

# “Warfare and Prayer”

The Six Psalms, Part 1

Psalm 3

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# I. Tugging Our Heartstrings

The heart is a stringed instrument. It can be plucked and resound with music. (Afterall, we refer to something or someone tugging on our “heartstrings,” i.e., our deepest feelings of love.)

- There are many “musicians” pulling on our heartstrings.
- But nothing can make us resound with the music of heaven like the Psalms.
- A “psalm” (ψαλμός; *psalmos*) is a striking, twanging, as in the chords of an instrument.

**The Psalms pluck our heartstrings, transforming us into instruments that resound with heaven’s song.**

*John Chrysostom.* If we keep vigil in church, David comes first, last and central.... All other men at night are overcome by sleep. David alone is active, and gathering the servants of God into seraphic bands, he turns earth into heaven, and converts men into angels.<sup>1</sup>

This Lent, we will get to know six Psalms known for encompassing the sorrows and joys of the Christian life. There is an interesting tradition that says our guardian angel will sing these psalms over us at the Great Judgment. These six psalms are 3, 38, 63, 8, 103, and 143.

The Psalter should be precious to us if only because it most clearly promises the death and resurrection of Christ, and describes His kingdom, and the nature and standing of all Christian People. It could well be entitled a “little

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Barriger, “The Old Testament in Orthodox Worship,” Diocese of North America, accessed February 17, 2024,

<https://www.acrod.org/orthodox-christianity/articles/scripture/oldtestamentinworship#:~:text=This%20tremendous%20influence%20of%20the,and%20central%20is%20David%20again> .

Bible” since everything contained in the entire Bible is beautifully and briefly comprehended.... It seems to me as if the Holy Spirit had been pleased to take on Himself the trouble of putting together a short Bible.<sup>2</sup>

## II. How to Pray the Psalms

Psalms like Psalm 3 are hard to pray.

- Do I really have that many enemies? (“How many” 3x; vv. 1, 2)
- Do I really lie down, sleep, and wake because God upholds me? (v. 5)
- Do I really want God to “break the teeth of the wicked”? (v. 7)

Psalms are hard to pray when we ignore three perspectives.

### 1. The Psalms are *dynamic*, not *static*.

- a. *The Psalms pull us into their world.* They are not old prayers stuck in the muck of history in need of being brought into our lives. Rather, we are the ones stuck in the muck of a fallen world, needing to be brought into *their* lives.
- b. *The Psalms are a drama.* They contain a communion of persons. The Psalmist speaks; the Father speaks; Christ speaks.<sup>3</sup> Praying the Psalms draws us into this ever-present dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, in the “Preface to the Psalms” in his German translation of the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Patrick Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, revised (Chesterton, IN: Conciliar Press, 2011), chap. 1. Kindle. “Conversation is especially a trait of the Psalms, where we discover, not only ourselves speaking to God about Christ, but also Christ speaking to His Father about us, and so on. The voices will vary, not only from psalm to psalm, but also during the course of a single psalm.”

*Henry Patrick Reardon.* When I recite the lines of this Psalm [18], in short, its reference is not reduced to the things that happen to be going on in my individual life. I am playing a part, rather, in the larger and transforming drama of redemption. The paltry circumstances of my own existence are taken up, through this prayer, into the ongoing history of God's people.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The Psalms are *Christocentric*, not *egocentric*.**

- a. The Psalms are not about us but about Christ.
- b. In the Psalms we walk and commune with Christ. This is why the Psalms are the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament.

*Luke 24:44.* These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

- c. Psalms 1–3 introduce and establish the rhythm of the Psalter.<sup>5</sup>
  - i. *The Man* (Psalm 1). Through obedience, Adam flourishes God's presence. Christ is the New Adam.
  - ii. *The Messiah* (Psalm 2). Adam becomes David; the Man becomes a King. Christ is the New David.
  - iii. *The Suffering Servant* (Psalm 3). Christ is the Suffering Servant.

## **3. The Psalms are *spiritual*, not *literal*.**

- a. We cannot pray the Psalms if we trap them in their historical setting.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- b. Israel = God's people, including the Church (cf. Rom 11)
- c. Enemies = that which wars against the soul (i.e., sin)
- d. "Break the teeth" (v. 7) recalls Genesis 3:15.

### III. Psalm 3

#### A. What Psalm 3 Teaches Us about God

##### 1. Christ is our Salvation.

- a. In Psalm 3, we progress from Adam to David to Jesus
- b. "Salvation" (v. 8) = *Yeshua*, which is the Hebrew form of Jesus (Greek).

##### 2. Christ is our Resurrection and Life.

- a. "Sleep" (v. 5) is the same used to refer to the death of kings as sleeping with their fathers (Kings and Chronicles).
- b. Refers to death in Job 14:12
- c. Refers to death in Psalm 13:3

#### B. What Psalm 3 Teaches Us about Ourselves

##### 1. We are persecuted every day.

- The same enemy who pursued David pursued Christ; he now pursues us (see title of psalm).
- Meditation on God's Word (Psalm 1) and adoration of God's Son (Psalm 2) lead to persecution for God's people (Psalm 3).
- The Christian life is a spiritual war between sin and our heart.

##### 2. We are lied to every day.

- "There is no salvation for him in God" (v. 2)

- “Cheek” and “teeth” may suggest lies. (v. 7)
- Cf. “the counsel of the wicked” (Ps 1:1)

### **3. We need Jesus’ salvation every day.**

## **IV. Prayer is Warfare**

**Psalm 3 teaches us that prayer is the way we engage in spiritual warfare.** The violence in this Psalm is spiritual, not physical.

*Eph 6:12.* For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Psalm 3 is a prayer for those who resist sin and the devil.

*Patrick Henry Reardon.* This is not a prayer book for the noncombatant, and unless a person is actually engaged in hostilities it is difficult to see how he can pray Psalm 3.... To relinquish any one of the psalms on the excuse that its sentiments are too violent for a Christian is a clear sign that a person has also given up the very battle that a Christian is summoned from his bed to fight. The Psalms are prayers for those engaged in an ongoing spiritual conflict. No one else need bother even opening the book.<sup>6</sup>

**Prayer is our counter-attack against the persecutions and counsels (Ps 1:1) of our enemy.**

- Prayer provides a shield of protection about us (vv. 3, 6).
- Those truly in prayer cannot sin.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- But sleep “renders prayer impossible.”<sup>7</sup> So we seek Christ’s aid even in sleeping and rising.

In life, we come face-to-face with our enemy. But in praying the Psalms, we come face-to-face with our Savior.

Who will pluck our heartstrings? Our many foes, or Christ?

Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us; for You are good and You love mankind. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. “And just what is wrong with sleep? Very simply, that it normally renders prayer impossible. As the one virtually insuperable obstacle to constant prayer, sleep has often been a bit vexing, as it were, a sort of mild embarrassment for those who take seriously the biblical mandate that they pray without ceasing.”