

Up to My Neck: The Christian Experience of Pleading for God's Mercy

Psalm 69:1-36

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Psalm 69 is a great Psalm. What hymn comes to mind that you would sing when you are experiencing reproach and shame and discouragement? I can think of a few but not many that speak as frankly as this Psalm speaks. When you're searching for the words to say, when you feel like you're drowning and you can't feel the bottom and you can't come up for air, where do you go? Well, one place would be right here in Psalm 69. Before we read and hear God's word, let's pray and ask for His blessing on the reading and preaching of that word.

Heavenly Father, this is Your word. It is a blunt word. It expresses the heart of a choice servant, David, when he felt overwhelmed in the very depths of his soul, when he felt abandoned, when he felt shamed beyond the capacity to survive. And there are brothers and sisters in this room who've been just there. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that because Your word is profitable and it's not only able to correct us but it's able to build us up, that You would use this word to correct and build up the saints, to make us to be mighty in prayer, trusting in trial and praising You because of Your glorious person and providence. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Psalm 69, this is God's word:

For the choir director; according to Shoshannim. A Psalm of David. 1Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. 2I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. 3I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God. 4Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; What I did not steal, I then have to restore. 5O God, it is You who knows my folly, And my wrongs are not hidden from You. 6 May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; May those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God of Israel, 7Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face. 8 I have become estranged from my brothers and 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. 10When I wept in my soul with fasting, It became my

reproach. 11 When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. 12 Those who sit in the gate talk about me, And I am the song of the drunkards. 13 But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, at an acceptable time; O God, in the greatness of Your lovingkindness, Answer me with Your saving truth. 14 Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink; May I be delivered from my foes and from the deep waters. 15 May the flood of water not overflow me nor the deep swallow me up, Nor the pit shut its mouth on me. 16 Answer me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; According to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me, 17 And do not hide Your face from Your servant, For I am in distress; answer me quickly. 18 Oh draw near to my soul and redeem it; Ransom me because of my enemies! 19 You know my reproach and my shame and my dishonor; All my adversaries are before You. 20 Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, And for comforters, but I found none. 21 They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. 22 May their table before them become a snare; And when they are in peace, may it become a trap. 23 May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, And make their loins shake continually. 24 Pour out Your indignation on them, And may Your burning anger overtake them. 25 May their camp be desolate; May none dwell in their tents. 26 For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten, And they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded. 27 Add iniquity to their iniquity, And may they not come into Your righteousness. 28 May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous. 29 But I am afflicted and in pain; May Your salvation, O God, set me securely on high. 30 I will praise the name of God with song and magnify Him with thanksgiving. 31 And it will please the LORD better than an ox or a young bull with horns and hoofs. 32 The humble have seen it and are glad; You who seek God, let your heart revive. 33 For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise His 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 the cities of Judah, That they may dwell there and possess it. 36 The descendants of His servants will inherit it, And those who love His name will dwell in it.

Amen. This is God's word. May He add His blessing to it.

This Psalm reveals to us a vulnerable man, a man who has been wronged. His enemies have slandered him. His enemies have falsely accused him. His enemies are not simply his private enemies; they are enemies of God. In part, the very reason why they hate him is because of his identification with God, his love for God, the temple of God, the worship of God. And they mock him, and he can't just shrug this off. He's been slandered; he's been betrayed. He's been falsely accused and he can't just shrug this off. It bothers him. And it's not because he's hypersensitive, and it's not because he is sinfully self-preoccupied.

It's because he has a personal, moral sensitivity that has been engrained in him by the word of God. He knows that injustice is inherently displeasing to God, and that injustice is inherently deserving of the judgment of God. And it bothers him that, though he is a part of God's people and though he loves God and though he has been redeemed by God's grace and mercy and brought into His people, that this is his lot in this fallen world and therefore he comes to God with this excruciating cry and prayer. He doesn't mix words. He says exactly how he feels. He doesn't candy coat or spiritualize the circumstance that he is in. He doesn't downplay how deeply discouraged he is, how utterly baffled he is by what he's going through. But he does do this: he takes it right to God in prayer.

There are so many lessons for us in prayer from this Psalm because this Psalm depicts for us David's experience as a guide to Christian experience, the Christian experience of pleading for God's mercy in the time of trial. But more than that, this Psalm, since the very first days of the Christian church at Pentecost and after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, was identified as a Psalm par-excellence about the experience of Jesus Christ Himself. And there are seven sections to this Psalm. Let's just walk through them quickly together tonight.

I. Plight put into words (1-4) [The cry of a vulnerable, mistreated man] Let's begin in verses 1 through 4 where we see this cry of a vulnerable and mistreated man. And I want you to see what David does. David puts his plight into words. Many of you have been in places where you are so confused by the intensity of what you're going through that you cannot put it into words. And when you are in that state, you are in a dangerous state. And David...and you can see his befuddlement at the beginning of this Psalm...David refuses not to put his plight into words. He can't quite figure out how to start. You can tell that with the beginning of this Psalm.

Do you notice that you have to go several verses into this Psalm to find out what's wrong? He spends the first few verses telling you about how he feels about what's wrong because he can't get to what's wrong yet. He can't put his plight into words and so he just starts talking. He just starts talking to God about how he feels about what's happening to him, and he keeps talking until he can put his plight into words. And I want to tell you that that's wise counsel for prayers, because there are going to be some times in prayer where you can't find the words to say. Thank God the Apostle Paul says that in those times we have the Holy Spirit who intercedes with groanings too deep for words, but learn the lesson of David. Don't stop praying until you pray. Don't stop praying until you pray. Until David can put his plight into words, he is not ready to shut up.

And so look how he begins. In verse 1 he cries for rescue. His situation is dire; it's life threatening. "Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life." Now, if you took him at face value, you would have thought that he got caught in a summer flood in the outskirts of Jerusalem, but it's a metaphor, isn't it? It's a

metaphor for what he's going through. He hasn't told you what he's going through, yet but he's just telling you this, 'I feel like a drowning man, God. I'm up to my neck. The floodwaters are rising. Save me. I need your help.'

He goes on. Look at verse 2. Now he changes the language: "I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me." Now the picture is not of being up to his neck in water, but the picture is his feet have gotten mired in the sticky clay and now the floodwaters are rolling over his head. I love the way the Psalter says this: "deep in a miry clay where standing there is none." That is exactly where David feels himself to be.

And yet the metaphor changes again in verse 3. "I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait to God." It's not the metaphor that you would expect for a man who had just been talking about drowning, but you see he's grasping to try and get a hold of this experience and express it in words. He's saying 'Lord, I'm worn out with weeping and I've been weeping for so long my throat is dry. I feel like a man out in the desert. I'm parched and I'm almost blind waiting for God.' You know how sometimes people in the midst of an intense sickness accompanied by a fever...their eyesight becomes fuzzy and they can't see clearly? And this is how he's describing himself.

But to this point you don't know what's happening to him. Why does he feel this way? Finally when you get to verse 4, "Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies." Finally, David is beginning to be able to express what his plight is in words. He's so overwhelmed by the emotional experience of this that it takes him awhile to get there, but because he has persevered in praying to God he's finally gotten there. And having put it into words, he has now effectively put a petition before the living God to answer and that in and of itself is an encouragement. When we are overwhelmed by an inner torment, we must come before God and articulate our plight. That's what David does. And you're overwhelmed and you're saying, "But I can't say it." You keep trying until you can say it. You articulate that plight before God. That's what David does in this Psalm.

But perhaps you've already noticed something interesting about verse 4. This verse has a New Testament application. Did you know that this is one of the most quoted Psalms in the whole of the New Testament? This verse was appealed to by Jesus in John 15:25. Do you remember when He was explaining to His disciples that the world hated Him and therefore the world was going to hate them? And He says that His generation's rejection of Him is a fulfillment of this verse. In John 15:25 He says, "But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'" You see, Christians weren't just fancifully applying this Psalm to Jesus after His Resurrection. Long before His Resurrection He had already applied this Psalm to Himself, and they were simply following Jesus' lead. Well, we see then that this

cry of a vulnerable, mistreated man is not only the cry of a believer putting his plight into words, but this now becomes the cry of Christ in the experience of the wrongful suffering which He endured on our behalf on the way to the tree.

II. Confession, Kingdom Petition and Protest (5-12) [Dishonored for God] Secondly, look at verses 5 to 12, because in these verses David says something absolutely shocking. He says that he was being dishonored for God. In this section he lifts up a confession; he makes a kingdom petition, and he sets forth a protest. He, first of all, confesses his sin. Look at verse 5: "God, it is You who knows my folly, And my wrongs are not hidden from You." And David here confesses his folly and his wrongs, his thoughtless and his deliberate sins. He's being falsely accused, but he knows that if someone were looking for things to accuse him, they could find them. Even though he's being wrongly accused in this sense, he's not about to claim that he's sinlessly perfected.

By the way, the fact that Jesus Himself appeals to this Psalm and to this passage and yet never ever remotely suggests that He needed to confess sin or to be forgiven of it, is a thunderous testimony to the sinlessness of Christ and to His Deity; and, of course, then to the discontinuity between David the type and Jesus the anti-type. Jesus' fulfillment of this Psalm far outstretches the experience of David in every way. Jesus didn't need to confess sin as He bore it...David did. And so David confesses his wrongs, and doesn't that remind us that no matter how unjust the situation we find ourselves in, in relation to the world, we ought never to fail to confess our sin to God? No Christian ought to fail to confess sin even when wronged.

But then in the very next verse David does something that's very poignant. He prays that no shame would come to God's people because of Him. 'Lord, You know what I'm going through and the enemies of Your people are mocking me. They are falsely accusing me and they're mocking me. And, Lord, I just want to pray right now that your people would not be dishonored by me.' Is that not a phenomenally un-self-centered prayer to lift up in this moment of David's experience? I mean, could you, could you blame David for being a little self-preoccupied in this moment of time? And yet his concern is that the people of God would not be dishonored and discouraged because of him. Look at what he says in verse 6, "May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; May those who seek You not be dishonored through me."

And then in verses 7 through 12 he goes on to say that his sufferings are for God's sake and he professes...he protests that zeal for God's house consumes him. 'Lord, my heart is pure. I love Your house. I love Your worship. I love Your kingdom, Lord. My zeal consumes me but my sufferings are for Your sake.' And you remember how the New Testament picks up this very passage in verse 9 and applies it to Christ? It was this Psalm that Jesus' disciples remembered when He cleansed the temple. You remember in John 2:17 when John is recounting the cleansing of the temple by Jesus, he says, "His disciples

remembered that it was written, 'ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME"? And you remember how Paul takes this Psalm to speak of Christ when He instructs us in Romans 15:3 to bear with the weaknesses of one another by saying, "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME'"? In other words, Paul is saying, 'If Christ could bear reproach for God, certainly we could at least bear with one another's weaknesses.' If Christ could bear that reproach for God, and, of course, on our behalf, certainly we could bear with the weaknesses of one another in the Christian church. Is that not a stinging rebuke of our impatience with our brothers and sisters in Christ? If He would bear the reproach of God for us and we won't even bear with the weaknesses of one another.

But did you notice how David begins to pull himself up in this section of the Psalm? "O God," "O Lord God of Hosts," "O God of Israel"—three times he names God differently. What's he doing? He's reminding himself of who God is, and that's going to continue explicitly in the next section in verses 13 through 18. So just as no Christian ought to fail to confess sin, so no Christian ought to forget who his God is when we come to Him in prayer. He's the God of hosts. David is surrounded by enemies that he says are more powerful than he. So what? He is the servant of the Lord of armies. He is the servant of the God of Israel who brought His people out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage and Pharaoh and across the Red Sea. and into the land of Canaan and vanquished their enemies before them. That's the God that he's praying to and no Christian ought to forget his God in time of trial.

III. Petition rooted in the character of God (13-18) [A cry for help] Thirdly, look at verses 13 through 18, this cry for help. And I want you to see how this petition of David's is rooted in the character of God. Have you noticed that so far we have no specific petition from David yet? We've got a general petition. You heard it in the first two words of the Psalm. "Save me." Have you ever been in the middle of something and all you can get out is, "Lord, help me. Lord, help me"? That's a good prayer, friends. That's a good prayer. Don't make fun of that prayer: "Lord, help me." But you want to go beyond that, don't you? You want to be able to say more than that. You want to be able to specify and that's what David does. He hasn't been able to get the petition out yet, but finally in verses 13 through 18 this petition begins to roll:

But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, at an acceptable time;O God, in the greatness of Your lovingkindness, Answer me with Your saving truth. Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink;May I be delivered from my foes and from the deep waters. May the flood of water not overflow meNor the deep swallow me up,Nor the pit shut its mouth on me. Oh draw near to my soul and redeem it; Ransom me because of my enemies! And do not hide Your face from Your servant,For I am in distress; answer me quickly. Answer me, O LORD, for Your

lovingkindness is good; According to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me."

Suddenly the petition is specific: 'Answer me. Deliver me. Don't let me sink. Don't hide Your face. Answer me. Draw near. Redeem and ransom.' And did you notice how at the beginning of the petition it's 'Lord, answer me in Your own time'? By the end of the petition it's 'Lord, answer me quickly.' And what's it based on? It's based on who God is. Notice here that He is addressed simply as "the Lord," the covenant God of David and of Israel, and He is described as One who is full of lovingkindness and truth. And David is just reminding himself again who it is that he's praying to. He's praying to the Lord, the Redeemer of his people. He's praying to the Lord who is gracious and compassionate, who is full of lovingkindness, who is faithful to His promises. That's who he's praying to, and he prays specifically, and he begs for God's redemption and ransom. It is so important for us as we pray to remember that believing petition is rooted in the character of God.

And as we pray, and as we remember who God is, let's never forget that our redemption is based on the Father's non-redemption of His Son at Golgotha. You see, David pleads here that he would be redeemed and God heard that prayer. But Jesus cries, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and He is forsaken because He's standing in our place and He's bearing our sins. And that is how committed to our redemption the Lord is. Never forget it when you call to the Lord. Our redemption is based up the Father's non-redemption of His own Son at Golgotha.

IV. Expression of internal wounds and abandonment (19-21) [The experience of shame and abandonment] Well, very quickly in verses 19 through 21 David recounts to us, fourthly, the experience of his shame and abandonment. And he expresses the internal wounds and sense of loneliness and dereliction that he is feeling. He expresses in verses 19 through 21 his sense of being engulfed by shame and abandoned by all comfort, and yet the New Testament reminds us that Jesus' own experience transcends David's at every point. It's Matthew who remembers this Psalm in his account of Christ's death. And in Matthew 27:34 he speaks these words, "They gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink," following after the words of Psalm 69:21. And it's so important for you to remember that these depths of feelings expressed here in verses 19-21 are not inconsistent with Christian experience. Not only are these things the experience of David, they're the experience of Christ. And so the depth of feeling expressed here is not inconsistent with godly Christian experience, but we must take them to the Lord in prayer.

V. David's prayer for judgment and Christ's prayer for forgiveness (22-28) [The curse] In verses 22-28 David calls down a curse upon his enemies in prayer. He prays for God's judgment. And I want to say simply this: This judgment is the appropriate response of God's justice to the actions of His enemies, and David is

not wrong to pray for it. In fact, interestingly, the New Testament says that this Psalm is fulfilled in judgment in the New Testament. In Acts chapter 1 this Psalm and this curse of David is applied to Judas. Judas' judgment is fulfilled in this Psalm. In Romans 11:9 and 10, God's judgment against unbelieving Israel is said to be a fulfillment of the curse of this Psalm. In Revelation 16:1, when the bowls of wrath are being poured out by God in judgment against the nations, the language is borrowed from right here in Psalm 69. So it's not just one of those in the Old Testament, it's wrath in the New Testament; it's love. No, the New Testament sees the judging wrath of God fulfilling this curse.

But you know, if you're reading this Psalm as the experience of Christ in the midst of His suffering, you're struck by this section when you come to it because after being given vinegar to drink, Christ's prayer is a prayer for forgiveness, not for judgment against His enemies. "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." And the contrast is glorious, isn't it? –because Jesus goes beyond simply the call for God's judgment. Oh, that judgment will come, but as our King and Lord and Redeemer, He petitions for mercy.

VI. Expectation of deliverance (29-33) [From pain to praise] In verses 29-33 we see David move from pain to praise, and the whole section is shot through with his expectation of deliverance. And it reminds us that we must pray with confidence, but it doesn't stop there.

VII. Public and universal praise (34-36) [A confident call to doxology] Verses 34-36, the seventh section of the Psalm, end in a confident call to doxology, an appeal for public and universal praise. It just reminds us that we ourselves, all of us as the congregation of God's people, must join in praise to God at the deliverances of all of our brethren. Let's look to God in prayer.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for this Psalm, a Psalm that You have given to us to supply words in our own days of soul distress. May we see Your hope and Your strength in this Psalm. And above it all may we see Your Son our Savior. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand for God's blessing? Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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