

SUFFERING, IMPRECATION, VINDICATION
(SUNDAY, AUGUST 12, 2018)

Scripture reading – John 19:1-30; Psalm 69:19-36

INTRODUCTION

There are no contradictions in Scripture. In all situations we say by faith that God is faithful.

But Scripture and our experience testify to the fact that the believer at times or for extended times will face profound suffering and trial.

Holding God's truth faithfully doesn't mean all your problems vanish or that you always have simple answers.

Your hope is not the absence of suffering but that you will be able to praise God even in the midst of suffering.

Verse 33 is one of the great promises of Psalm 69.

33 For the LORD hears the poor, And does not despise His prisoners.

Psalm 69 is one of the top three most quoted Psalms in the NT.¹

v. 4 (Jn. 15:25)

v. 9 (Jn. 2:17; Rom. 15:3)

v. 21 (Jn. 19:28; and parallel passages)

v. 22 (Rom. 11:9ff.)

v. 25 (Acts 1:20)

Though not direct quotes, verses 12 and 20 also describe the savage treatment our Lord endured.²

Psalm 69 is considered a **direct Messianic Psalm**.

¹ *New Bible Commentary*, 528.

² *Ibid.*, 528.

It is Messianic because of how the NT references the Psalm from nearly beginning to end in terms of Christ.

It is also Messianic in that it describes the sufferings of Christ and shows very powerfully the nature of the Messiah - one who would unjustly suffer and yet be vindicated.

When we consider the Psalms and how they speak of Christ and even how they are the words of Christ, we come across challenging verses in the Psalms like verse 5 which contain confessions of sin and foolishness.

How do these verses speak of Christ?

In understanding how these verses speak of Christ, we consider that Jesus is our High Priest.

One of the duties of the High Priest was to confess the sins of Israel.

So, when we read Psalm 51 or Psalm 69:5 and consider our own sin, we can be thankful that Jesus Christ has also confessed our sins and bore them in his body on the tree.

In his full humanity he so identified with us that he bore the judgment that we deserve because of our sin.

Passages of confession then speak of Christ as our representative and High Priest.³

Listen to John Calvin's wonderful description of the book of Psalms found in the preface of his commentary.

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;" for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.

As God's people we also apply this Psalm in light of the fulfillment of Christ. And viewing it from this perspective still gives us much application.

There are still very many who suffer for the name of Jesus Christ in ways that this Psalm describes.

³ Richard P. Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms*, 89.

These Psalms are important in testifying to what we do know - that sometimes God brings His people to suffer in almost unimaginable ways.

The cruelty that can be in the heart of man is so often shocking.

Our Lord endured some of the most savage treatment. His people are often called to endure in a similar way with the hope that even in the greatest times of suffering we will praise God.

This morning we will be looking only at the second half of Psalm 69: vv. 19-21; 22-28; 29-36.

Your hope is not the absence of suffering but that you will be able to praise God even in the midst of suffering.

1. THE SHAME OF SUFFERING, VV. 19-21

19 You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; My adversaries *are* all before You.

20 Reproach has broken my heart, And I am full of heaviness; I looked *for someone* to take pity, 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.

What are the main themes of this Psalm?

The three main themes are the description of suffering, the plea for help or judgment, and the assurance of deliverance and praise.

Verses 19-21 then reflect earlier verses in the Psalm. They do not simply repeat but they emphasize again the depths of David's suffering.

Verse 19 highlights the suffering of David not so much in terms of physical suffering but what might be called the emotional or spiritual aspects.

The words reproach, shame, and dishonor emphasize this aspect of suffering.

And what is perhaps most remarkable is that the author of this Psalm was not some poor, out-of-work Israelite. It was King David who penned these words.

The situation which gave rise to these words is not known to us. But it is both significant and amazing that it was King David who spoke of this intense and trying suffering.

Reproach has to do with receiving insults.

Shame is related to humiliation.

Dishonor is a similar term. The use of the three terms emphasizes the suffering that David endured.

Verse 7 is similar in description.

7 Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Shame has covered my face.

Verse 19 speaks to the incredible and overwhelming shame that Jesus endured on the cross.

The verse that I read after our celebration of the Lord's Supper also speaks of shame:

Heb. 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Though David describes the humiliation he was facing because of his enemies, the main point of the verse is **that of God's awareness of all that David was facing.**

We are starting with verse 19, but we should consider its connection also with verse 18.

Look at verse 18.

We can say that verse 18 is part of the "mystery" of prayer.

When you pray you are certainly not bringing any new information to God.

And yet prayer is not just a technique to make you feel better. It is part of how you are to humble yourself before God and bring your burdens to Him.

This is one of the lessons that David was teaching the faithful in Israel and you also.

Verse 20 continues in much the same way.

David here emphasizes again the insults heaped upon him and their effect.

The NKJV is quite literal here – **Reproach has broken my heart.**

We would like to know what would cause David so much pain that he would be full of heaviness. David was a man of great passion and one who was called to suffer throughout his life in very significant ways.

And from this Psalm we can say that the burden David was forced to bear was made heavier by the fact that he was seemingly abandoned.

There were no mourners.

He could find no comforters.

Truly this an amazing statement. King David had no one to stand with him.

With verse 21 what David describes in terms of insults, brokenness of heart, and abandonment **is an OT picture of the suffering of Christ on the cross.**

As I have pointed out, the NT does not really call attention to the physical pain Jesus endured which was obviously incredible, nearly indescribable. **What the NT does focus on is the shame, insults, and humiliation of our Lord and His incredible sorrow.**

The NT accounts also emphasize the abandonment of Jesus by all who were disciples.

Peter denied our Lord three times, but all the disciples fled from him, including John, who at least did later return to watch our Lord suffer on the cross.

Matthew 26:38 Then He said to them, **“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”**

Verse 21 might be the climax of these three verses.

David received no help. Instead he was given gall, some sort of poisonous plant to eat and vinegar to quench his thirst.

What is significant is that the words for gall and vinegar in the Greek translation are used in Matthew 27:34 and 48.⁴

As we read earlier, John saw a clear connection with the thirst of Jesus and this Psalm.

⁴Tyndale Commentary, 266.

David wrote this Psalm describing his own suffering and yet in this description through the Holy Spirit's work, David was also describing what so many could not understand – a Messiah who was insulted, humiliated, disgraced, and abandoned.

How could this be the Messiah?

The answer is that this is what the OT describes both in terms of suffering and vindication.

2. MAY GOD'S ENEMIES BE BROUGHT TO JUDGMENT, vv. 22-28

22 Let their table become a snare before them, And their well-being a trap.

23 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; And make their loins shake continually.

24 Pour out Your indignation upon them, And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.

25 Let their dwelling place be desolate; Let no one live in their tents.

26 For they persecute the *ones* You have struck, And talk of the grief of those You have wounded.

27 Add iniquity to their iniquity, And let them not come into Your righteousness.

28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous.

Given that Psalm 69 is a more obvious Messianic Psalm, some have found verses 22-28 especially troubling.

Didn't Jesus pray that His enemies would be granted forgiveness? Did Jesus ever curse His enemies?

Before we are quick to explain and reconcile, it is good to consider the seriousness of the charge.

Boice cites the comments of one commentator Maclaren who did not think it possible to reconcile these words and the actions of Jesus on the cross and take seriously the words found in these verses.

The conclusion that some recommend is that we see a **contrast** between these harsh words and the spirit of our Lord.

As you might guess, I don't think that is the best approach. Let me give several reasons.

First, Jesus did pronounce words of woe and judgment throughout His ministry.

Yes, it is true that He also so powerfully prayed for that those persecuting Him would be granted forgiveness, but that prayer doesn't mean that judgment is somehow covered over.

Our Lord both prayed for His enemies as well as announcing to those who rejected Him the certain judgment they would face.

The prayer of forgiveness that Jesus prayed on the cross was answered in that some of those who were directly responsible for His death were graciously called to faith and repentance.

And very sadly, those who continued to reject the only way of salvation would face the judgment described in part in verses 22-28.

Second, several Apostolic interpreters show that the words of verses 22-28 are not just outdated OT ideas and feelings that should be changed now in light of the NT.

Peter in viewing the actions of Judas applied the words of Psalm 69 and Psalm 109.

Acts 1:20 "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: "Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it"; and, 'Let another take his office.'

The Apostle Paul who certainly knew the Spirit of our Lord also quoted from Psalm 69 several times in Romans.

Romans 15:3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*"

Paul also wrote in Romans 12 quoting from Deut. 32:35,

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord.

But earlier in Romans 11, Paul understood the strong words of judgment found in verses 22-28 applied very interestingly not to pagans but to Israel in her unbelief.

Rom. 11:9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them.

10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always.”

Some of the best comments on these words I found in the *New Bible Commentary*.

This section of commentary was written by J. A. Motyer.

I looked his name up since I was not familiar and found that he was a theologian from Bristol, England. He died in 2016.

Sometimes IVP gets it very wrong, but here is an example of some of their finest commentary work.

We must also ask if such a prayer accords with the mind of Christ, for much in the psalm has brought us face to face with his sufferings and his reaction was to pray that his tormenters might be forgiven. Surely this is now the only possible course. But there is more to be said: the Lord Jesus himself pronounced dire ‘woes’ (Mt. 23:13-36); he envisaged himself saying ‘Depart, you who are cursed’ (Mt. 25:41); the day will come when all will flee the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:15-17); he will be there when the books are opened (Rev. 20:12)—and at that day there will be no prayer for forgiveness, only the logic of divine justice eternally applied. **In a word, there is such a thing as pure anger and here, in one who longed for justice, the OT reflects that aspect of Christ’s character.**⁵

What is also significant is that the words of verses 22-28 are not just angry, spiteful words, but words that express justice.

There is an appropriateness to them given the suffering of David. Much of what you find then in terms of the desired judgment corresponds to their evil in striking out against David.

Listen again to the excellent comments of Motyer:

They acted in poisonous spite, figured in terms of food (21): their *table* will be a *snare* (22); they brought about bodily exhaustion (3): they too must suffer (23); they inflicted a sense of divine withdrawal (17): they will suffer its reality (24); his family was estranged (8): their homes will be destroyed (25); they made false accusations of guilt

⁵ *New Bible Commentary*, 528.

(4-5): they will be held irretrievably guilty (27); they set themselves against God (9):
God will set himself eternally against them (28).⁶

Verses 22-28 also are significant in that they describe the judgment that you and I deserve were it not for the mercy and grace shown to us miserable wretches.

Do you know what you have been saved from?

These strong words then are quite fitting in a Psalm which points to the cross.

3. PRAISE EVEN THROUGH SUFFERING, VV. 29-36

29 But I *am* poor and sorrowful; Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high.

30 I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.

31 *This* also shall please the LORD better than an ox *or* bull, Which has horns and hooves.

32 The humble shall see *this and* be glad; And you who seek God, your hearts shall live.

33 For the LORD hears the poor, And does not despise His 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 Also, the descendants of His servants shall inherit it, And those who love His name shall dwell in it.

The last 8 verses of this Psalm certainly have a very different tone.

The Psalm is filled with suffering and sorrow, but it ends with hope, confidence, and praise. God's great work is not finished.

Look at verse 29.

⁶ Ibid., 528.

It is again amazing to see David describe himself as poor. He was not talking of his financial situation.

Poor here speaks of being afflicted.

I am afflicted and sick or in great pain which is the meaning of sorrowful.

It seems that on a number of times David faced illness, which was used against him.

Verse 29 is a good transition verse because again it shows that **David trusted and prayed in the midst of this difficult situation**. He hoped and prayed for God's great deliverance.

Let your salvation protect me, which is the idea of set me on high.

As we see in verse 30, it is this confidence in God's deliverance that leads him to declare that he will praise God with song and thanksgiving.

God is going to work. David has no doubt of that.

And in response David will be filled with thanks and praise. **I think this verse is at the heart of this Psalm and it is the testimony of many of God's people in the midst of suffering.**

The Psalm continues in verse 31.

This will please God more than an ox or bull with horns and hooves. The words singing/song and bull are very similar, so likely there is a play on words.⁷

What is also interesting is how this verse testifies that what God most desires is His people to be in right relationship with Him.

The sacrificial system is not called into question by this verse as being a waste or a poor idea, but this verse does point to the fulfillment of the sacrificial system in Christ and that God's people continue to bring sacrifice through right worship.

David's actions he states will bring encouragement also to others.

The humble – perhaps referring to those also called to suffer but certainly those who are humble before God will take note and respond with proper joy. Those who are seeking God are given encouragement that they will continue to live.

Isn't this a profound statement in light of the cross?

⁷ Alter, Psalm 69:21

And what a promise is found in verse 33 that I highlighted earlier.

The LORD does hear the poor.

There are a variety of words used to describe suffering, here is another, a word used 23x in the Psalms – **needy or poor**.

The LORD does hear the poor and does not despise His people who are prisoners or in captivity.

This is significant in that often suffering causes us to question whether God still cares for us.

The temptation is to think you have been forgotten by God, that you are somehow outside His care. **This is the natural way to think but it is most wrong.**

The verb despised is an important verb used also in the passages which foreshadow the suffering of Christ in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.

We must not let circumstances lead us to believe that somehow God no longer takes an interest in our plight.

A crescendo of praise beautifully ends this Psalm. Special focus is placed on God's people dwelling in the land of promise.

Some commentators believe that these verses were added later by an "editor."

The reason has to do with the language of building or as some translations read rebuilding the cities of Judah. This seems to express the fact that Israel was in exile or some would suggest the time of Hezekiah when portions of Judah were captured as we read in 2 Kings 18:13, when Sennacherib took all the fortified cities of Judah.

I suppose this is possible, but I don't think we are forced to take this position.

We know that even when Israel was fully in the land of promise that they had not fully chased out their enemies. Zion was only taken in the beginning part of David's rule.

There were still other cities that needed to be captured. Certainly, the attitude of verse 35 was we might say even more important during the exile and the return from exile, but I think it is possible to understand that David is expressing the hope and covenant blessing that God would give to Israel.

One important lesson we learn from these verses is why God's people can always praise God even in the most difficult of circumstances.

This is not just positive thinking or ignoring the reality of suffering.

It is an acknowledgement of God's worth in all situations not when we just feel like praising God.

Your hope is not the absence of suffering but that you will be able to praise God even in the midst of suffering.

CONCLUSION:

We must not be Job's comforters as we minister to others, but certainly this Psalm pointing to Christ does remind us that we should not be surprised if we are called to endure horrible times of grief and suffering.

Many of God's people are horribly afflicted. It is revolting to consider, but this does not go against God's plan. In fact it testifies to God's plan, when God's people suffer and yet continue to trust and praise God.

I close with the very appropriate words of James Boice who commented on this passage.

"I wish I could plant that truth in your mind so that nothing would ever blot it out and that it could ring there with a constant glad clarity. In this world there is always much pain and evil. It is what life is like. What is more, God does not always remove the pain or troubling times. Jesus prayed in great agony in Gethsemane, asking that the cup he was about to drink might be taken from him, and God did not remove the cup. Jesus had to drink it. God nevertheless heard his prayer and did not despise his agony. Moreover, he sent angels to minister to him and strengthen him so that he might go through his trial gloriously for God. Be assured that this will be the case with you also. Whatever cross you are given, tell God about it and know that He will hear your prayers and come to strengthen you. You will certainly praise him for it one day." [582-583]

Closing Hymn: Psalm 69D

BENEDICTION – NUMBERS 6:24-26

“The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” ’