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# Title: Save us, O God!

**Text: Psalm 69**

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## **Introduction**

What are your thoughts when life is its darkest? When your life is narrowed in focus down to a single yet cataclysmic crisis, what is it that governs your thoughts about the circumstances in which you find yourself? What are your thoughts about Jesus? What do you believe to be true about the One who died for you? And before we walk too far down the individual road, there are those congregations this evening who are going through some dark hours because of things that have occurred in the past week. They simply want this day to be over. Monday morning these church bodies will collectively wake up with no other thought than survival. When we as a body are faced with disappointment or even attack, what governs our thoughts? What do we believe to be true about the One who died for us, regenerated us, and gathered us together?

Tonight and next week, we will be looking at a Psalm that not only helps us orient our thoughts when life is bad and we get desperate, but also help us identify with One who was crushed on our behalf in the events that became known in church history as The Passion. Passion week is still two weeks away, but I trust our study of this Psalm will help shape our thoughts leading up to that point.

Our passage this evening is a journey into the thoughts and emotions of a king and a people who are at the end of themselves. Life is dark. Life is hopeless. The Psalmist's world is in total upheaval. The outlook is bleak. The destiny of a people rides on a king whose life seems on the verge of being snuffed out. And as this king is being crushed by those who hate him and his God, there is a cry of desperation.

Tonight, our text is found in the Psalms. The Psalter was the hymnbook of God's people. The Psalms were meant to be sung in the assembly. Commonly in Jerusalem, the context for the original piece was the tabernacle or temple. Even in the instances in which the songs of lament were written in the first person, the assembly well understood, as they were singing, that the writer of the Psalm was one of them. The assembly identifies itself with the writer in corporate solidarity with the Psalmist. The plight of the writer represented the plight of the people.

Our text is Psalm 69. Psalm 69 is a Psalm of Lament, songs sung as complaints to God coupled with expressions of trust in the midst of complaint. In Psalms of lament, Israel collectively voices complaint to God. While songs of Praise and Hope take their cue from the covenantal blessings

given to God's people, songs of lament arise from situations in which there is either no covenant or the covenant has been broken. Songs of lament are sung by those feeling the effects of the curse of the fall and covenant-breaking. In the Psalm of blessing, all is right with the world. God is in control and we enjoy his blessing. In the Psalm of lament, the Psalmist's world is in disarray. God seems distant, and the effects of judgment, or even the threat of judgment, on covenant breakers is being felt.

Psalms of lament are not completely hopeless, though a couple of them seem to end that way. From within the upside world comes a resolute expression of trust in the steadfast love and faithfulness of a God who does not break covenant with his people. There is an acknowledgment that no matter how bleak it looks, God is still in control, still saving his people, and some day, he will make all things right. Psalm 69 is \*that\* kind of Psalm.

That said, we are going to read this Psalm together in a moment and as we read, notice the desperation, notice the faith in the midst of despair, notice how the expressions of trust are woven into the complaints.

Turn with me to Psalm 69.

Psalm 69 is a Psalm of David. This song is written in eight discernable movements, successively alternating between cries for help (vs. 1, 6, 13b-18, 22-29) and statements of plight (vs. 2-5, 7-13a, 19-21), with the final statement being a statement of praise (30-36). The statements of plight function as the reasons for the cries for salvation and deliverance, and as one moves through the Psalm, the lament increases in its intensity resolving the complaint and expression of trust in a chorus of praise.

It is a bit of a long Psalm, but meant to be sung in its entirety. The tune, identified here as *Öliliesö* has been lost to posterity. But let's stand as God's people and read it aloud together as an assembly. This is what God's Word says:

1 Save me, O God!

For the waters have come up to my neck.

2 I sink in deep mire,

where there is no foothold;

I have come into deep waters,

and the flood sweeps over me.

3 I am weary with my crying out;

my throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim

with waiting for my God.

4 More in number than the hairs of my head  
are those who hate me without cause;

mighty are those who would destroy me,  
those who attack me with lies.

What I did not steal  
must I now restore?

5 O God, you know my folly;  
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

6 Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,  
O Lord God of hosts;

let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me,  
O God of Israel.

7 For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach,  
that dishonor has covered my face.

8 I have become a stranger to my brothers,  
an alien to my mother's sons.

9 For zeal for your house has consumed me,  
and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

10 When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,  
it became my reproach.

11 When I made sackcloth my clothing,  
I became a byword to them.

12 I am the talk of those who sit in the gate,  
and the drunkards make songs about me.

13 But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.  
At an acceptable time, O God,  
in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving  
faithfulness.

14 Deliver me  
from sinking in the mire;

let me be delivered from my enemies  
and from the deep waters.

15 Let not the flood sweep over me,  
or the deep swallow me up,  
or the pit close its mouth over me.

16 Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;  
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

17 Hide not your face from your servant;  
for I am in distress; make haste to answer me.

18 Draw near to my soul, redeem me;  
ransom me because of my enemies!

19 You know my reproach,  
and my shame and my dishonor;  
my foes are all known to you.

20 Reproaches have broken my heart,  
so that I am in despair.

I looked for pity, but there was none,  
and for comforters, but I found none.

21 They gave me poison for food,  
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

22 Let their own table before them become a snare;  
and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.

23 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see,  
and make their loins tremble continually.

24 Pour out your indignation upon them,  
and let your burning anger overtake them.

25 May their camp be a desolation;  
let no one dwell in their tents.

26 For they persecute him whom you have struck down,  
and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.

27 Add to them punishment upon punishment;

may they have no acquittal from you.

28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;  
let them not be enrolled among the righteous.

29 But I am afflicted and in pain;  
let your salvation, O God, set me on high!

30 I will praise the name of God with a song;  
I will magnify him with thanksgiving.

31 This will please the Lord more than an ox  
or a bull with horns and hoofs.

32 When the humble see it they will be glad;  
you who seek God, let your hearts revive.

33 For the Lord hears the needy  
and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.

34 Let heaven and earth praise him,  
the seas and everything that moves in them.

35 For God will save Zion  
and build up the cities of Judah,  
and people shall dwell there and possess it;

36 the offspring of his servants shall inherit it,  
and those who love his name shall dwell in it.

## A Psalm of David

The first thing we notice about Psalm 69 is what we said earlier in that this is a Psalm of David. We know almost nothing of the origins of this Psalm. Other than a couple of hints in this passage, we do not know the circumstances that gave rise to this Psalm. We do know from the book of Samuel that there are a couple of events in David's life that would seem similar to what we find here. The first is Saul's chasing of David through the wilderness. There were days that David thought that he might not make it out of the desert alive, save for the fact that he was the Lord's anointed and heir to the throne. There are some Psalms written in those dark days. There's also the time in David's life after he was king when he was pushed off his throne, out of his house, out of Jerusalem and was on the run for his life again. This time, his own son Absalom was the hunter with David's life in danger as the hunted. Both Saul and Absalom fit the perpetrator's profile in this Psalm. And there's a

reference to homelessness away from brothers who were opposed to him that might fit the description regarding David's flight from Saul, since there are intimations in Samuel that David's brothers, like Joseph, were not all that fond of their young sibling. Regardless, we simply don't know the circumstances, other than it's a Psalm of David.

## A Psalm of Contrast

The second thing we notice as we come to Psalm 69 is the stark contrast in the Psalter between Psalm 69 and the ending of Psalm 68. The contrast is so stark that this cannot be accidental:

O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord, to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; behold he sends out his voice his might voice.

Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies. Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel for he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God.

What lofty vision and declaration of God. Awesome is God from his sanctuary. Blessed be God! Here is God in all of his heavenly glory, the occasion of which is to break forth in song. The Grand and Exalted Ancient of Days in his heavenly dwelling is given praise for who He is for his people giving them power and strength. Psalm 68 ends with the only possible ending of this exalted vision of the God who keeps covenant with Israel: Blessed be God! Blessed be God!

Save me O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

Where is the praise? Where is the vision of God in all of his glory? Where is the recognition of what God has done for his people? Where is the comfort of knowing God is ruling and reigning from his heavenly dwelling place? Where is the pronouncement of covenantal blessing on the ever faithful God? Where is "Blessed be God"?

Save me O God! Where has God gone for David? Is Psalm 68 still true? No longer is there the casting of a grand vision of God in his sanctuary. Instead, David, the Anointed One of Israel, the recipient of the divine covenant, the king who sees God in all of his glory and has heaped upon God praise for who he has been for his people in power and strength now find himself in hell on earth where God not only is seemingly absent, his hand seems to be against him. This contrast between the ending and opening of these two

Psalm 69 is David's recognition that even those who are God's covenantal people still find themselves very much affected by the curse.

### **David's First Plea: Save me O God!**

Save me O God! Becomes the overarching theme of this Psalm. All that follows in this Psalm could be subsumed under that desperate cry. It is a cry of anguish. It is a cry of terror. It is a blood-curdling cry meant to make the assembly's hair stand on end: Save me O God! The Psalmist wastes no time in making an immediate appeal to the saving God of Israel, the only one in whom there is any hope of salvation. Whatever it is that compels David to cry out, it is apparent that David has no choice but to turn to the only One who can save him.

### **David's first statement of plight: I'm drowning**

Why is it that "Save me O God" contains such anguish and desperation? This first cry for help is followed by a description of his situation. "I sink in deep mire where I am losing my feet. I have come into deep waters and the floods sweep over me."

David is drowning. David is going under. David is so overwhelmed by his situation, he is about to succumb with his very life. David is such a mess, his voice is nearly spent from his pleas of desperation, and the flicker of life in his eyes nearly out. He has been waiting on God's salvation that long. This, for David, is the dark night of the soul, in which all light seems to be gone from the eyes. Life is out of control. There is a seeming inevitability of doom. David's life is in upheaval to the point of catastrophic. There seems to be no way out and God seems so distant. His cry for salvation rises to God, because he senses God's hand in the events of his life. But what used to be a calm and resolute waiting on God and the vindication of his servant has now become a waiting for help that may seem like it will never come.

Throughout the Old Testament, these "waters" and "deep mire" are symbolic of distress that is brought on by judgment. This kind of catastrophic upheaval that is overwhelming David is accentuated by alienation and darkness. The imagery here evokes the concept of Sheol, the pit, the realm of the dead, and indeed the pit is mentioned later in this song. Echoes of Jonah and Joseph and Jeremiah can be heard here. Even God's people are not immune to the effects of the curse in a fallen world. The pain is real, the suffering is real.

This suffering is exacerbated by the fact that it is an unjust suffering. "Mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal, must I now restore?" There's no more severe mental anguish portrayed in the pages of scripture than that of unjust suffering at the hands of those who hate God and hate God's people because they hate God. These who

hate God are many. The language in verse 4 mirrors verse 2. "More in number" and "mighty" describe enemies who threaten to overrun David's life. The sheer number of those out to destroy David are flooding David's world to the point he feels as if he is drowning.

This near hopelessness of the Psalmist's situation isn't simply because God seems to have God missing, but along with God, truth and justice have also gone missing. There is a longing for vindication, but vindication of the anointed one is elusive because justice is AWOL. What gives rise to David's sense of being overwhelmed by life in the darkest hour of his soul are lies being spread like wildfire about the Anointed One of Israel. And there is nothing he can do about it.

The distress of the situation explains the impulse and desperation behind "Save me O God!" And the magnitude of his helplessness forces David to confess his own sin. There's sense in which David recognizes his plight with fallen humanity. "O God, you know my folly. The wrongs I have done are not hidden from you." Here we are clued in that this great distress of David's life wasn't simply physical. That becomes more apparent as we move through the Psalm. In the clarifying moments of being pulled under the rushing tide, David acknowledges and confesses his falling short of the glory of a God whose holiness is so bright and intimate knowledge so vast nothing escapes his attention.

## Mediation for his people

David follows this confession with his second petition or plea. This petition is on behalf of his people, and further clarifies the kind of flood that has put his life in danger. David recognizes that the destiny of his people rests with his destiny. Whatever affects him, affects them. His shame is their shame. If David's destiny comes to an end, so too the destiny of his people. If all hope is lost with David, all hope is lost for his people. David, the mediator, offers himself as a substitute for his people: "let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me; let not those who see you be brought to dishonor through me." Shame me, but don't shame them. Allow me to be dishonored, but don't allow that dishonor to fall on them.

## Suffering for God's Sake

And this substitutionary mediator follows this plea with more clarification about his plight. The second plea is followed by a second explanation or declaration of the nature of the Psalmist's adversity. "For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach." These flood waters of life that are about to overwhelm David and extinguish the flicker of life in his eye are the result of David's identification with the Covenanting God of Israel. This oppression is spiritual warfare. This oppression is persecution. David, as God's choice to



lead Israel, suffers humiliation because he \*is\* God's choice. David suffers reproach because he is the anointed one with whom God has made covenant. His opposition isn't simply against David. It is against the one true God of Israel that has redeemed himself a people out of Egypt and has made David a leader for the people.

The persecution of David for the sake of a covenanting God on behalf of his people has resulted in his homelessness ó verse 8. Piled on top of this sense of anguish is a familial alienation. False accusation and innuendo have taken their toll on family relationships. The unjust attacks on David have cut him off from his family in dishonor and shame. The scoffing of older brothers at a young teenager heading off to fight Goliath have given way to an outright disowning of David.

No longer welcome in the family house, he runs to take refuge in God's house. What a contrast between verse 8 and verse 9. He trades the broken relationship of family in an earthly house for divine communion in the heavenly house, the place where God comes to meet his people. But even that doesn't stem the floodwaters engulfing David.

Verse 9 - Not only is David suffering because of his identification with the one true God of Israel, but also because of his identification with God's glorious dwelling presence among his people. **Zeal for your house has consumed me.** There's probably a double meaning here. This is typically understood to be a description of David's passion for worship and the dwelling presence of God in the tabernacle. Such a passion is well chronicled. But given the circumstances of David's plight and his lament here, we must also see here that it is precisely David's passion for God's house that is his undoing. David's self-identification with God's dwelling presence with his people is such that David is being consumed to the point of losing his life and being cut off from the people of God. The reproaches of those who reproach the covenanting God of Israel have fallen on David.

David's zeal for God's communion with his people in shekinah glory is consuming his life. Falsehoods are being spread. He bears the reproach of unjust suffering because of God's name and God's presence among his people, the ironic result of which is an alienation from God's people. Even more ironic! the shame and humiliation and alienation that would so richly be deserved by those who hate God have fallen on the one who loves God and his dwelling place.

This section ends in another ironic contrast. Such is David's humiliation and infamy that **Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands** is no longer playing in Jerusalem's Top 40. That hit song has been replaced the song of infamy. The humiliation of David doesn't settle for the gossip chain. It goes viral in song. Reinforcing the overwhelming sense of doom is the

blasphemous melody borne by alcohol. Long after the lights have gone down, and the streets have gone silent, stuck in David's consciousness is the blasphemous melody whose notes propagate the lies into the inner recesses of the soul.

David's response is a classic response of the righteous to the wicked: But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord. If the rancor of a bartune is going to carry the tale of David's demise hither and yon, then his only response can be his own prayer song in appeal to the only one who can save him. How ironic indeed. David's appeal as the waters of life rise to his neck and the tide threatens to drown him in humiliation and shame, is to the One whose reproach he bears. Let that sink in. The destiny of Israel rides with one whose last, desperate appeal is to the very one who is the subject of his humiliation. These enemies hate David! these enemies hate Israel! these enemies hunt down David because they hate God.

Thus, David's appeal for salvation isn't simply for his own personal vengeance. David's appeal is for God's vindication not only of those who love him, but for his own sake. Instead of running from God when life seems over, David runs right to God: Save me O God. I'm drowning. I'm being shamed. Don't allow this shame to spread to your people. I'm bearing your reproach. Zeal for \*your\* house has consumed me. Vindicate me, vindicate your people, vindicate You! If God cannot vindicate, there will be no vindication. If God cannot or will not save, there will be no salvation.

## **The Voice of the Messiah**

But is this passage simply about David's misery and his personal mediation on behalf of Israel? Not hardly. The New Testament writers see Messiah written all over this passage. In fact, few Psalms are quoted more in the New Testament. In the backdrop of David's voice is the voice of another who would come who is greater than David. And these Psalms of lament placed on the lips of the Messiah became expressions of the inner thoughts and emotions of One who endured unimaginable suffering on behalf of His people.

Ever wonder what Christ was thinking or feeling in those hours that led up to the cross? Ever wonder what Christ was thinking as he hung on that cross for hours? We need not wonder. We're looking at once such journey into his thoughts and emotions in those final hours.

In the Upper Room on that final night when he gathered with his disciples and observed a final Passover, he quotes from verse 4 here: they hate me without cause. There on this final night, the Passover lamb looks at those for whom he will be reproach and says, "More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause, mighty are those who would destroy me."

When Christ drives out the money changers on another Passover occasion, John ties Christ's actions to verse nine, "Zeal for your house will consume me." While the passion for God's presence among his people is noted by John, in the end, it was zeal for the temple that literally consumed Christ. Mark notes that a false accusation stemming from that event of driving out the moneychangers was presented at Christ's trial: we heard him say, "I will destroy this temple made with hands and within three days will build another made without hands." Psalm 69:9: Zeal for your house consumed me and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

Bearing reproach instead of those who deserved it, Christ went to the cross to endure alienation from everyone including His own father. There he hung in shame and humiliation, bearing reproach for those who deserved reproach. There he hung and one must wonder, where is the Blessed be God, heard only one week before as the throngs waved Palm Branches? Where is the praise? Where is God? Where is truth? Where is justice? There he hangs and his world, in fact the world he created is in catastrophic upheaval so much so, the sun refuses to shine. The ultimate in unjust suffering has fallen to one who, unlike the Psalmist, knew no rebellion. Christ's destiny and the destiny of his people will seemingly come to an inglorious end in infamy. The drunkards have already begun their song. If you are really the Christ, save yourself and come down.

As he hangs on the cross, vindication seems like a mirage. This is Christ's dark night of the soul. He is drowning under the weight of all that went wrong in Adam's fall in the garden:

Save Me O God. The waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire. I have come into deep waters, and the floods sweep over me. I am weary with my crying out, my throat is parched. The numbers of my enemies are overwhelming. They hate me without cause. The mighty are out to destroy me. They attack me with lies. It is for your sake I have borne reproach. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. The drunkards are singing their blasphemous songs about me. Save me O God!

Yet Christ endured it all and entrusted his very soul to his father. He did not succumb to the temptation to come down from the cross, but instead, bore the reproach on behalf of a nation whose destiny was tied to his. Even as the blasphemers warmed up their baritone, Christ sang his own song of resolute trust in His father: Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me.

His shame became our hope. His dishonor became our honor. This is the prayer, this is the petition and plea of a King dying on behalf of His people.

## Conclusion:

What are your thoughts when life is its darkest? When your life is narrowed in focus down to a single yet cataclysmic crisis, what is it that governs your thoughts about the circumstances in which you find yourself? What are your thoughts about Jesus? What do you believe to be true about the One who died for you? When we as a body are faced with disappointment or even attack, what governs our thoughts? What do we believe to be true about the One who died for us, regenerated us, and gathered us together? We will be tempted to blame God. We will be tempted to question God. We will be tempted to wonder, "where is the justice?" When we have false accusations thrown our way, when we suffer because we are Christians, we will be tempted to wonder, "where is our vindication?" When the world is in catastrophic upheaval, we will be tempted to wonder, "where is the hope?" O Jesus, Save Us! Our hope must be in the One who already has saved for himself a people by becoming a reproach for those people. This morning Mark made this comment: "It often takes a moment of crisis to bring us to our lowest point before we will seek out Christ." When we have those moments of crisis, our hope, our faith, and our belief is in the one who had the ultimate moment of crisis and redeemed for himself a people.

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