

“Praying Under Pressure”

23 August 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: Forever (Give Thanks To The Lord)

Prayers of Adoration & Confession:

Reading: 2 Samuel 12:9-12, 2 Samuel 15:1-15, Psalm 3

Sermon:

Many of us are under pressure. People we love are sick. We are unable to plan with any certainty. We are concerned about schooling for our children, how we will do our work, how long these restrictions will continue. We may be worried about the church, its finances, how things will be restored and renewed. We might be struggling with our faith: what do I really believe? We may be worried about ourselves and our mental health; we may be experiencing some symptoms of stress. We may be concerned for our world and the obvious climate change. We may think our government will implode. There are many pressures we face because of circumstances, people, climate, and society, and it appears to be increasing. *People under pressure.*

The psalms are songs about life. Psalm 1 and 2 are the entry doors. Psalm 1 sets life in the context of a relationship with God through obedience to His word, outlining the blessing this is in the circumstances of life. Psalm 2 teaches us a worldview that understands who God is and the opposition the world has towards Him and His people. God promises His Son that He will bring the nations under His rule and punish all who defy Him. And in an act of wonderful grace, everyone is warned to be wise, submit to God's Son and come into a relationship with Him, with the great and everlasting promise, *“blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”* The psalms are songs about life, with and under God.

Psalm 3 brings us straight into a real pressured situation, a difficult situation for God's anointed king, David, recorded in some detail in 2 Samuel, chapters 15-18. David's son, Absalom, planned and now leads a rebellion, or coup, against his father, David. David has to flee Jerusalem, and in a poignant moment outside the city's walls, David walks up the Mount of Olives with his head covered and his feet bare. He is conscious of his sin, he is hurting over the betrayal of his own son. He is the anointed King, but being overthrown by a cohort of his own people, and he is running for his life away from Jerusalem and the temple.

In Christopher Ash's book, *Teaching the Psalms*, he says we must interpret the psalms as applying first to David as the anointed king of Israel. This helps us avoid a direct application to ourselves. The psalm is David's and the promises are given to him, God's anointed; they are truly fulfilled in Jesus, God's anointed Son; and we apply them and partake of their promises because we are in Christ and are His followers, so v.8b: *“May Your blessing be on Your people.”*

I. The King Is Under Great Pressure (v.1-2)

I loved Dale Ralph Davis' little quote: “David's enemies were *‘Many, mean and mouthy.’*”

2 Samuel 16:5-8

As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei, son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. 6 He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. 7 As he cursed, Shimei said, 'Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! 8 The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!'

That is, indeed, mean and mouthy. David has many foes, they rise against him and, critically, they speak words that appear to be true. They are difficult for him to hear, words with which he must wrestle: *"God will not deliver him"* (v.2). David is made aware of his past sin, adultery, and murder, and of the judgement of God announced to him by the prophet Nathan - constant strife within his family (2 Samuel 12:10-12). Absalom, David's third son, murdered Amon, David's first son, because he raped Tamar (Absalom's sister).

The same is true of Jesus Christ, God's anointed. As we saw in Psalm 2, Jesus experiences the hatred, enmity, and defiance of the world. When Jesus hung on the cross, they said, *"He saved others, but He can't save Himself...He's the king of Israel.....Let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"* He hung there with the weight of our sin and He is taunted with the possibility that God will not rescue Him (Psalm 3:1-3).

How does this then relate to us? David and his loyal followers face the barrage of anger and accusation. They have to avoid the stones, the dirt, and probably excrement being thrown at them, because they are walking with the king. Jesus warned His followers that they would face difficulty and persecution because of Him. The pressure we endure is because we are with Jesus, because we walk with Him and are loyal to Him. We suffer because of Him.

What are we to do? Talk to God about it - pray. Our deliverance comes because the Lord's anointed is heard and answered and the blessing of His victory flows to us (v.8). O Lord!

II. The God The King Believes In (v.3-4)

David's situation is terrible; it is bleak, deadly and without hope. Yet the tone of these verses is not of despair, but of hope, because they are about God. They are focused not on the problem but on God.

BUT YOU!

Are a shield around me. Yes, his enemies are many, but protection is all around and encompassing. We know what a shield is, and I pictured a Roman phalanx with shields surrounding us. However, it is more likely the shield is the covenant promises given to Abraham, and then to David, as the Lord's anointed. David is confident, because he has been installed by God on the holy mountain (Psalm 2:6). We mustn't forget the fact that David *is* guilty. He has sinned and terribly, and his circumstances are terrible. The prospects do not look good, but the promise stands and God delivers him because of His covenant promise.

Bestow glory on me. It is not David's righteousness that saves, but God's glory, given to us in Jesus Christ. He gives us His character, His righteousness and His presence through the Holy Spirit.

Lift up my head. You may remember that Pharaoh "lifted the head" of his cupbearer and restored him to his position and job (Genesis 40). It is a lovely picture of David, weighted down with his sin and difficulties, and yet God gently lifts his head up and restores him. David is vindicated and he has victory, not by his own work but by the work of Jesus.

You answer prayer. David has left Jerusalem; he is separated from the place where God dwells and from the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, but his prayers are heard and answered.

These blessings of God, the reality of God's presence, is not ours by right, but we claim them through the saving work of Jesus. We only have these privileges through the Lord's anointed. Are these not fantastic words which capture wonderfully the hope we have in the gospel through the Lord's anointed, Jesus Christ? These promises are ours in Christ.

III. The King Rests In God And His Promises (v.5-6)

We know that when we are under pressure one of the first effects is that we fail to sleep. Fear, anxiety, restlessness, overactive thoughts, annoyance, etc. rob us of sleep. David has been so reassured by who God is and what He has done for him as the Lord's anointed, that he is able *in* this crisis to sleep, because he knows that God sustains him.

David's circumstances are unchanged, the enemies are drawn, but he lies down to sleep and he wakes the next day because the Lord sustains him. God, being all that he has just outlined, enables him to rest in God and His control of every circumstance. Because the Lord sustains him, he lies down to sleep.

Fast forward to a time when Jesus and the disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. A storm breaks and the boat is in danger of going under; yet, Jesus sleeps. The disciples were really surprised and thought He didn't care but, of course, He was showing them the extent of His faith and trust in His Father God.

We claim this same security and sustaining, because we are in Christ, in union with Him. This rest is ultimately the rest of salvation and a peace that passes understanding, only and exclusively ours in Christ and because of His covenant promises. It depends on the reality of Christ's deliverance from death and the blessing He gives to us. This is biblical assurance.

IV. The King's Deliverance (v.7-8a)

Dale Ralph Davis has a great story about the idea that we cannot be secure until our enemy and their threat is effectively nullified.

"Some months ago, I came across a clip in WORLD magazine about Bessy. Bessy is/was a Burmese python that accidentally was set loose in an Idaho apartment complex. A posse of plumbers was called to find the 8-foot reptile among the walls and pipes of the 57,000 square foot complex. They found Bessy loitering in the ceiling of the apartment below her proper home. For two weeks the residents had been nervously checking beneath beds and under sheets for the huge snake. After hearing the news of Bessy's discovery one

resident confessed, "we'll definitely sleep better". No mystery there. Until the threat is removed it is hard to feel secure."

The image of the request of David is striking. The idea of breaking his enemies jaw links the idea of enemies to wild animals, the breaking of their jaw renders them ineffective and powerless. Or it may be an image of a person with a broken jaw not being able to speak, and so their lies and untruths are again rendered null and void. They once said *"God will not deliver him"* and now they cannot speak such an untruth.

The breaking of the jaw is a violent action against his enemies, the wicked, a knockout blow so that he is delivered and victorious. This deliverance or victory comes from the LORD. Our NIV translation translates the tenses as future - it is a deliverance that hasn't yet taken place. Yet, David is still able to sleep because he is at peace. I'm told the tenses in Hebrew are past tense. His confidence is so certain that what is yet to take place is, to David, as if it has already taken place. So, this throws us forward: David was delivered and Absalom was killed in the most bizarre of ways (which you can read about in 2 Samuel 18). However, David's reign after this episode was not very impressive, so we look further forward to the Lord Jesus and His deliverance from His enemies, *"having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross"* (Colossians 2:15).

Our confidence, our deliverance, depends entirely on the work of God in Christ Jesus on the cross. God is the Saviour, the Vindicator, the One who brings justice. It is because the threat of sin and its consequence, death, have been defeated, because Satan and the powers of evil have been nullified, that we live with resilience, confidence and hope even when under pressure. God takes care of us and He takes care of our enemies. This is the reality of spiritual warfare.

V. Our Blessing Comes From The King's Deliverance (v.8b)

When the King is delivered, we share in that blessing. Jesus has won for us eternal life, given us hope and sent His Holy Spirit to dwell with us. These blessings won for us in Christ are the reason we pray under pressure with confidence.

Psalm 1: The LORD watches over the way of the righteous.

Psalm 2: Blessed are all who take refuge in Him

Psalm 3: To the LORD I cry aloud, and He answers me from His Holy Hill. From the LORD comes deliverance. May Your blessing be on Your people.

Selah (Pause, sing it louder, have a musical interlude while we think about that truth)

Hymn of Reflection: IPH 257(i) What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Prayers for Others: Graeme Murdock

Closing Praise: IPH 79 Be Still, My Soul

Announcements

Benediction: And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now, and for evermore. Amen.