

Scripture: Psalm 3
Series: Knowing God
Date: 11.10.2019
Sermon Title: God in the Cave

MPT: Do not be afraid, salvation belongs to the omnipotent God.

MPS: Victory over fear can be ours by receiving God's salvation in Christ and believing all his promises to us in Christ.

During our time in grad school Courtney and I both were pulling some hours at our local church. I was interning as a part of my seminary program. She was taking on some hours as extra income. Often we would ride together the 30 minutes it took to get to the church. Well one day we drove separately because Courtney had a dinner with the kids ministry staff. So 5pm hits and we say bye and I start driving home. And because we are madly in love about 10 minutes into the drive I call her. She doesn't answer. No big deal. Just saw her. About 10 minutes later I call her again. No answer. And then something happens in me.

It should be said right here that the moment I'm sharing with you is not a proud one for me. In fact, I had largely blocked it out. But it's one of several moments where I was absolutely overpowered by fear. The name for this particular form of fear is anxiety. See something happened when Courtney didn't pick up. My imagination went 100mph straight to worst case scenarios about what had happened or was happening to

Courtney. Awful things. My heart was pounding and I had to pull the car over. I turned the car around and sped to the restaurant she was having her meeting at. And I sat in that parking lot until she came out. And when she did come out she was NOT happy. She was embarrassed and mad. Her husband had become some creeper dude who went all out-of-his-mind because she had her phone on silent? Not a good moment for me.

And I share that with you because it wasn't the only time I've squared off against anxiety and lost. It is one of my greatest enemies in my walk with Christ and because of that it is an area that I've felt great shame in and yet also where I've come to know God the best. Where facts about God transform into a real closeness to God. And I want to share some of that with you today. I know I'm not alone. According to the National Institute of Health 31.8% of U.S. Adults experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. That means more than one out of four of your friends, colleagues, and neighbors battle anxiety. Anxiety is the primary mental health problem facing children and teens today and it has been for over a decade. It's also the primary mental health problem facing adults. Today's teens and young adults are 5-8 times more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety disorders than people were during major crises in history including the great depression, WWII, and the Cold War. Fear is crippling our society and it is crippling the church too. We need God's help.

Intro to Knowing God

If you have your bible get it out and turn to Psalm 3. The setting of Psalm 3 is King David in a cave. He's surrounded by

enemies and his faith in God is under attack. And the sweet, sweet thing about today's Psalm is David doesn't leave the cave at the end of it. This Psalm is not about how to get out of the cave. It's about how to invite the presence of God into the cave with you. And in doing so, how to find comfort in, and victory over, anxiety right there in the dark anguish of the soul.

We are going to spend the next 3 weeks in the Psalms. A different psalm each week. Any time we preach a Psalm we do so as a part of our ongoing sermon series called Knowing God. The idea behind the whole series is simple: You weren't made to just know about God, you were made to know God. God is not a subject matter, he is a person. And he created you to know him like you know a person. To depend on him, to draw close to him. And often people experience a big gap between what they hear in church and what they experience in real life. They hear ABOUT a God who loves them, who can strengthen them, and meet their needs. And maybe they get inspired for an afternoon, but life doesn't really change. That's because head knowledge **about** God never translates to heart knowledge **of** God.

Psalm 3 is so good for helping us learn what it means to cross that bridge from knowing about God to knowing God because it is going to show us how to invite God in to help us deal with fear. One of the most primal emotions we feel. And we all feel it. I want to read it to you and then talk about the abundance of hope for us in the face of fear. Whether your fear is something small that spins out of control or its something

much bigger that could swallow you whole...there are promises for you today. There is a great deal of hope for you.

Context: King David is our author. His son Absalom has taken over his throne. David is on the run and he's hiding in a cave. Most likely David wrote this years later but wrote it in the present tense so he could articulate what was happening. But either way, he has real fear and offers real hope to anyone who will receive it today. So as I read it I want to ask you to do something. Open your heart to receive God's word to you. See these words are where the real power is. These 8 verses contain more power in them to free you from fear than all of my words. All of my words are here to help shed light on **these** words. The truths laid out in this Psalm have brought me such profound freedom from anxiety. Not that I don't battle with it anymore, I still do sometimes. But I am a different man now. I'll talk more about that later. Ok here are God's words to you from Psalm 3. (Pray before we read them?)

Lord, how my foes increase!
There are many who attack me.
2 Many say about me,
"There is no help for him in God." Selah
3 But you, Lord, are a shield around me,
my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.
4 I cry aloud to the Lord,
and he answers me from his holy mountain. Selah
5 I lie down and sleep;
I wake again because the Lord sustains me.
6 I will not be afraid of thousands of people
who have taken their stand against me on every side.

7 Rise up, Lord!
Save me, my God!
You strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.
8 Salvation belongs to the Lord;
may your blessing be on your people. Selah -- Psalms 3:1-8
(CSB)

May the Spirit of God stir confidence in the promises of God in your heart today.

We are going to walk through the text. Verses 1-2 talk about the fear David is dealing with. So we will start there. and then the next 6 show us how David finds victory in the cave. Just like David spends the majority of his words focused on God, not on his fear, so we too will spend a big portion of our time on God's help in the cave.

Let's start with verses 1-2

1 Lord, how my foes increase! There are many who attack me.

I want us to begin by acknowledging the legitimacy in David's fear. His son Absalom is literally bringing about 12,000 men to attack him and wipe him out. Verse 6 he says he will not be afraid of thousands of people who take their stand against him...that's not exaggeration for dramatic effect. He's right. There are thousands of people. And I think a lot of the time worry and anxiety begin with good intention based in reality. Here is a threat or a problem and I want to care for it. I love my wife and want her to be OK. Good and right desire. I don't want my child to experience harm. I want to provide

financially for my family and I can't find a job. But that often becomes something different doesn't it.

2 Many say about me, "There is no help for him in God." Selah

This is a little different. David is being told that God has left him just like he left Saul before him. Saul sinned and the spirit of God left him. Well, David sinned. Had an affair with Bathsheba & killed her husband. So maybe the naysayers are right. Maybe God has left David. That word help is the word "Salvation." Which matters a lot because of how it gets used again in verse 8. While verse 1 is a statement based in physical reality, verse 2 presents a deep challenge to his calling from God. See David was anointed to sit on the throne and one of his offspring was to rule Israel forever. This isn't the way it was supposed to go down. And so the opportunity to fear is creeping in. The cave is almost a physical expression of where his soul COULD go. Spiraling down into a frozen panic.

I think this is where we need to pause and talk about the difference between healthy fear that we should just call fear. And an unhealthy fear that morphs into worry and anxiety. And let's get some definitions.

Healthy fear is a reaction to danger. It is a self-preservation reaction. It is specific and constructive. Example: We were playing at the beach with our kids and I tell my 3 & 4 year old boys...being in an inner-tube riding the waves will be fun! Well, they both flip and the video Courtney is shooting from her comfortable spot is of me running behind them with their feet up in the air & heads underwater. And Courtney yelling "GET THEM GET THEM!" Healthy Fear springs you into specific action to resolve specific danger.

Anxiety – after the danger, you have an abiding sense that danger still lurks. Somehow, somewhere. It's usually more undefined and doesn't seem to go away. Sissy Goff in her book 'worry free girls' defines anxiety as perpetual worry that never quite seems to lift.

I heard the difference between healthy fear and unhealthy anxiety explained like the difference between a thunderstorm and a steady rain. A thunderstorm is intense...for a short period of time. Then the storm passes and the sun comes out. Anxiety is more like a constant cold drizzle. It's always raining. And if it's always raining, after a while your soul will start to mildew. It's debilitating. Your body wasn't made to stay in that kind of state and so it starts to physically, spiritually and emotionally break down when it does. David is physically being attacked and at a deeper soul level his identity as it relates to God's promises are being attacked. It's a thunderstorm. And it would be really easy for fear to win the day and freeze him entirely. Yet, that's not what happens.

In this moment of fear in the darkness of the cave David seeks out God. And the psalm takes a beautiful shift. And in doing so it offers us hope in the cave. Watch the process he goes through because in it is how we grab hold of God and let his strength carry us in the cave. I just want to offer a lot of hope in God today for us. If you find yourself in the cave I want you to take hope down with you. If you aren't prone to anxiety or worry but you know those who are well, all the better for you today because what you hear today you can give to them. And be the mouthpiece of God to someone in need. I'm not going

to give you a lot of action steps today. I'm going to give you a lot of promises and maybe one action step.

3 But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.

"But." The Psalm didn't end in him losing himself over his troubles. In the middle of the trouble he says BUT you Lord. David places the Lord God between himself and his trouble. They are closing in, there is great reason to fear and all would be lost BUT...GOD. See in moments of fear, in seasons of doubt, Christians are able to look back at the cross and say there was a time when all hope was lost for me...but God. That's Ephesians 2.4 We were dead in our trespasses and sins...BUT GOD...who is rich in mercy, because of the great love that he had for us made us alive together with Christ Jesus. But GOD. In so many ways that is the Christian testimony. But God.

And that's so big because fear's greatest asset is amnesia. That in the cave, maybe your memory will go dark too. Maybe you'll be unable to remember God's faithfulness. But David has it tucked away in his heart. I'll get to that later. Let the promises roll in...write them down, memorize them.

1) **God protects me.** "A shield around me" – That translation is spot on. Around me means God is the type of shield a garrison would use that would protect it on all sides as it continued its attack. This isn't a captain America arm shield. This is God before me, behind me, beside me, beneath me, and above me. God protects me IN THE BATTLE. We Christians are really

good at remembering God is with us. I think we need to recover the theological mindset that God surrounds us. The Holy Spirit lives in us, but he also covers us. And in your cave, God is not only with you, he has you completely protected on all sides.

Now think about that for a second. God is more than your companion who is with you. He is your protector. And you may say “yeah but I don’t feel that.” Well, that’s a different thing. What we are seeing in Psalm 3 is that We don’t feel our way out of fear. Feelings aren’t built for that work. We pray our way out.

We pray our way out. And prayer starts with where we are. Oh God look at what is happening. But then makes an important shift to what we know to be true. So when our emotions and thoughts start to betray us, we wrap our minds around what we knew to be true when we were still sane.

2) **God is where I find my worth.** That’s the word “my glory.” Glory is importance or weight. He finds his identity not in what *they* are saying about him. He says no GOD is my glory. You God are where I find my glory. What does that mean? It means in this dark cave he takes stock of who God is...and what God has said about him. And chooses to let that be the script he rehearses in his head. Not what fear says, but what God says. God is the sovereign creator of the universe. He is the only one with the currency that my soul trades in. So I will look to him. Some of you struggle with acceptance. That’s where your anxiety comes in. What if we could say...no more. God has called me son, God has called me daughter. Soul, I will be free from the fear of people’s opinions of me. 3rd

graders – 12th graders listen to me: God loves you. Your friends, your siblings, your classmates, sometimes your parents will say things that will hurt you ok. And its ok to be hurt by them. Words are powerful. BUT, I want you to hear God loves you and his words and his love are WAY stronger than anyone elses. And the way you will survive mean words...the way mean words don’t become labels you identify with...is remembering what God says to you. You are God’s chosen son or daughter. Nobody else gets to say who you are. You are God’s.

3) **God restores me.** Lifter of my head is such a powerful phrase. Just think about it. David literally had walked out of town weeping with his head hung low. 2 Samuel 15 is like a funeral procession. David is weeping and crying and so is everyone else. It’s like a funeral procession / escape. It’s terrible. He’s embarrassed, ashamed, and frightened. And God meets David right there.

One way you know you are dealing with unhealthy fear, is it has a way of creating shame in you. Like...man I couldn’t trust God again. I failed God again. I acted in fear not in trust. And your head drops. But then God comes along and lifts your head. He restores your spiritual sight and your dignity and your sense of hope. Before he calls you to do anything, he just comes like a father and says child, I love you. Now pick your head up and let’s go. Used to be my coach’s favorite go-to because I was always so hard on myself. He’d see me mad that I’d messed up and my head would be hanging. And he’d say pick-your-head-up & get ‘em next time. God is even more gracious. He’s saying don’t you even try to lift your head up.

Let me do that. Let me restore you. That begins in the gospel. We can lift our heads because we've been called sons and daughters of the most high God!!! And David says God...you lift my head in the midst of shame.

4 I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain. Selah

Maybe you need to grab ahold of this promise today. When you cry out...God help me! God look at what is happening and help me...**God hears me in the cave.** This is a massively important promise when facing down worry and anxiety. God hears you in the cave. You don't need polished prayers to pray to God. You can cry aloud. Say what is happening. What you are dealing with. And he will hear you. And he won't just receive it, he will answer you.

How do you know? Because God has granted us access to Zion through Jesus. Jesus has made a way for us to speak to God and to find real help from him. Hebrews 4.16 **let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. -- Hebrews 4:16**

God hears you, he welcomes you in your time of need and he restores you. He makes you whole again.

5 I lie down and sleep; I wake again because the Lord sustains me.

God sustains me; so I will sleep. Anxiety and worry have a way of keeping us awake at night. Of keeping us fixated on the problem. David has found a wonderful blessing that comes from knowing about God to knowing God. from God being a subject matter to a person, a shield, glory, rescuer, provider and sustainer. He says because he knows God like this, he sleeps. He closes his eyes which means he can't even see what may attack him. Real threat. But he knows the Lord doesn't sleep. In fact think about this. We are created in the image of God right? But...our bodies need sleep as to where the Lord does not need sleep. Why did he not grant us perpetual energy like he has? The answer is simple. Our physical need for sleep is a built in reminder that we are not him. As a reminder that we should not be anxious but instead we should rest in him. We should close our eyes. In fact, one of the most dramatic events in Jesus' ministry and a huge test of faith for the disciples begins and centers on Jesus sleeping through a storm. In that scene Jesus doesn't just teach us to have faith in God in the storm, he models what that faith looks like. It's sleeping.

2 In vain you get up early and stay up late, working hard to have enough food — yes, he gives sleep to the one he loves. -- Psalms 127:2

And the reason he wakes up...the Lord sustains him. The Lord got him through the night in the cave. I want you to hear that God doesn't sleep so that you can sleep. And it may be that one of the greatest acts of discipleship, greatest acts of growing closer to God & trusting God is who he says he is...is to go home today shut everything down.... And take a holy nap. I have a friend who used to call his bed "The Word."

That's like Christian short hand for 'the word of God' or the bible. He named it that so that when we asked why he was late to work he could say "man I was just stuck in the word this morning and couldn't get out of it." And we would be impressed.

I think we see sleep as lazy when it is actually a spiritual discipline. Now I'm not telling you to shirk responsibility and blame God for your tardiness to work. But maybe those hours late at night could be better spent practicing the spiritual discipline of sleep. And if you think...yeah easy to say but I can't shut it down...I turn everything off but my mind races. That's a huge spiritual red alert. Let that darkness while you look up be your cave. Invite God in. Pray your fears & surrender them to God. Ask him for rest in your mind & heart. Your body will follow. I've been trying this this week. It's difficult. But worth it. Some of you are like YES LAWD this is the greatest sermon ever the pastor has ordered sleep. Yep. Be blessed. But the prescription is really for those who will have the hardest time with it. Some of you are like my wife Courtney who has the spiritual gift of sleeping. She could hold seminars on it. She's not a morning or evening person. She's a sleep person. Praise God for those of you like her. But please keep it to yourself while we worriers try to trust God.

6 I will not be afraid of thousands of people who have taken their stand against me on every side. 7 Rise up, Lord! Save me, my God! You strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.

Told you I will give you one action step today. It's to pray your fears. Don't bottle them up and pretend like you are ok. Don't let them take the steering wheel of your heart and mind and drive you crazy. Instead lay them out before the presence of the Lord. That's what David is training us to do here. Here's how you can pray this Psalm in a sentence:

God, because you are who you are, I will not be afraid. I want you to write that down and pray it this week in the cave. This doesn't JUST need to be for the cave. Train yourself day in and day out with this prayer. See what David is doing here? He's recited SO MANY of God's promises to him and then said...he will not be afraid. His mind racing with everything coming against him the first thing he needs to do is remind his soul who God is. THEN now in verse 6. With all those truths, all those soul lifting promises. He is able to say "I will not be afraid."

And even then...who does he call to action? He calls the LORD to action. All he calls on himself to do is trust God. He calls God to Rise up & he calls God to save him. SAVE ME MY GOD! What a desperate, powerful prayer that is also available to us! Save me my God! He knows what God can do: God can destroy his enemies.

In fact, the reference to striking the cheek and breaking the teeth of the wicked...several commentators I read say he's evoking the imagery of striking down a wild beast. Because once you remove the teeth of a wild animal, its mostly harmless. It can't bite you without teeth. And David is saying you God...you bust the teeth out of the enemy. So it can

attack...but it has no power over me. Which reminds me of the apostle Paul's comment about death itself:

Death has been swallowed up in victory. 55 Where, death, is your victory?

Where, death, is your sting? -- 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

Death still comes...but the stinger has been taken out. So I don't have to fear it. And listen often that is fear's greatest weapon. A looming sense of death. That's the raincloud that won't leave. That locks us up and causes us to helicopter parent or to avoid risks. And Paul says the teeth are taken out of it. HOW? Well that's our last verse isn't it? David ends his prayer in the single glorious triumphant truth of Christianity.

8 Salvation belongs to the Lord; may your blessing be on your people. Selah

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Let me explain something right here about how we are to read that truth. Because the truth is even more powerful to us. See David writing is confident that salvation from enemies belongs to the Lord. He's confident God is the deliverer. God is with him in the cave, sustains him in the cave, God saved him from the bears & lions when he was a shepherd, God delivered him from Goliath. He knows salvation in this situation belongs to the Lord just like salvation in any other situation. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

But there is another level we get to read this with. It's vitally important for how you see the Psalms and really how you see the entire old testament. Jesus said to his disciples once in a

pretty epic bible study that the whole old testament was actually about him. That the Old Testament has an overarching narrative, a grand story that is telling about the one God would send to save the world from true darkness. Darkness in scripture is a metaphor for sin. We run from God we rebel against him and choose our way over his way. The presence of God is light and we run away from that into darkness. We are lost without him. And we can't find our way back to him on our own. So God sends Jesus down to us. Into our darkness. And he says I am your way out of the cave. You can't climb your way out. But I can bring you out. I can bring you back into the presence of the father. I'll lift your head, pick you up, and bring you back home. I will surround you.

The grand narrative of scripture is that Jesus won the victory over sin & death FOR US. He took our place so that we do not experience true darkness. He came down into the cave and said I will save you. The answer to your fear is the victory Christ has won over sin and death.

The answer to your fear is to make your home there. Let me close with what you can walk out of here with. It's the passage the Lord used to save me from the cave of fear. He met me while I was locked up and frozen by anxiety. While I was at urgent care because I thought I was having a heart attack and it was actually a panic attack. And in his kindness he led me here:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer

and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. -- Philippians
4:4-7

See the worst thing you can say to a person who struggles with anxiety is “don’t be anxious.” It’s like pouring gasoline on a fire and saying “hey stop burning.” All you do is intensify the problem. Paul says don’t worry and I was mad at him for this. But then he gives us worriers something to do: Pray. Pray your fears. Do something with them: give them to God. Now he’s telling Christians to do this. Those who have opened themselves to the salvation of Christ...who have been rescued from the cave but find themselves slipping back there. He says the peace of God that we cannot possibly understand. It’s too great...it will guard your heart & your mind...the two most vulnerable places the enemy will attack you. It will GUARD you. The peace of God will guard you how? In Christ Jesus.

In Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song; this cornerstone, this solid ground. Firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease. My comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand.

Will you let God into the cave with you? God I know you hear me in my cave. And because you are who you are, I will not be afraid.

David does this a lot in the Psalms.

5 Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from him. 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will not be shaken. -- Psalms 62:5-6

- Difference between FEAR and Anxiety
 - Fear – reaction to danger. Self-preservation reaction.
 - Anxiety – after the danger, if you have an abiding sense that danger lurks.
- There is healthy fear & unhealthy fear called anxiety
 - Healthy fear – specific and constructive.
 - Ex: rescuing your child from a specific danger / threat. Catching them when they fell over. “GET THEM GET THEM!”
 - Anxiety – generalized & undefined. Not sure why it’s there. & It debilitates you. Makes you unable to act.
 - Fear is like a thunderstorm. You go through it and then sun comes. Anxiety is like a cold drizzle. Always raining. After a while your soul starts to mildew.