

**Psalm 3**  
**Grandview Calvary Baptist**  
**July 25, 2010**

Psalm 3 - First of Psalm's ascribed to David

In the scope of biblical history, David is considered a spiritual giant. If you've ever questioned why that is you wouldn't be the first.

At one level, his life seems so mortal. So ordinary, so human, if you will. Fraught with the struggles that all of us know well - ambition and anger, lust, deceit, murder, selfishness, doubt. Yet God himself described David as "a man after my own heart" How does he come by that designation?

I think this Psalm will help us at least in part to answer that question.

The key, it seems to me, is to understand the historical context in which this Psalm has been placed.

*"A Psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom".*

Whether it was actually written in that context or placed there afterward is irrelevant. We have been told that this is the contextual lens through which the Psalm is to be read.

Let's remember the story of Absalom.

Absalom, this prince of Israel, has stolen the hearts of all the people of Israel. Not an innocent theft. It was done with cunning and with strategy. He would sit outside the city gates leading into Jerusalem and when people would come to seek council from King David, Absalom would intervene.

He would show a focused interest in the person. He would kiss them rather than let them fall at his feet. Who are you and where have you come from? What concern has brought you here? And then he would convince the person that he was better prepared to address the person's concerns than his father was.

Absalom was tall and handsome, with thick black hair that hung down his brawny body. People were taken with him.

So when he had enough of a following he staged a takeover of the state. He set himself up in the city of Hebron, declared himself king, and then he sent word to his father that he was advancing on Jerusalem to take the throne.

Unbelievable. And you thought you had upstart teenagers! Here is an adult child with an ego and ambition out of control! And an army of 10,000 to back him. Not only that, some of David's closest advisers are in the mutiny to the point that David is no longer sure who is for him and who is against him.

Which brings us to the first stanza in Psalm 3. READ

Now David has to decide what to do. Located in the fortified city of Jerusalem has one of two choices: He can either stay in the city or he can leave it.

Let's consider the first choice: staying put in the city of Jerusalem and defending the city. Important to understand this:

Jerusalem is the seat not just of political power and wealth - but religious and economic and social power and wealth. It's all bound up here for him. *Jerusalem is who David is!!!* This is his city. Surely God would come through for him.

### **Our Walled Fortresses**

Archaeologists tell us that the majority of towns and cities in Palestine were fortified in biblical times. Fortification meant survival. Even today you can see the crumbling ruins of ancient walls dotting the landscape.

True of almost all prehistoric human habitation.

The necessity to live inside fortifications is, it would seem, instinctual to human notions of survival and prosperity.

Now we may not live inside walled cities any longer but nevertheless, from the perspective of the spiritual life, its important to understand that the need that *all* of us have to *live inside walled fortresses* persists. And we all do. We all do.

And before you get defensive, that's not a bad thing. It's a human thing. It's part of our instinctual human mode of self-preservation and significance.

So by our walled fortresses I'm referring not to brick and mortar but to *those things we have invested in whereby we have made ourselves into the people we are*. And that includes everything from:

- the personality, the characteristics by which you are known
- the job or vocational calling you've established ourselves in - your successes and your failures
- the house or apartment you live in, the way you've organized it
- the person we've married or the people we live with - the relationships that you bounce off of for better or for worse everyday
- the church-going routines you've established or not - your religious self
- the clothes we wear and the fashion statements we pursue
- For some people its their self-proclaimed status as a victim of circumstances (quite a common fortress that many hunker down inside of)

We all have all these things. They are the things that our identity is bound up in. Our identity, whether we like that identity or not/whether we are conscious of it or not, is the fortress that we live inside, that keeps us secure.

Its always been the case, in the age of consumerism and commodification it has reached new heights of course.

Marketing experts and sociologists have cleverly called it “our brand”. We brand ourselves. And it doesn’t just stop at the individual level - churches have brands, and neighbourhoods have brands, and tribes have brands, and countries have brands.

Not big TV watchers (part of my “brand”) but I did watch a bit of world cup soccer. Wheat fields and mountain lakes - We were told that this is what makes us Canadian . We are a people in touch with the immensity of the natural world, the rugged outdoors is our playground, we are a nation of athletic, adventurous risk-takers. By the end of the ad – I had totally identified with it. Yes! I thought, even though I haven’t seen a wheat field or swum in a mountain lake for years!

These are not bad things. They are the props on the stage of our lives. They provide the tangibles of negotiating relationships. They give us a place in the social order. They can be what make us unique whether individually or collectively, locally or nationally.

For David, the walled fortress of Jerusalem, established him as king. The seat of political power, religious power, wealth, abundance.

NOW, if David were a lesser man spiritually, he would have hunkered down inside the walled fortress and prayed: “God, come and protect the Holy City.”

It’s a tempting prayer, isn’t it? It is one of the most common misuses of religion that I know of. We USE our faith to appeal to God to protect our walled fortresses. To protect our egos that are bound up in them.

How desperately we want to protect those things in our lives that we have so deeply identified with. Any great spiritual tradition will tell you, are NOT the true you.

### **Leaving our Walled Fortresses**

Where in fact, the role of healthy religion is not to protect our walled fortresses but to call us out of them. Our fabricated egos. Our over-identification with self. To leave the strongholds of our own making.

Now, the thing to understand is that we will almost never do it on our own. Too scary. We almost always have to be forced out. This movement almost always requires some external incident that undoes us – the breakdown in a marriage, a death in our family, the loss of a job, the betrayal by a close friend or colleague, growing old (one none of us will avoid).

And if we learn anything from biblical narrative it is that the very things we have given so much to - whether its our children, our ministries, our work, our wealth, our religious pursuit even - the things that are closest to us in so many ways. These are the very things that will fail us. We want them to save us, so to speak, but they

can't. Of course, they can't. In that way we can use the language of betrayal. In that way, the things we have so much invested in (even religion) will betray us.

Adam betrayed by Eve, Isaac by Abraham, the great betrayal - Jesus by Judas, here David with Absalom – his own son for crying out loud! The very things which we have nurtured and loved will often be the very things which WILL FAIL us and force us out of our own securities. It's the only way we will ever be able to let go.

And that is okay. I think it's what Jesus was getting at when he urged his followers, "If you want to follow me you'll have to leave your family behind".  
*In so doing we die to the very things that we have thought were who we were and without which we were convinced that we would have no life.*

Jesus likened it to a seed, "Unless it falls to the ground and dies...."

### **The Security of God**

David's first choice is to defend Jerusalem.

His second choice, which maybe in the end is no choice at all militarily speaking, is to leave it. To relinquish everything to a son.... who has a bigger army than he has.

David's departure from Jerusalem is narrated in 2 Samuel 15 and 16. I'm going to recollect it very briefly, and you tell me if it sounds at all familiar.

2 Sam 15

verse 16 - He leaves the city.

Verse 30 – He goes up to the Mt. of Olives, with a crowd of devoted followers following alongside him barefoot and weeping

Verse 31 - Told betrayed by one of his closest confidants and advisors

2 Sam 16

verses 5-8, 13 - A man by the name of Shimei comes out throwing stones and curses at David calling him a "murderer" and a scoundrel. READ verses 5-8,13

Does it sound familiar?! David's suffering outside the walls of Jerusalem (stripped, abandoned, mocked, betrayed) sounds like the suffering of someone else we know? Jesus. David's suffering anticipates the suffering of Christ. And Christ's suffering becomes the archetype of all suffering that comes to us when we leave either by force or by choice the walled fortresses that we deceptively had come to believe were our true security.

The final insult that David endures, come from his son Absalom who, upon entering Jerusalem, sets up a tent in public and rapes his father's concubines – making a complete mockery of his father, scorning the king's authority. 16: 21,22

David's dignity is the last thing to be taken from him. And he flees to the wilderness. In the nothingness, the spiritual nakedness, the vulnerability of the wilderness - that David comes to understand who he truly is and where the source of his true security lies.

It is in this place, under these circumstances that we are instructed to read our Psalm: It is *here* that David voices this prayer:

*Vs. 4 But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, the one who lifts my head. ... (My dignity comes from God alone and no one can take that away.)*

I think we are circling in close on the spiritual genius of David here.

Vs. 5,6.

The truth of the matter is that most of us go through most of our lives without leaving the walled fortresses of our own making. And that is especially true for those of us who live in societies defined by secular capitalism over which religion is just a veneer. It's not really our fault. We've been so long coddled by the lie that the walled fortresses that we live inside are all there is. The voices of spiritual guides are drowned out.

And if pain of any sort threatens to oust us from our walled fortresses what do we do? Why we sue it or we medicate it or we bomb it rather than have it force us from our strongholds.

So fewer and fewer are the people, the spiritual giants, who have left their fortified lives, and finding themselves naked and wounded before God, have been able to say:

*I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me.*

I remember when my children were first born they would sleep on their backs with their hands above their heads. Like this.

I remember Mary Dickau once told me that its the most vulnerable position that a person can sleep in. That it's the sleep of those who know no fear. She also said, there are only two categories of people who sleep like that: newborn babies and kings.

I picture David sleeping like that. Not because he's a king but because he's a person who has left the false assurances of his stronghold, and yet knows himself completely in the hands of God and therefore without fear. Completely free.

The Catholic tradition calls these completely free people "saints". I think saints comprise a third category of people who sleep with their arms stretched high above their heads.

### **Returning to the Stronghold**

The final thing that needs to be said about this story is that God does defend Jerusalem (the last two stanzas of the Psalm). David goes back and resumes his rightful place as King.

But once you leave your walled fortress and come to a place of knowing your security to be completely found in God alone something *fundamentally changes*.

Now you can return to those places and those things that are closest to you and that you have nurtured.

And its only now that you can truly love - without defensiveness or grasping or anxiety.

It's the type of love that we see in David, who upon returning to Jerusalem, learns of the death of his son Absalom in the battle over the city. Does he cheer? No. Does he offer a sigh of relief? No.

2 Samuel 18:33

My prayer for you today is that you, like David, will have the courage to leave behind your walled fortress when it is asked of you SO THAT, like David, you might return one day to where you began, a person truly transformed and free to love (even in death) those who God had given you in this lifetime to love.