

Exposition on Psalm 3

by St. Augustine

The Psalm is an exposition of Christ's Passion and Resurrection, and a declaration of faith in the salvation of the Lord.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:7

Topics: "Christ's Suffering", "God's Salvation"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on Psalm 3, interpreting it as speaking in the Person of Christ, highlighting the betrayal by an undutiful disciple and the persecution faced by Christ. The Psalmist acknowledges God as the source of salvation and blessing, emphasizing the need for humility and reliance on God's grace. The passage is also viewed as a reflection of the Church and its Head, with prayers for deliverance and victory over enemies. Each believer is encouraged to trust in God's saving power, seek His intervention in times of trouble, and find strength in the resurrection and regeneration offered by the Lord.

Transcript

A psalm of David, when he fled from the face of Absalom his son.

1. The words, I slept, and took rest; and rose, for the Lord will take me up, lead us to believe that this Psalm is to be understood as in the Person of Christ; for they sound more applicable to the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, than to that history in which David's flight is described from the face of his rebellious son. And, since it is written of Christ's disciples, The sons of the bridegroom fast not as long as the bridegroom is with them; Matthew 9:15 it is no wonder if by his undutiful son be here meant that undutiful disciple who betrayed Him. From whose face although it may be understood historically that He fled, when on his departure He withdrew with the rest to the mountain; yet in a spiritual sense, when the Son of God, that is the Power and Wisdom of God, abandoned the mind of Judas; when the Devil wholly occupied him; as it is written, The Devil entered into his heart, John 13:27 may it be well understood that Christ fled from his face; not that Christ gave place to the Devil, but that on Christ's departure the Devil took possession. Which departure, I suppose, is called a flight in this Psalm, because of its quickness; which is indicated also by the word of our Lord, saying, That you do, do quickly. John 13:27 So even in common conversation we say of anything that does not come to mind, it has fled from me; and of a man of much learning we say, nothing flies from him. Wherefore truth fled from the mind of Judas, when it ceased to enlighten him. But Absalom, as some interpret, in the Latin tongue signifies, Patris pax, a father's peace. And it may seem strange, whether in the history of the kings, when Absalom carried on war against

his father; or in the history of the New Testament, when Judas was the betrayer of our Lord; how father's peace can be understood. But both in the former place they who read carefully, see that David in that war was at peace with his son, who even with sore grief lamented his death, saying, O Absalom, my son, would God I had died for you! 2 Samuel 18:33 And in the history of the New Testament by that so great and so wonderful forbearance of our Lord; in that He bore so long with him as if good, when He was not ignorant of his thoughts; in that He admitted him to the Supper in which He committed and delivered to His disciples the figure of His Body and Blood; finally, in that He received the kiss of peace at the very time of His betrayal; it is easily understood how Christ showed peace to His betrayer, although he was laid waste by the intestine war of so abominable a device. And therefore is Absalom called father's peace, because his father had the peace, which he had not.

2. O Lord, how are they multiplied that trouble me! Psalm 3:1. So multiplied indeed were they, that one even from the number of His disciples was not wanting, who was added to the number of His persecutors. Many rise up against me; many say unto my soul, There is no salvation for him in his God Psalm 3:2. It is clear that if they had had any idea that He would rise again, assuredly they would not have slain Him. To this end are those speeches, Let Him come down from the cross, if He be the Son of God; and again, He saved others, Himself He cannot save. Matthew 27:42 Therefore, neither would Judas have betrayed Him, if he had not been of the number of those who despised Christ, saying, There is no salvation for Him in His God.

3. But You, O Lord, art my taker. It is said to God in the nature of man, for the taking of man is, the Word made Flesh. My glory. Even He calls God his glory, whom the Word of God so took, that God became one with Him. Let the proud learn, who unwillingly hear, when it is said to them, For what have you that you did not receive? Now if you received it, why do you glory as if you had not received it? 1 Corinthians 4:7 And the lifter up of my head Psalm 3:3. I think that this should be here taken of the human mind, which is not unreasonably called the head of the soul; which so inhered in, and in a sort coalesced with, the supereminent excellency of the Word taking man, that it was not laid aside by so great humiliation of the Passion.

4. With my voice have I cried unto the Lord Psalm 3:4; that is, not with the voice of the body, which is drawn out with the sound of the reverberation of the air; but with the voice of the heart, which to men speaks not, but with God sounds as a cry. By this voice Susanna was heard; and with this voice the Lord Himself commanded that prayer should be made in closets, Matthew 6:6 that is, in the recesses of the heart noiselessly. Nor would one easily say that prayer is not made with this voice, if no sound of words is uttered from the body; since even when in silence we pray within the heart, if thoughts interpose alien from the mind of one praying, it cannot yet be said, With my voice have I cried unto the Lord.

Nor is this rightly said, save when the soul alone, taking to itself nothing of the flesh, and nothing of the aims of the flesh, in prayer, speaks to God, where He only hears. But even this is called a cry by reason of the strength of its intention. And He heard me out of His holy mountain. We have the Lord Himself called a mountain by the Prophet, as it is written, The stone that was cut out without hands grew to the size of a mountain. Daniel 2:34-35 But this cannot be taken of His Person, unless perhaps He would speak thus, out of myself, as of His holy mountain He heard me, when He dwelt in me, that is, in this very mountain.

But it is more plain and unembarrassed, if we understand that God out of His justice heard. For it was just that He should raise again from the dead the Innocent who was slain, and to whom evil had been recompensed for good, and that He should render to the persecutor a meet reward, who repaid Him evil

for good. For we read, Your justice is as the mountains of God. 5. I slept, and took rest Psalm 3:5. It may be not unsuitably remarked, that it is expressly said, I, to signify that of His own Will He underwent death, according to that, Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.

No man takes it from Me; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. John 10:17-18 Therefore, says He, you have not taken Me as though against My will, and slain Me; but I slept, and took rest; and rose, for the Lord will take me up. Scripture contains numberless instances of sleep being put for death; as the Apostle says, I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Nor need we make any question why it is added, took rest, seeing that it has already been said, I slept.

Repetitions of this kind are usual in Scripture, as we have pointed out many in the second Psalm. But some copies have, I slept, and was cast into a deep sleep. And different copies express it differently, according to the possible renderings of the Greek words, ἀΐαΐαΐ sleeping may be taken of one dying, but sleep of one dead: so that sleeping may be the transition into sleep, as awakening is the transition into wakefulness. Let us not deem these repetitions in the sacred writings empty ornaments of speech.

I slept, and took rest, is therefore well understood as I gave Myself up to My Passion, and death ensued. And I rose, for the Lord will take Me up. This is the more to be remarked, how that in one sentence the Psalmist has used a verb of past and future time. For he has said, both I rose, which is the past, and will take Me up, which is the future; seeing that assuredly the rising again could not be without that taking up. But in prophecy the future is well joined to the past, whereby both are signified.

Since things which are prophesied of as yet to come in reference to time are future; but in reference to the knowledge of those who prophesy they are already to be viewed as done. Verbs of the present tense are also mixed in, which shall be treated of in their proper place when they occur.

6. I will not fear the thousands of people that surround me Psalm 3:6. It is written in the Gospels how great a multitude stood around Him as He was suffering, and on the cross. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God Psalm 3:7. It is not said to God, Arise, as if asleep or lying down, but it is usual in holy Scripture to attribute to God what He does in us; not indeed universally, but where it can be done suitably; as when He is said to speak, when by His gift Prophets speak, and Apostles, or whatsoever messengers of the truth. Hence that text, Would you have proof of Christ, who speaks in me? 2 Corinthians 13:3 For he does not say, of Christ, by whose enlightening or order I speak; but he attributes at once the speaking itself to Him, by whose gift he spoke.

7. Since You have smitten all who oppose me without a cause. It is not to be pointed as if it were one sentence, Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God; since You have smitten all who oppose me without a cause. For He did not therefore save Him, because He smote His enemies; but rather He being saved, He smote them. Therefore it belongs to what follows, so that the sense is this; Since You have smitten all who oppose me without a cause, You have broken the teeth of the sinners; that is, thereby have You broken the teeth of the sinners, since You have smitten all who oppose me.

It is forsooth the punishment of the opposers, whereby their teeth have been broken, that is, the words of sinners rending with their cursing the Son of God, brought to nought, as it were to dust; so that we may understand teeth thus, as words of cursing. Of which teeth the Apostle speaks, If you bite one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another. Galatians 5:15 The teeth of sinners can also be taken as the chiefs of sinners; by whose authority each one is cut off from the fellowship of godly livers,

and as it were incorporated with evil livers.

To these teeth are opposed the Church's teeth, by whose authority believers are cut off from the error of the Gentiles and various opinions, and are translated into that fellowship which is the body of Christ. With these teeth Peter was told to eat the animals when they had been killed, that is, by killing in the Gentiles what they were, and changing them into what he was himself. Of these teeth too of the Church it is said, Your teeth are as a flock of shorn sheep, coming up from the bath, whereof every one bears twins, and there is not one barren among them.

These are they who prescribe rightly, and as they prescribe, live; who do what is written, Let your works shine before men, that they may bless your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:16 For moved by their authority, they believe God who speaks and works through these men; and separated from the world, to which they were once conformed, they pass over into the members of the Church. And rightly therefore are they, through whom such things are done, called teeth like to shorn sheep; for they have laid aside the burdens of earthly cares, and coming up from the bath, from the washing away of the filth of the world by the Sacrament of Baptism, every one bears twins.

For they fulfil the two commandments, of which it is said, On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets; Matthew 22:40 loving God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind, and their neighbour as themselves. There is not one barren among them, for much fruit they render unto God. According to this sense then it is to be thus understood, You have broken the teeth of the sinners, that is, You have brought the chiefs of the sinners to nought, by smiting all who oppose Me without a cause. For the chiefs according to the Gospel history persecuted Him, while the lower people honoured Him.

8. Salvation is of the Lord; and upon Your people be Your blessing Psalm 3:8. In one sentence the Psalmist has enjoined men what to believe, and has prayed for believers. For when it is said, Salvation is of the Lord, the words are addressed to men. Nor does it follow, And upon Your people be Your blessing, in such wise as that the whole is spoken to men, but there is a change into prayer addressed to God Himself, for the very people to whom it was said, Salvation is of the Lord. What else then does he say but this? Let no man presume on himself, seeing that it is of the Lord to save from the death of sin; for, Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 7:24-25 But bless, O Lord, Your people, who look for salvation from You.

9. This Psalm can be taken as in the Person of Christ another way; which is that whole Christ should speak. I mean by whole, with His body, of which He is the Head, according to the Apostle, who says, You are the body of Christ, and the members. 1 Corinthians 12:27 He therefore is the Head of this body; wherefore in another place he says, But doing the truth in love, we may increase in Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, from whom the whole body is joined together and compacted.

Ephesians 4:15-16 In the Prophet then at once, the Church, and her Head (the Church founded amidst the storms of persecution throughout the whole world, which we know already to have come to pass), speaks, O Lord, how are they multiplied that trouble me! Many rise up against me; wishing to exterminate the Christian name. Many say unto my soul, There is no salvation for him in his God. For they would not otherwise hope that they could destroy the Church, branching out so very far and wide, unless they believed that God had no care thereof.

But You, O Lord, art my taker; in Christ of course. For into that flesh the Church too has been taken by the Word, who was made flesh, and dwelt in us; John 1:14 for that In heavenly places has He made us to sit together with Him. Ephesians 2:6 When the Head goes before, the other members will follow; for, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Romans 8:35 Justly then does the Church say, You are my taker. My glory; for she does not attribute her excellency to herself, seeing that she knows by whose grace and mercy she is what she is.

And the lifter up of my head, of Him, namely, who, the First-born from the dead, Colossians 1:18 ascended up into heaven. With my voice have I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me out of His holy mountain. This is the prayer of all the Saints, the odour of sweetness, which ascends up in the sight of the Lord. For now the Church is heard out of this mountain, which is also her head; or, out of that justice of God, by which both His elect are set free, and their persecutors punished.

Let the people of God also say, I slept, and took rest; and rose, for the Lord will take me up; that they may be joined, and cleave to their Head. For to this people is it said, Awake you that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall lay hold on you. Ephesians 5:14 Since they are taken out of sinners, of whom it is said generally, But they that sleep, sleep in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:7 Let them say moreover, I will not fear the thousands of people that surround me; of the heathen verily that compass me about to extinguish everywhere, if they could, the Christian name.

But how should they be feared, when by the blood of the martyrs in Christ, as by oil, the ardour of love is inflamed? Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God. The body can address this to its own Head. For at His rising the body was saved; who ascended up on high, led captivity captive, gave gifts unto men. For this is said by the Prophet, in the secret purpose of God, until that ripe harvest Matthew 9:37 which is spoken of in the Gospel, whose salvation is in His Resurrection, who vouchsafed to die for us, shed out our Lord to the earth.

Since You have smitten all who oppose me without a cause, You have broken the teeth of the sinners. Now while the Church has rule, the enemies of the Christian name are smitten with confusion; and, whether their curses or their chiefs, brought to nought. Believe then, O man, that salvation is of the Lord: and, You, O Lord, may Your blessing be upon Your people.

10. Each one too of us may say, when a multitude of vices and lusts leads the resisting mind in the law of sin, O Lord, how are they multiplied that trouble me! Many rise up against me. And, since despair of recovery generally creeps in through the accumulation of vices, as though these same vices were mocking the soul, or even as though the Devil and his angels through their poisonous suggestions were at work to make us despair, it is said with great truth, Many say unto my soul, There is no salvation for him in his God. But You, O Lord, art my taker. For this is our hope, that He has vouchsafed to take the nature of man in Christ. My glory; according to that rule, that no one should ascribe ought to himself. And the lifter up of my head; either of Him, who is the Head of us all, or of the spirit of each several one of us, which is the head of the soul and body. For the head of the woman is the man, and the head of the man is Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:3 But the mind is lifted up, when it can be said already, With the mind I serve the law of God; Romans 7:25 that the rest of man may be reduced to peaceable submission, when in the resurrection of the flesh death is swallowed up in victory. 1 Corinthians 15:54 With my voice I have cried unto the Lord; with that most inward and intensive voice. And He heard me out of His holy mountain; Him, through whom He has succoured us, through whose mediation He hears us. I slept, and took rest; and rose, for the Lord will take me up. Who of the faithful is not able to say this, when he calls to mind the

death of his sins, and the gift of regeneration? I will not fear the thousands of people that surround me. Besides those which the Church universally has borne and bears, each one also has temptations, by which, when compassed about, he may speak these words, Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: that is, make me to arise. Since You have smitten all who oppose me without a cause: it is well in God's determinate purpose said of the Devil and his angels; who rage not only against the whole body of Christ, but also against each one in particular. You have broken the teeth of the sinners. Each man has those that revile him, he has too the prime authors of vice, who strive to cut him off from the body of Christ. But salvation is of the Lord. Pride is to be guarded against, and we must say, My soul cleaved after You. And upon Your people be Your blessing: that is, upon each one of us.

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