



“Our Stories in Worship”¹

In the late 1800’s, there was a father who was very concerned for his son’s spiritual state. He wrote a letter to the president of Moody Bible Institute and asked if his son could go to the school. The father thought that if his son was under regular training of the Bible that he might turn to Jesus. At first, the president (named R.A. Torrey) responded and stated that while he was sympathetic to the plight, Moody was not a reform school. The father didn’t take “no” for an answer, and so he pled his son’s case again. Torrey then responded with a “yes,” but with the qualification that the son meet with him every day and abide by all the rules and requirements. If he failed these terms, the son would be asked to leave.

The son abided by the rules, and he met with Torrey daily. Torrey said that “The son came and at first it almost seemed hopeless. Never have I met someone with so many problems, and particularly in the spiritual realm.” But the son met with Torrey every day, and Torrey always responded with answers from the Scripture because he wanted the boy to realize that human reasoning alone wasn’t enough for his soul. After months of this, one day the son came in with his face bright. God answered the prayers of the father and of Torrey. God had saved this young man.

Later in his life, this son said, “. . .if I hadn’t gone through that experience, and may I assure you it wasn’t pleasant at the time, I perhaps never would have come to know the importance of God’s Word and the wonderful truth of salvation by grace.” At some point later in this man’s life, he became the assistant superintendent of Moody Bible Institute. He also spent his life preaching and even writing some books on the Scriptures. But, in his own words, he said of this poem he wrote: I don’t know how much merit my song has as far as literary value is concerned but I’ll tell you one thing – that song has affected more people around the world than the many books the Lord has permitted me to write. God is good, isn’t He?” The poem became the song *At Calvary*.

When you know his story, you can hear more in the words, “Years I’ve spent in vanity and pride, caring not my Lord was crucified, knowing not it was for me he died at Calvary.” Or, “By God’ Word at last my sin I learned.” And still, “O the love that drew salvation’s plan! O the grace that bro’t it down to man!” (see Al Smith’s *Treasury of Hymn Histories*, pp. 69-71).

Or, I think of the story behind the hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. A young man named Joseph Scriven was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1820. He graduated from Trinity College in Dublin with the plans to marrying his sweetheart. He dreamt of building a home with her and then he had hopes of starting a business with the education he received. But these plans never materialized. His fiancée drowned the day before the wedding. Joseph saw her body taken from the water and he suffered a shock that would remain with him until the day he died.

¹ This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

In an effort to forget, he moved to Canada, and he spent his life helping the needy there. After being in Canada for about 10 years, he discovered that his mom was struggling with some more intense sorrows. In response to this, he wrote down some words in poem form and he entitled it, "A Friend Who Understands." Now we call it *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. "What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!" (see Al Smith's *Treasury of Hymn Histories*, pp. 232-234).

When we hear the stories behind the songs we sing, the words ring with greater force, don't they? When we hear "When sorrows like sea billows roll" in the song "It Is Well," it confronts us as we consider this man's two daughters died as a ship drowned in the ocean. And yet, he can say "It is well!" When we sing "Jesus Loves Me" and realize that it was written by an adult who was struggling with assurance and felt the need to write something basic and straightforward to encourage the hearts of the weak, we discover it's not simply a children's song! Jesus love *me* this is know for the Bible tells me so!

The reason I share these stories is because as we go through this series in the psalms, I want us to also see that many psalms are written because of specific life circumstances. There are actually 14 psalms with introductions stating the specific situation behind the psalm. But there are also many psalms where you realize the author is writing about specific events in his life.

As I evaluate these psalms, and read the stories behind them, I come to see something that David Pollard has told me over and over again – and I've heard him share with others on different occasions: **Our story is not our story. Our story is God's story.** Think about it a little more. Some (or maybe, many) of the psalms are quite vulnerable. In our day, we might be tempted to not share like David or Asaph, and yet David and Asaph wrote these words down to be sung by God's people! Why? I think many people tend to think their stories are theirs. We think of our lives as a book with many chapters. But it's our story. But if we view our lives like that, then we're the center of the story. The reason David and Asaph (and others) can be vulnerable is because their stories aren't theirs! Their story is part of a *much larger* story in which they aren't the center. God is the center. And the Messiah is the Savior! When we trust the Lord, we realize our stories don't define us, but God defines us and even redeems us in his story! It's not our drama that matters. It's God's drama!

So, this morning, this morning I'm going to go through three psalms. This sermon will be more like three mini-sermons. We will look at the backstories, and then give some application from each. But the emphasis is on how the backstory helps shed light on the words of the psalm themselves. I hope you begin to see how our stories are really God's stories. In doing so, I hope you're encouraged by the God who works in our lives. But I also hope this frees you in your transparency before the Lord. Maybe even, for some of you, I hope you might take the time to write out the story God has in your life – and who knows – maybe your words would become a song.

Let's start with Psalm 3. And before I read, let's pray together. [Pray for Bob & Dawn Heuer, and for Manna Church with Dave Geurrin]

1. Psalm 3 and trusting in God's protection and glory.

We will read this entire psalm.

O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." Selah But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people! Selah²

After reading this, let's then read the introduction: A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.³ The story is told in 2 Samuel. In chapters 15-17, we read of Absalom's defiance against his dad, King David. David is experiencing the kingdom crumbling down. People are mocking and deriding him. And finally, David gets to a point where he has to tell 600 soldiers to leave Jerusalem.

Can you imagine the feeling in this moment? Can you imagine the confusion for David and for the soldiers? Wasn't David anointed by God? Was God going to let his kingdom die? In addition, this isn't merely some other person attacking the kingdom, this is Absalom. From the Scriptures, we can even get the sense that Absalom might have been David's favorite. But either way, Absalom was dearly loved by David. So, it's David's son who has turned so many against him, and at one point, we're told that Absalom threatened an army of 12,000 to fight against David. David is outmanned. David's resources are dwindling. David has minimal support from the people.

And, it seems he accepts defeat. He leaves Jerusalem – the holy city. The city where God said he would rule from, David leaves. To add to all of this, David was told that something like this was going to happen to him. In 2 Samuel 12:10-11, we read, "¹⁰ **Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.** ¹¹ **Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. . .'**"⁴ All of this was happening as a result of David's sin with Bathsheba.

You could imagine the acute pain that David could feel in all of this. And yet, how does David communicate in this psalm? David goes to God. Matthew Henry writes, "**Care and grief do us good and no hurt, when they set us a praying, and engage us, not only to speak to God, but to cry to him as those that are in earnest**" (as quot. in *Psalms* by Plumer, p. 60). In this psalm, David doesn't say that his sin has separated him from God. David doesn't say, "What can I do to make it right, God?" David seems to take the turmoil of the situation and then also the past promises of God and he clings to the faithful God! Yes, this was immensely painful for David to see what was happening. His heart was in turmoil over his son! And, in the midst of this darkness, David reveals what trust looks like. He trusts and loves God when life falls apart.

God promised his Kingdom to remain through David. Nothing would thwart that plan – not even Absalom or a 12,000-person army. No matter the intensity of the pain or trial, David would still say that there is salvation in God! God is his shield, meaning protection. God is his glory, meaning his all and joy. God is the lifter of his head, meaning that when he's brought down low, God will raise him up!

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 3:1–8.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 3:title.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Sa 12:10–11.

So, David prays that God would punish the enemies and reveal salvation truly comes from God and God alone – and God will never leave his own.

Oh Ventura, when we read this, I'm pointed to Jesus. Jesus, *the Anointed One*, who David points forward to – is the King of kings. And yet, he was not merely threatened. He was murdered on the cross. Was God there? Did God care? Was God still the protector, shield and lifter? Oh yes! While Jesus cried out "It is Finished," he lowered his head in death, but three days later his head was raised as he rose from the dead. He conquered over death and promised forgiveness and reconciliation with God for all who trust him! Salvation belongs to God!

So, for us as we read Psalm 3, we can see that even like David, we can be in bleak circumstances, but in those circumstances, God never leaves us nor forsakes us. In addition, I want you to see that even though David had consequences for his sin, he doesn't tremble in fear before God. I've had many conversations with people in the past where they're going through hardships and they say, "Do you think God is punishing me?" And the way they say it, it sounds like God is being vindictive towards them.

Christian, God has *no* wrath towards you! All of it was poured on Christ. Therefore, when he disciplines, the author of Hebrews says he disciplines us for our good, not for our demise! So, like David, simply lay yourself before God, in faith, trusting that he is working in and through you and will give you all blessings in Christ, because he is the God who saves!

Do you see some of how David's experience, written in this psalm, can encourage and strengthen us? Before knowing the story, you just read the psalm, but in knowing the story, there's greater weightiness and a greater realization of what trust looks like. David shows us how his story isn't his story. It's God's story! Now, let's move to Psalm 30.

2. Psalm 30 and Everlasting Praise

We have to read the entirety of this psalm as well.

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit. Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved." By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your face; I was dismayed. To you, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy: "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!" You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me

*with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!*⁵

This psalm focuses on how God rescued David from various hardships. Many have died, but God rescued David over and over again. So, in verses 4-5, David calls for the people to sing praise to the Lord! Yes, there are hard moments, but joy comes in the morning. In verse 6, David reveals that in prosperous times, he had a tendency to believe he was invincible. But verse 7 shows that God is in control of pain and prosperity. So, in verse 8, David states that he cries out to God.

Verse 9 might seem intriguing: “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?”⁶ In the context of this psalm, David is giving a reason to God for the Lord to rescue him. David reveals that the point of our existence in this world is to praise the Lord. Well, if he’s dead, he won’t praise God on this earth! So, he prays that God would keep him alive to continue to praise! And in verses 11-12, David states that God has turned his mourning into dancing so that he could sing his praise and not be silent!

This is a psalm of rescue, but what’s the occasion of this psalm? We’re told that this is “A Psalm of David. A song at the dedication of the temple.”⁷ There’s debate over what it means by “the dedication of the temple,” but I believe this is referring to when the temple was dedicated in Solomon’s day. If that’s the case, then this psalm becomes interesting for a couple of reasons. First, at a dedication of the temple, why is David talking about God rescuing from painful circumstances? It just sounds like a personal song of how God’s worked in his life? Well, this personal song is to be sung by the people of Israel to always remember that this is how God works amongst his people, too! In Israel there were times of joy and times of despair, but God would always keep a remnant for himself! And there would be days when Israel would turn in praise. Their mourning would be turned to praise. And, at the dedication of the temple, while they waited for the temple for a long time, they were reminded of God’s faithfulness! Their mourning was turned to dancing!

The second interesting piece is that David died before the dedication of the temple. So, he wrote this song for the dedication, but he wasn’t there. And I find this interesting because David asks God to preserve him from death so that he could praise God on this earth. Yet, at the temple, he wasn’t there on earth. But did you notice the end of verse 12? It says, “O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!”⁸ Is he saying he’ll never die? No. He’s revealing God’s faithfulness. While he did pray for rescue many times, and God rescued him many times; David’s ultimate prayer is that he would give thanks to and praise God. And God had rescued David to do just that!

And how can God make that promise? Well, it’s because of the future fulfillment found in Jesus. Jesus would die and rise because he never sinned and was the Anointed One who died and rose. And so, Jesus himself says that he came to give life and life abundantly. In him is eternal life!

But how does the story behind this psalm encourage us practically? Well, actually, as I thought of this psalm, I thought of Trebor Schaub. Trebor and his family used to regularly attend here. They moved away

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 30:1–12.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 30:9.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 30:title.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 30:12.

from Holland and moved away from the church, but they kept in touch at times. Trebor, as a child, had cancer. The treatment worked. His cancer went away. His cancer came back when he was a little older. He had more treatment and he recovered. Then, about a year ago, the cancer came back. He went through months of treatment, and they thought the tumor went away again. And then, in December, it came back larger than before. But something different happened in this past season for Trebor. You see, in previous years, Trebor struggled with whether he trusted Jesus or not. But in this last season, God drew Trebor close to himself and Trebor's love for the Lord blossomed. A couple weeks ago, David and I met with Trebor, and he shared the struggle of praying for healing while also trusting the Lord's will. In reality, how can he praise God if he's in the grave? And yet, he also knew that he would be with Jesus and that would be good.

Isn't that what the psalmist is saying here? God answers our needs. God does rescue, but even more, God gives us the privilege to live life abundantly – where here and now or in eternity future. And someday, in that eternity future, we will be in the eternal temple of God, where there will be no more pain or sorrow or weeping or death! Do you see how the death of David after writing this psalm for the dedication can open our eyes in encouragement? Our story is not our story! Our story is God's story – revealing God's love and power!

The next two psalms, I'm going to run through even more quickly, but I think they're just as, if not more poignant.

3. Psalm 51 and The Need for Forgiveness.

Psalm 51 is the psalm where David compiles his prayer of forgiveness in poetic form. He engaged in an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. He had Uriah killed. The title says, "To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."⁹

This was written after confronted. By the way, months went by when David was hiding in his sin. A godly man who had been taken in his sin – which took him much further than where he wanted to go. In verses 3-4, he confesses his sin: For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.¹⁰ He doesn't skirt around the issue. He doesn't blame shift or make the sin sound lighter than it is. He also cries out to God alone for cleansing: ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Then in verse 12 cries, "¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."¹² Get that. He doesn't say "restore to me the joy of my salvation." He says "your salvation." David had a plan for his own salvation. His self-salvation plan was to give himself pleasure with another woman, not his wife. And our self-salvation plans always bring death. But David cries out for joy in God's salvation! The restoration, reconciliation, forgiveness that only God can give!

As a result, David states that if he's forgiven, he knows his heart will overflow in wanting to teach sinners. He'll be humble to reach out to those like him! You see his humility as it comes to the end. He's no better than anyone else. And, in our worship, we should communicate this way. God doesn't just want fancy sacrifices. He wants our hearts!

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 51:title.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 51:3–4.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 51:9–10.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 51:12.

Ventura, what encouragement this psalm should be to all of us! We shouldn't come to corporate worship faking it. We shouldn't live the Christian life only focusing on how grand we are and what we've accomplished. Instead, we should live our lives pointing to the truly grand One, God!

As we read this psalm, we clearly see that David's story is not David's story. It's God's story. Seriously, some of us are so ashamed about our sins that we think we should just sweep it all under the rug. Don't tell other people because what will they think of me? But what about David? David wasn't concerned about his reputation. He was concerned that we all see a God who can forgive chiefest of sinners! What about Paul? The same reality! What about Peter who denied Jesus or Moses who murdered? As the apostle Paul wrote, **"¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."¹³**

This isn't simply Paul's testimony. It's all of our testimonies. Jesus didn't save those who are well, but those who are sick. And in David's examples in just these three psalms, we see how David's story wasn't his. And, in each of these, David is pointing to the God who rescues, redeems, forgives, protects, loves. In revealing these realities about God in his life, David then encourages us who trust the Lord, too. We see that we have the same God. And to this God we should sing these songs. Sing these songs in faith. Sing these songs because God is faithful. Sing these songs to declare that we don't want to be stuck in our story, as if it were our own to keep to ourselves. But instead, let these psalms cause us to be more open and transparent, not to emphasize ourselves but to put on display God's goodness. May even the stories of Mick, Cara, Gavin and Jamie be an encouragement today. They're not the only ones who have experienced God's mercies! If you are a Christian, you have, too!

But, even as we hear stories, let us also sing songs, knowing that these songs are declaring that we are a part of God's story! **Our lives, as followers of Jesus, aren't isolated books with their own storylines. Our lives are a part of God's story of redemption. When we sing, we proclaim the belief that our story is God's story! And someday, we will see how he worked all things together for good for all who loved him and are called according to his purpose.**

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ti 1:15–16.