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The Sermon

Dr. Austin Duncan

Psalm 3

"Trouble and Trust"

September 10, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

It is a joy to be here. An introduction is unnecessary. I've been among you many times, and it's always a pleasure to open God's Word with you, such an attentive church who believes in the Scripture. You love the Word of God. And obviously an adventure in the Psalms which you're setting out on is an adventure and a place in the Scripture that's one of your favorites. Christians love the Psalms, we're drawn to the Psalms. It's a place where we express our affections. We find expression for our affections and for our sorrows and for our joy. One author calls the Psalms, "a song book for all seasons of the soul," catch that, "a song book for all seasons of the soul."

Likewise, Calvin said, "The Psalms are an anatomy of the human soul." It's the entirety of who you are in your most truest expression of yourself. The eternal part of you that will last forever is expressed in repentance and joy, and sometimes anxiety and sorrow and salvation throughout these famous songs, whether it's the familiar song of the shepherd, Psalm 23; or the lengthy exposition of the word of God in Psalm 119; or that tiny, but mighty, center of the Psalms with 117. All 150 songs are a place where the believer's heart is drawn to, and they help us to see what we sometimes struggle to have the words to say in our times of prayer or devotion or worship before the Lord.

There's no doubt that the psalm before us, Psalm 3, is reflective of something both familiar to us in a psalm of faith or trust, and something

less familiar to us in a category of the Psalms called lament. The Psalms are a song book, just like the hymn book in some of your chairs there, a collection of songs written by various authors over centuries. The oldest psalm is Psalm 90, penned by Moses. David is the most prominent and prolific of the authors of the Psalms. There's groups of composers like the sons of Korah. There's Ethan.

There's a variety of authors and genres in the Psalms. But in the Psalms what you don't see in our modern hymnody, in our modern song collections are many songs of lament, of lament. A lament is a song of trouble, a song of tears, a mournful song, a song suited to a world like ours, a fallen world. And I think it's because most people don't want to acknowledge that, you know, that's why they fill a stadium and call it a church in Houston. They just want plastic grin, they don't want to deal with reality, stark realities. They want something positive and affirming, even if they shouldn't be positive or affirmed.

And so lament is a missing category; though there are some song that we know. The most famous modern song of lament is probably "It's Well With My Soul," right, "Peace Like a River," that song we know very well. William Cowper in the 18th century wrote, "God Moves In Mysterious Ways: Ye fearful saints fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and will break in blessings on your head." That was a man who understood kind of the minor key of Christian experience.

Less well-known a song in the hymnal by Anne Steele written in the early 1700s called "Dear Refuge Of My Weary Soul." She penned these words: "Dear Refuge of my weary soul, on Thee, when sorrows rise, on Thee, when waves of trouble roll, my fainting hope relies. To thee I tell each rising grief, for Thou alone can heal; Thy Word can bring a sweet relief for every pain I feel." That's it, isn't it, an anatomy of all parts of the soul.

There are times when it's difficult to find a song appropriate for our troubles, and Psalm 3 is one of those songs, one of those songs that's suitable for trouble and hard times. Psalm 3 is considered an individual

lament by those who categorize the songs; and there's 39 other individual laments in the psalter. But if you add the corporate lament, the congregational laments and the individual laments together, you know many of the songs fit in that category: 62. And I think that's remarkable: 62 of the 150 Psalms – What's the percentage of that, Ken? It's 41 percent of the Psalms are lament songs. That's almost half. That's an incredible amount of songs that are intended to express the believer's sorrow and the believer's expression of trust, and pain, and suffering, and tragedy, and difficulty, and repentance, and grief. And I think it's notable that Psalm 3 is in the front of the Psalms.

There's great wisdom in the arrangement of the Psalms. Psalm 1 stands as a century. I think Spurgeon was the one that said it's a century, a guard, saying, "There's two ways to live. As you enter this book, you're either going to go the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked. And there's only two paths, two destinies, two ways, and only one way to be blessed by God." That's the message of Psalm 1. Psalm 2 is a message about God's kingship: "The nations rage, the peoples plot in vain, but there's God on His throne laughing at those who would dare oppose His kingship," and then speaking of his sovereign King installed on the throne, and a warning and an invitation, "kissed the Son, lest His wrath be kindled and He become angry in the way. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him." Psalm 3 follows those two. Psalm 3 follows Psalm 1 and 2, such insights to follow. That's the deep stuff I have for you today.

But its front position is important, because what we see in Psalm 3 is that this is traditionally seen as a morning prayer, like an in the morning prayer of trust in God is one that's suitable for the believer's troubles. And whether you're in a period of your life where you're going through it, you're going through difficulty, suffering, sorrow; or it's on the horizon, this beginning of the Davidic collection, Psalm 3 through 41, gives you this song of sorrow, confusion, despair and difficulty in the form of a prayer, with notes that are certainly missing from our modern expressions of worship, right? The imprecation is what it's called in verse 7: "Arise, O LORD; save me! For Thou has smitten all the enemies on the cheek; Thou has shattered the teeth of the wicked." I mean, that's violent. The Psalm 3 version we just sang, "They took the teeth out of that thing, right?" I mean you don't sing, "Smite the broken teeth of them." That's not Christians. So this is such a

unique song, and such a song of conveyance of how to hang onto God when it's hard to do that.

What else is in this song? I think predominantly it's a song of faith, a song that exudes faith and trust and assurance and confidence. And that's very typical of these sad songs in the song book: trouble, lament, judgments, all coming together with trust. And so this really is a song of trouble and trust. And that's your sermon title, if you're into that sort of thing, "Trouble and Trust," a song of trouble and trust.

And what else sets this song apart, something I love about it, is it has a superscription, it has a historical context. Most psalms do not. Most psalms have maybe a musical notation, a mysterious Hebrew word. We've lost the sense of *shiggaion* or something like that, but this one tells you exactly what the occasion, the context, the provocation of this song was in its superscription. And that's really where we need to start is looking at those tiny letters, if your eyes can see them. For some reason these are in the original. But the people who design Bibles forget about people that have eye problems, so you just stick your face real close to it and you can see it.

It says, "A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." And that's where I want to begin. Before we even get into Psalm 3, to understand what would have been the occasion of this song of trouble and trust, let's dive into the background just a little bit. I don't want to get in the weeds, but you've got to get the context, the flavor, the texture of this song to understand it, and I think it'll help it even resonate more in your heart.

So, you've got 2 Samuel in your Bible. Why don't you try to find it and flip over there, and we'll kind of jump around. I just want to have you have some familiarity with 2 Samuel. Maybe go to like chapter 14 would be a good place to kind of park, and I'll move through there a little bit, and then we'll come back to Psalm 3.

So, where are we in this song of trouble and trust? Well, you know about King David, right? Everybody knows about King David: David and Goliath, you know, a little shepherd boy turned king. Well, that's the 1 Samuel story, that's the journey from shepherd to king. And God gives His people a king according to their own desires, a king that they wanted, a king like Saul. And from that king comes the true anointed king. Saul is replaced because of his disobedience to God, and God chooses a shepherd boy named David, and 1 Samuel is the story of David's rise from shepherd to king.

And 2 Samuel is the book where David is on his throne. And the most notable story in 2 Samuel, the one we remember so well, is the story of sin in chapter 7 where David commits sin with Bathsheba and the cover-up with Uriah as he hatches his murderous plot. And 2 Samuel is a portrait of the fragility of this kingdom. But it's Absalom who really requires our attention to understand Psalm 3. It's when David fled from his son Absalom. It's Absalom we need to get to know.

Absalom was David's third born son. You meet him first in 2 Samuel 3. His name ironically means "my father is peace." And at the time of his birth, that was the great hope and promise. But years after David's sin with Bathsheba and his ensuing repentance, Israel is enjoying a period of international peace and stability. But there's strife in the king's house as Absalom and his brothers and sisters come of age. David is eventually going to have to skip town.

Before that, Absalom has to skip town. Absalom is put in exile, he's sent on the run because he orchestrated a revenge killing of his half-brother to avenge his sister. And so Absalom is on the run before David is on the run, and this self-imposed exile lasted three years; and by the time you get to 2 Samuel 14, where you are in your Bible, this is what it says. Look at verse 25: "Now in all Israel no one was as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him. And when he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year he cut it, for it was heavy on him, so he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels by the king's weight. And to

Absalom they were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a woman of beautiful appearance."

What a strange interruption in the narrative of royalty and kingship, this description of Absalom. It really says three things about him. Number one, he has good looks; number two, he has a serious, serious head of hair, selah; and number three, he has a family, right, three sons and a beautiful daughter. Matthew Henry observes what's not said. There's nothing said of his wisdom and his piety. Absalom is big on looks and little on substance. And if you're reading through Samuel much, you remember probably in 1 Samuel the description of King Saul. He was head and shoulders above everybody else: he was tall – he was on the Israelite national basketball team – and therefore, the people thought he should be a king. But he lacked substance, he lacked godliness, he lacked a commitment to Yahweh.

Or, maybe you remember when Samuel went to replace King Saul with one of the sons of Jesse, and they line up the sons, and Samuel says when he sees Eliab the firstborn son of Jesse, David's oldest brother, Samuel says, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before me," and it wasn't. It wasn't the oldest, it wasn't the tallest, it wasn't the biggest, it wasn't the best looking, it was a boy out tending the sheep; that was God's chosen one.

And the story of Saul is a lot like the story of Absalom. What you see with Absalom is he was all externals. It was all politics, it was all working the crowd. By the time you get to chapter 15, Absalom's rebellion is well underway. Second Samuel 15, it says, "Now" – verse 1 – "it came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men as runners before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and it happened that any man had a suit to come to the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, 'From what city are you from?' And he would say, 'Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.' And Absalom said to him, 'See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king.' Moreover, Absalom would say, 'Oh that one would appoint me judging the land, then every man who had a suit or a cause could come to me, and I would give him justice.'" Look at the description in verse 5: "It happened that when a man came near

to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. And in this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel."

What a mess: the chariots, the horses, the fifty attendants before him. He's putting on a show, he's setting up a rebellion, he's going after the people's hearts. He parks this whole setup in front of the ancient equivalent of the courthouse. People come to see the king and they make it as far as Absalom. They know he's the king's son, so they bow down, and he says, "Oh, you don't need to bow to me, I'm not that kind of a prince. Stand up, brother. Brother, I'm with you. I wish there was more justice in this land. If somebody put me in charge, I'd do it." He's got his sleeves rolled up, he's got a hard hat on, he's shaking hands, he's a man of the people, he's kissing babies, you know the type. "Your claims are good and right," he said. There was no plaintiff Absalom met that he didn't agree with. And he was dealing treacherously with his father's kingdom. And it says, "Absalom dealt with all Israel in this manner." So he stole their hearts. He had this polished image, a feigned interest in people's problems; and like a politicking thief, he stole the people in a carefully crafted rebellion.

And maybe you're thinking, "Well, this is what David deserves," and you'd be partly right, because the consequences of the David and Bathsheba fiasco, and Nathan told David in chapter 12 that a sword would never depart from his house because the consequence of his sin. And not only that, he specifically says, "I'll raise up evil within your household. I'll take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he'll lie with them in broad daylight," something that would be fulfilled in gross immorality in Absalom's rebellion as he takes over his father's palace. And so you'd be thinking maybe that David is getting his just rewards, and you'd be right. But, though David is suffering under the judgment of God and much of his trouble is a direct consequence of his own sin; nevertheless, David is God's rightful king, he's God's man, and rebellion against King David is ultimately rebellion against God Himself, the God who put David in the throne in the first place.

Yes, there's consequences for David's sin according to Nathan, Prophet Nathan, he was right. There's trouble in David's own household, but that is an excuse Absalom's evil deeds. David is still God's chosen king, and rebellion is still rebellion against God, and you can try to wrap your mind around that, or explain it, you know, "God sent this as judgment." But Absalom's responsible for the judgment.

But better than explaining it is just extolling it, because you're going to see it everywhere in the Bible and in your life. That's the intersection and the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, right? I mean, we worship God because that's how He runs this world. Peter preached this like this in the book of Acts: "Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men both," right? Sovereignty and responsibility. And that should provoke us to worship God.

And David sees this. He sees the plot is already overwhelming the kingdom and he has no chance. So David abdicates his throne, there's no other option here. Absalom has won the entire hearts of the people, and David has to run. He leaves the palace in fear for his life and flees Jerusalem with a ragtag handful of leaders still faithful to him. The clergy offers to go and bring the ark of the covenant; and David, so much wisdom in this section of 2 Samuel, it's amazing to see how he's matured, how he's repented, how he's come back in good fellowship with God, because his wisdom's on display, and he tells the priests, "Don't bring the ark, leave it there," which is maturity in David's part. He doesn't need the furniture of Yahweh, he needs the favor of Yahweh. He doesn't need the ritual, he needs a righteous and right relationship, he needs repentance, and so he's trusting as he's retreating in what the LORD would bring.

Who does he have with him? A handful of soldiers; some of them impressive, some of them his mighty men, but some of them are - one guy named Barzillai who is an octogenarian. That's who David had on his side, old guy. And as David retreated he walked down that holy hill from Zion where the palace was, away from Jerusalem, away from God's city, crossing

into the Kidron Valley towards the Mount Zion, and then out to the wilderness to ascend the Mount of Olives.

The narrator tells us in Samuel that David is climbing. He's barefoot as part of the kind of sign of his humiliation. His head is covered in mourning as he weeps and he climbs and climbs. He hears the voice of one of his old rivals, this guy Shimei, an old troublemaker who's still loyal to Saul's household. And this old guy's yelling at David, saying, "Get out! Get out, you man of blood! Get out, you scoundrel! The LORD repay you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, and the place you reigned! The LORD has handed His kingdom over to your son Absalom. You've come to ruin because you're a man of blood."

And so now David is in exile. He has to flee the palace before he's killed by his own son. That's the occasion, that's the setting of Psalm 3. David's flight is the occasion for David's song of trouble and trust. David's flight is the occasion of David's faith, and David's faith is the foundation of David's song. He's been betrayed, he's been conspired against, he's outnumbered.

This isn't merely some political trial, a thing of kings; this is intensely personal, as all trials are. And this is a song, though its setting very different than our experiences, is intensely personal, like all trials are. And so I think it's a song not far off from our own troubles. So whether your trials are self-inflicted upon you by sinful choices you made in your past, or if they're circumstantial things brought on by you don't know why, or sinful people are after you, David understands both of those things, both missteps and misgrants, because we all know trouble. And if you don't now, jot down these lessons from Psalm 3, because friend, trouble is coming, and your troubles may not be national in scope, but they're personal and painful; and I know that your expectation of mercy can draw from and even exceed King David's as we look at this song in light of the shape of Calvary.

So let's listen in. Let's listen into a barefoot dispossessed king who instead of a crown had his head covered in grief. Listen and you'll hear him weep, and learn from the song that his tears brought. If you've ever faced trials

and trouble, David has a song for you composed in four equal couplets, divided by that word "selah," each one teaching us more about the relationship of trouble and trust. And whether your trouble is now ongoing or on the horizon, mark it down, because life in a fallen world is full of troubles, and we need songs to express and sustain our trust.

Psalm 3 teaches us how to trust in trouble. Let's look at these first few verses, the first couplet I want to call it. The heading on the first two verses is "Trouble and Temptation," verses 1 and 2, "Trouble and Temptation." Let's look at the text. Psalm 3:1, "O LORD," – all caps; that's the covenant name of God, Yahweh – "O Yahweh, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. Many are saying of my soul, 'There is no deliverance for him in God. Selah.'"

Here we have three lines of synonymous poetic parallelism. Our poetry in English: dog, hog, blog. Poetry in Hebrew is parallelism: equal kind of length, sometimes similar sounds, but they're usually an idea that's building. And that's what's happening here in this poetic parallelism, all three lines are saying the same thing. This kind of poetry is meant to emphasize, to underline, to tap on your attention and to come to climax in the final word of verse 2, the mocking words of his enemies: "There is no deliverance for him in God."

It seems at this point in David's existence to be far more enemies in his life than subjects, and the rising tide of disloyalty is only on the increase as he looks around and his foes are resisting him. It wasn't that long ago there were people singing songs about David: "David has killed his ten thousands." The crowds were adoring him. But now there's a new generation that has come in, and their hearts are with Absalom; and not only are they increasingly against him, these adversaries in verse 1 it says, "are rising up." The opposition to him is active, it's present, it's happening right now; they're in pursuit of him.

Another thing that's clear in these poetic lines in verse 1 is that repeated word "many, many" in verse 1. In my Bible they use the word "increase."

Or maybe it says "more." It's the same Hebrew word, the word "many." "Many are rising up against us. Many are saying of my soul." Three times the word "many" appears repeatedly. And it appears later in the psalm as well in verse 6. That word "ten thousands" has the same consonants as the Hebrew word for "many." And so the outnumbered kind of scenario, the foes surrounding him, the many, many, many adversaries, many enemies all around vocally ridiculing him. That's why this is trouble. The trouble is obvious.

But, verse 1 and 2 is trouble and temptation. The trouble is the threat of death. What's the temptation? Well, the temptation is to abandon his trust, to listen to the words of his enemies, to hear them say, "There is no deliverance for him in God," and to believe that.

"Deliverance" is a keyword in this Psalm. It's the Hebrew word for "salvation" or "deliverance" or "help." And perhaps it's the words of that rascal Shimei ringing in his ears, "Man of blood, man of blood, you deserve everything you're getting!" He knows his opponents are numerous and loud. And it's not that the voice of his enemies is doubting the power of God, it's worse than that. It's more personal, because the enemies are assuming that God is on their side and against David.

The great hope of the enemies is his apparent alienation from God. They see David's circumstances – barefoot, mourning, dispossessed, out in the wilderness, on the run from people trying to kill him – and they say, "It's exactly what he deserves, because God's not with him anymore. God won't save him. God won't answer him." They wrongly conclude that he's forsaken of God. And it's not uncommon for God's enemies to talk like this and to make this mistake, but it's also not uncommon for us to be tempted to believe them. Some of you know what it's like to be taunted, belittled, to have your faith actively undermined and ridiculed.

Verse 2 ends with the first occurrence of that word "selah" in the psalter. If you read the whole book, 150 psalms, you'll find "selah" 71 times. It's a word that we don't know what it means, probably a musical pause. But some

wise commentators like to think it means pause and think, or better yet, pause and ask, "What do you think of that?"

Consider verse 2 in light of the "selah," "There is no deliverance for him in God. What do you think about that?" When trouble surrounds us and trials overwhelm us it's of most critical importance that we do not believe a lie. Spurgeon said it this way: "It's the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God."

David demonstrates for us the response of faith, and it's in the space between verses 2 and 3 we see a massive change, a change of tone where David turns his attention from the numerous, increasing rising vocal adversaries, to fix his eyes on the omnipotence of God. And so the second couplet, verses 3 and 4, let's call it, "Trouble and Trust. Trouble and Trust." Verse 3, "But Thou, but Thou, O Yahweh, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head. I was crying to Yahweh with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah."

The first word matters greatly here, and something happens in that white space between 2 and 3, because David gives an emphatic, contrastive kind of a word. He says, "But Thou, o Yahweh," showing us that massive chasm between verse 2 and 3, between the rebellious masses, mocking voices, and Yahweh Himself, and David says, "But You, O LORD." And this is how we need to see our enemies, our critics, our adversaries, our trials, our troubles, in this perspective. David sees his enemy suddenly in their true proportions as he turns his gaze from his circumstances, from his enemies, to God Himself, off of his adversaries, off of his trials, looking to God Himself. And it's this where his eyes are becoming overwhelmed, no longer by his troubles, but by the person and nature and character of his God.

That's the content of this second couplet. In verses 3 and 4 we learn that when our eyes are on our troubles, we're overwhelmed; when our eyes are on God, we start to see everything clearly. I mean, there's countless examples of this in our lives and in our Bibles. The spies go into the Promised Land, and ten of them see only giants and certain death, death,

death. And two of them have eyes of faith and think, "Yahweh's got this." There's a difference with that perspective: looking with faith, or looking with fear; looking at circumstances, or looking to God's word. It's all a matter of perspective, and the eye of faith sees differently. And it's here in verses 3 and 4 that David's trust begins to surface.

And please note how prayerful this content is. Verse 3, "But Thou, O LORD." Who's he talking to? He's not talking to himself. There's times in the Psalms he speaks to himself. Here he's talking to God. This is a prayer: "But Thou, O LORD." Trust always begins with, "Thou, O LORD, You, O LORD." Not about your faith, or the quality of your faith, or the quantity of your faith, it's about the object of your faith. It's not about the power of faith, it's about the person your faith is in. And David's trust is in God, that's why his prayer is, "You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head."

This one commentator calls this whole psalm "praying on the run." And when you're on the run, to know that you have access to God in prayer is one of the realities that David is showing us, because friend, prayer is the ultimate acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God, isn't it. When you turn to God in prayer, you are saying, de facto, "I don't have the answers. I don't know what to do. I don't know where this is going. But You, O God." It's an immediate pivot from earth to heaven that says, "I need the sovereignty of God in full display in my mind and heart and emotions." And so David says, "God, O God," the God he's called out to repeatedly in verse 3 and 4 are packed with God. He talks about God's nature, God's attributes, God's character, and God's actions. And it's what we need in our trials. It's how we face our trials with faith.

So what does he say about God? What is his theology that comes out in his dark difficulties? Well, the first thing he says, "O God, You are a shield, a shield," - God is his protector - "a shield about me." This is a warrior writing this. This is a king. This is a commander of the LORD'S army. He knows exactly what a shield is. And when he calls God a shield, he's saying, "God is my protector, a shield about me," this warrior king. He knew his shields. He'd brandished his shield many times.

Perhaps he was thinking of God's ancient words to Abram a thousand years prior. The first time this metaphor is used in Scripture, God says to Abram, "Do not fear, Abram; I am a shield to you. Your reward will be very great." But most likely, David's just thinking of his favorite shiny shield. I mean, these were made of like a wicker-like substance, like a light kind of wood; but they'd cover them with layers and layers of glistening, kind of treated leather, so they could glance off the blow of a sword or a javelin. Two kind of shields in the ancient world: big, kind of full-body shields that guys could move together against the archers and against pressing armies; or a personal kind of shield, suitable for hand-to-hand combat, to fight one-on-one, to protect the torso in infantry as they're engaged with swords and spears. What a metaphor.

The Psalms employ this picture readily and regularly. Psalm 7:10, right on the same page probably, "My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart." David knew shields, and he knew there was no shield that could keep all the arrows away. No shields could block every sword and every spear, and no shield could stop an entire army, unless God is your shield. And God was a shield to David, unassailable. It's why he uses the strong preposition in Hebrew, "a shield about me," or, "all around about me." David sees God as surrounding him, as a field of protection that is invulnerable.

David is, remember, humiliated, dispossessed; but David sees himself as secure. David was in such a vulnerable place; but David wasn't surrounded just by enemies, he was surrounded in his most intimate and real sense by the shield that was his God. Psalm 18:2, "The LORD is my rock and my deliverer, my God, my rock, by whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Well, what else does David say about God besides He's his protector, his shield? Well, he says, look at verse 3, "You're my glory." We think about the word "glory" as radiance, right? We think like, you know, the sun is glowing and it has glory. But the Hebrew word "glory" isn't about shining, it's about weighing. The word is *kabowd*, it means weight or significance,

heaviness, majesty. Standing is a good word for it, like you're standing in the community. That's what the word glory means in the Old Testament. And here's David, no longer hanging onto his crown, no access to his throne or palace; but he was not lacking for glory, because God was his glory. David wasn't speaking of his own importance. David's significance was not in his kingship; ultimately, he knew that that belonged to God. His glory was not in his former victories or possible deliverance in the future, David's glory is God Himself.

And I love this phrase. He says, "O LORD art to shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head." For David, God was all-sufficient, and it took him a long time to learn this. He's on the run. He's on he's banking on this rich theological truth. This is such an assault to our self-importance, our self-perception, the way we view our standing, our influence, our significance. We need to be like David in this moment and say, "It's not my glory, it's God's glory. It's His reputation that matters, and that's what I'm concerned about."

The next little phrase is, "the lifter of my head." It means that David is God's restorer. It's a picture of the removal of shame, a picture of restoration, a picture of vindication from despair to hope. Related to David's glory, David says, "I call out, and He answers me." Well, what does it mean about God? It means that God is accessible. David calls out because he knows God can hear him. And in the 2 Samuel narrative, there's a great example of this in David's just instinctual automatic awareness of his need to ask for God's help.

David had a counselor, his best advisor, his wisest counselor for military, political. Any matter that pertained to the king's business, he would go to his guy Ahithophel. Ahithophel was his wisest counselor and his chief advisor, and Ahithophel defected and went to Absalom; and David hears the news that his best counselor has joined his rebellious son. And do you know how he responds? He immediately prays, right there and out loud. He says, "O God, frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel." That's it. I mean, just a fast, quick prayer shot up to heaven.

And God answers that prayer in a very unguessable way, because Ahithophel was a great counselor, military strategist, and he told Absalom exactly what to do to get rid of David fully and finally. It was a perfect plan. And so Ahithophel told Absalom, "Go this way and do this." And Absalom, because he's an idiot, heard this wise counsel, this trusted counselor from his father's chiefest ranks, who says, "Go there." And so Absalom, because he's an idiot, and sin makes you stupid, does this. And that's the moment that the coup fails, honestly, in the narrative. That's when everything turns towards David. Pretty soon there'll be twenty thousand soldiers, rebellious soldiers dead in the forest of Ephraim, Absalom among them.

David said, "Frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel." And how did that work? Somehow, God working all things together for his ultimate good in discipline and chastisement for David over his sin, in bringing about the prophecy of Nathan, and eventually bringing about a reestablishment of David's throne. All of this is happening, and it's happening in David's just quick arrow prayer to God, because, as he says here in verse 4, "I was crying to Yahweh with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain."

David sees God as accessible. He heard and answered David's prayer. Don't miss what this verse says. He says, "Where does my help come from?" He's crying out to the LORD, verse 4, "with my voice, and He answered me" - From where? Well - "from His holy mountain." Well, what's that? That's Mount Zion, that's where David's palace was, that's the place he just had to escape. That's the hill that symbolizes the presence of God, where the ark of the covenant was, where heaven meets earth in a in a symbolic sense. This is that holy mountain that represented Yahweh's grace with His people, and the kingship of God in Israel. And David wasn't there anymore, he had no access to that place. Nowhere was more dangerous on earth.

But where would David's help come from? Well, from Zion, because he knew God wasn't restricted as a local deity or as a tribal deity; but God was there and available to David even in the wilderness. God has never had a problem ministering to exiles. God has never had a problem chasing down a

wayward son, because geography doesn't stump an omnipresent God; and David had his gaze fixed on God. And we have to learn to match that gaze, to look to God's character in our times of trouble, because He provides us with what we need most, which is God Himself, our shield, our glory, our restorer, the lifter of our head, our accessible One who hears and answers our cries from His holy mountain. That's trouble, and that's trust.

Let's look at the third stanza, the third couplet, verses 5 and 6. We'll call it "Trouble and Tranquility. Trouble and Tranquility." Verses 5 and 6 show us trouble and tranquility. Look with me at verse 5: "I lay down and I slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about."

I know what you're thinking: this is no time for sleeping, right? Also, how dangerous is it to speak of one of the two most troubling topics in all Sunday preaching? Sleep. Another one is lunch. Now I've brought both of them up, and I have your attention until sleep or lunch overtakes your attention. We enjoy sleep, most of us; but we all understand that there's times when sleep is the last thing from our mind. And without getting you to think too much about sleeping at this moment, we do need to think about the theology of sleep.

The point here in verse 5 is that David's outnumbered, that "many" consonant with the ten thousands around him. I mean, he's in grave danger. When the price on his head would have been the favor of the new king Absalom, sleep would have been tough to come by in this situation. Trouble is usually like that. We all know what it's like to be unable to sleep.

The National Health Interview Survey said as many as 34 percent of people are affected by sleep disorders, which makes sleep a big business in our culture. And so you can buy NyQuil, or ZzzQuil, or Ambien, or Tylenol PM, or Unisom, or Lunesta, or Propofol – careful with that last one – drugs to give people sleep, desperate. They want to sleep so bad, they don't care the side effects include headache, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, muscle pain, joint pain, and death.

I read in the *New York Times* an article about a lady in Salinas, California who is blaming her family for eating all the food and leaving trash around. It turned out that the mouthfuls of peanut butter that were missing, and the Tostitos crumbs in the bed, and popsicle sticks on the ground were one of the side effects of a sleep medication she was on that was causing her to sleepwalk to the kitchen and eat large quantities of food. They didn't figure it out until she had gained a hundred pounds. This is my life story, friends. Maybe you're more natural. Natural people are customers too, right - herbs, and vitamins, and hypnosis, and chamomile tea, and Tai Chi exercises, and breathing techniques, and something you can buy at Whole Foods called St. John's wort, which I think I read about in the book of Revelation. Or more traditional methods like counting sheep, or making your snoring husband sleep in the garage.

People have tossed and turned in agitation for want of sleep, sometimes caused by fear, or distress, or a guilty conscience. But in David, we see a peace that passes all understanding. We see tranquility in the midst of trouble. What a gift when he says in verse 5, "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me." I've heard Pastor MacArthur say a bunch of times that if the growth of the church, the holiness of its members, the salvation of the lost was ultimately up to him, he would never sleep; and he sleeps just fine. It's David-like, because we understand the relationship between sleep and sovereignty.

The deep sense of security marks David, because the LORD sustains him. Verse 5, "The LORD sustains me." It's in the imperfect tense. It means a habitual trust from David led to a habitual sustenance from God. And if ever a situation screamed for sleeplessness, if ever a situation invited insomnia where restlessness would be perfectly reasonable, it's this one.

We would all say, "David is in store for some long and sleepless nights." But because David understands the sovereignty of God, he sleeps like a baby, an idiomatic expression in English that's idiotic if you actually have a baby, except when they do sleep. Is anything better? And it's mama's arms or grandma's arms, mouth kind of gaped open, eyes rolled back, just kind of

twitchy-eyed baby, just snoozing. So safe, so tranquil; no cause for worry or care. So content and calm, and quietly at rest. And for David, life under Yahweh's sustaining hand taught him how to sleep.

And when the morning finally came, David had slept and survived, and he gives all the credit to God who sustains him. One commentator says, "God's hand is David's pillow." May it be yours as well. And when we wake in a new day we see more of the same – God's sustaining power. Tranquility in the midst of trouble, faith in the face of fear reminds us that God's loving care marks the difference between despair and hope. And David finds this answer by this precious gift from God, the God who never sleeps and never slumbers.

Sleep reminds us of something theological, because God doesn't sleep. It reminds us that we're not Him. And so as we move towards this final couplet, verses 7 and 8, we can see, "Trouble and Triumph. Trouble and Triumph." Verse 7: "Arise, O Yahweh; save me, O my God! For Thou has smitten all my enemies on the cheek; Thou has shattered the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to Yahweh; Thy blessing be upon Thy people. Selah."

Deliverance has been on the horizon for a long time. In this Psalm the word "save" or "help" or "deliver" translated in verse 2, verse 7, and verse 8, has stitched this whole song together. It's a song about salvation, and it leads to this final stanza, which is a climax of salvation. And in verse 7 we finally get to hear David's clear, actual prayer, his request, his supplication. We hear his confidence in God's victory, knowing that He fights in and through His people when he says, "Arise, O LORD."

David, by praying, "Arise, O LORD," is calling on an ancient prayer from the book of Numbers 10:33 spoken by Moses. When the ark of the covenant was brought before the army for war, Moses would say, "Rise up, O Yahweh; may Your enemies be scattered, may Your foes flee before You." And David borrows that appropriate phrase and says, "Arise, O Yahweh!" He doesn't have much of an army, a ragtag bunch; he's actually separated

from his army so that they don't get killed for his sake; and as he hides in pretty much lonely isolation, he prays the prayer of the commander of the army of God as if he's surrounded by ten thousand soldiers instead of ten thousand soldiers trying to kill him, and he says with every confidence, "O Yahweh, rise up," because he knows God is his defender, and that triumph is on the horizon. God is his deliverer, God is his Savior, and so he calls on God by name to save him.

Brace yourself though for the end of this prayer, the battle cry is strong. But listen to these words: "You've smitten all my enemies on the cheek, and have shattered the teeth of the wicked." Hey, ain't nobody singing that on Sunday. To smite the enemies on the cheek: words of contemptuous dismissal. It's a gross insult in the ancient Near East to slap someone in the face - I think pretty similar to our culture.

The next phrase, "shattering the teeth of the wicked," is an incredibly violent image. And interpreters differ as to what it's a reference to, the interpreters talking about what it's like to be punched in the face. They're out of their depth, that's the issue. But they do wonder if this is about the removal of an animal's teeth to make it harmless, or if it's a picture of the punishment in the ancient world for certain verbal crimes like lying in court; one of the penalties was to have your teeth broken out. I mean this is violent, this is severe. And whatever he has behind this metaphor, somebody is going to the dentist big time.

I think my question is, "Are you ready for a prayer like that?" It doesn't seem very Christian, does it? Not very new covenant, or at least not very seeker-sensitive. I'm afraid today's Christians might be too puny to pray like this. But we can learn from David here; and this isn't about retributive violence, this is about allegiance to Yahweh. David understands that allegiance to Yahweh, to his God, is everything. This isn't David just calling for help for David's sake. This isn't David saying he needs to punch back. David is going to plead for the life of his son Absalom.

The last thing David wants is Absalom to die. But David on behalf of the people of Israel; that's why the prayer says, "Thy blessing be upon Thy people," as its final word. David, on behalf of His people, he knows that the honor of Yahweh is at stake. He knows that the throne ultimately belongs to Yahweh. So this isn't just some antiquated Old Testament prayer, because allegiance to God is still everything, and God's justice is not something that's an Old Testament issue or something we're not allowed to talk about or cover up, God's justice is the reason we evangelize a lost world, because if they don't come to Christ for salvation, they will be punished eternally in hell.

"Such were some of you." All of us were on the road to the judgment, the right and righteous judgment of God. God will judge every sinner according to their just deserves. And when we look at the holiness of God, none of us, not a single creature by nature and choice, we're sinners; none of us stand a chance before God's judgment. This isn't an Old Testament thing, read the martyr's prayer in the book of Revelation as they beseech God to avenge their blood. It is the right and righteous nature of God to punish evildoers.

Don't get this wrong: salvation and deliverance is a messy business, involving divine righteousness, involving ultimate justice. There's a difference between the harsh and unloving kind of angry prayer that some picture when they read this and the righteous divine judgment, because that's what this is. David uses the tenses here: "smitten" and "shattered." And some Bibles translate it, "smite the enemies," and some say, "He has smitten the enemies." Some say, "He will shatter the teeth," some say, "He has shattered the teeth." It's all reflective of David's confidence in the ultimate justice of God. David states that as if it's done, as if it's finished.

In the middle of the wilderness it's being prayed while Absalom is defiling David's palace. David's prayer has this victorious, triumphant, confident faith to it. And the rebellion would be resolved when those twenty thousand rebels are killed. And Absalom in almost an embarrassing way dies, his giant hair tangled up in a tree, and then some of David's disobedient commanders run spears through him. The trouble David faced cost him

dearly, because he genuinely and truly loved his rebellious son. But David would face another trial in his grief: mourning the death of that rebel son.

But it was with his eyes fixed on God, and on God's deliverance especially, that he ends this song with a testimony and a blessing. Verse 8: "Salvation belongs to the LORD; may Your blessing be upon Your people. Selah." What do you think of that? That's a declaration of the delivered. That's a blessing that comes from a shepherd's heart. David is confident he'll be delivered, but he wants God's people to see that deliverance and be blessed to have the joy and the rejoicing and be instructed in the triumphant nature of God's salvation.

At this point in their history Israel lacks significant unity because of the strife and rebellion and coup d'état that Absalom had brought. But David wants Israel to know and to be restored, that salvation belongs to the LORD, right? That's verse 8: "Salvation belongs to the LORD." David understood that his salvation wasn't found in sitting on Mount Zion in his temple, salvation wasn't found in the throne, salvation wasn't found in his crown, salvation wasn't found in military strength, salvation wasn't found in the end of this particular trial, salvation ultimately was found in the LORD; and we need to know that in the same kind of language.

There is nowhere where you can find salvation - not in a church, not in religion, not in ritual, not in good works. Salvation is still only found in the LORD. And when you trust Him in trouble and you await His deliverance, perhaps you remember Psalm 3. And though you're not a king, yet the day is coming; and in the meantime, take this trust with you, this truth with you, and speak it to trouble. Though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear; for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. Salvation belongs to the LORD.

There was another son of David, not Absalom, but a great-great-great-great-great-great grandson: the Lord Jesus Christ. And He was one who was perfectly righteous, a long-awaited son, a long-awaited king, a son who knew troubles far greater than His father David had ever known, a son who

was betrayed by those closest to Him, a son who never did a single thing wrong. And it was on the night before He was killed that He walked that same path off Mount Zion through the Kidron Valley, weeping as He went. The gospel writers tell us, "and went up to the Mount of Olives."

Same path David took; but He went not for Himself; and He was troubled on that dark night, and He was abandoned by His friends. A prelude to a far greater abandonment, as He would be drug back outside of the city and crucified on a cross; His enemies would surround Him. David says, "How many were His foes. They testified against Him, they rose up against Him, and they said," - remember Matthew 27:43 - 'He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him; for He said, "I am the Son of God.'"

David heard the voice of his enemies. Jesus heard the voice of His enemies as He hung dying on the cross, and Jesus responded in submission to His Father in perfect obedience and trust; and in Jesus' dying, He demonstrates the perfect righteousness and judgment of God. He took the penalty for our sin upon Him. Jesus delivered His people from death. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. And every trial teaches us to trust this Jesus more fully. Romans 8:28, which every believer loves the promise that, "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose," that God is working all those things together is a promise that David believed before Paul ever wrote it; and it's a promise that Jesus knew before Paul wrote it, because Jesus is God; and He tells you that salvation belongs to Him, that He's the one that we trust in trouble; and He'll prove it in your life over and over and over again, because when there's trouble, there's an occasion for trust.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for the confidence, the assurance, and the trust that we can have in the face of trouble. Thank You for this divinely-inspired song; may we live according to its truth. Guard us, God, from temptation. As foes surround us and we hear mocking words of ridicule, give us trust in Your presence as a shield, our sovereign God, our Savior, our strength. Give us tranquility that grants us security and peace. And God, remind us that in You alone is salvation. And God, we pray like David:

"Arise, O LORD; rescue and restore Your people. Give us trust in the face of our trials, in Jesus' mighty name we pray. Amen.