I like to remember what God promised Jeremiah in 29:11-12, "For I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you." What was David's prayer? Verse 7 was very specific in his requests to the Lord about the upcoming battle. Basically David recalled how God had given him victory in the past. God had always been with him before so David trusted him again. His enemies are like wild beasts with strong jaws who bite their prey and will not let go. The only freedom from these beasts is to break their jaw, and shatter their teeth. David's request in v.7, "Arise O Lord" indicates that God has been silent, seemingly absent, but now at the crisis point God will save him. God will use powerful measures to break the bite of the seemingly insurmountable enemies.

David's conclusion in v.8 is the basis for David's trust in the Lord---Salvation can only come from the Lord, and God blesses His people.

When the adversary attacks, appearances are deceiving. It appears that there is no place to go. It appears everyone is against you. It appears that there is no solution to the problem. David's opening verses are much like my feelings to adversity---God has abandoned us. We are not worthy of His help, and worst of all we need to turn elsewhere for help. Elsewhere usually means the ends justify the means which almost always includes some lying and deception. Nevertheless, we can study David's life and see that in spite of appearances, God loves us and has a plan for our life to do good for us in the end. Therefore David concluded, even before God delivered him from Absalom, that he would rest in God's salvation, and trust in His blessings.

Martin Luther said it well in his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"

“and though this world with devils filled
does threaten to undo us
we will not fear for God has willed
His triumph through us”

CHARLIE TAYLOR