

**God our Deliverer
Psalm 70**

Brothers and sisters, have you ever been in a situation where it seems you are damned if you do and damned if you don't? Maybe it was a situation like the Clash sings about – should I stay or should I go? If I go there will be trouble – but if I stay is will be double! You are caught between two terrible options and you have to choose the lesser of two evils.

Or maybe you've been in a situation where you are having to deal with people who have it out for you? Maybe someone sees you as competition for something they want? You are standing in the way of their quest for power? Or they feel threatened and insecure because of who you are? Whatever the reason, they've targeted you and want to take you out!

They intimidate and bully you, put you down, make your life miserable so that you will get out of their way, they seek to discredit you, ruin your reputation and isolate you and take away your support. They find ways to attack you – verbally and sometimes even physically.

And it can be very difficult to know what to do in such situations, especially when the people who are attacking you are subtle and crafty about it, so that nobody else realizes that they are attacking you – sometimes you don't even realize what is going on, until it's too late.

I was in a situation like this once, as a church leader, early on in my ministry. I was young and eager to build a leadership team and I was not very careful about discerning who I had recruited to join the team and confirming they were spiritually mature and qualified.

Pretty soon I found myself struggling to lead the team I had put together, a couple of these leaders started pushing back against our ministry team structure, wanting to make changes to it. Then they began to question leadership decisions for our ministry goals and directions and the space usage of the church that had been made prior to their leadership... then they began to question my qualifications and ability to lead as a pastor.

It was a bit confusing to me because I thought we were simply struggling to click together as a team and some disagreement about ministry direction had escalated into conflict- and so I consented to being absent from some meetings in order to help “de-escalate” the conflict.

However, it was much more than a disagreement. I was being targeted and lead antagonist had hacked into computer and my email and had dug up embarrassing information about me and some mistakes I had made. He was also targeting my wife and her business decisions and spinning all of this information to put me in a bad light with the leadership team at the meetings where I was absent, along with making complaints to my colleagues in the Presbytery about me.

And by the time a very wise lady said “this person wants your head” it was too late for me to do anything about it, the trap had already been laid, I hadn’t seen it, and I was stuck.

Because if I attempted to exercise my leadership clout and put an end to this behavior and stop this attack by kicking them off the leadership team I would look like the kind of “mean-

spirited and authoritarian abusive leader” I was accused of being. Moreover, it would also appear that I was trying to shut them down and make them go away because I had something to hide and I was afraid of being exposed.

So, I was in a difficult situation where I was damned if I did anything and damned if I didn’t do anything... the only thing I could do was ask God for help - just like King David asked God to help him when he wrote Psalm 70, which we just read this morning. *“Hasten, O God, to save me; come quickly, Lord, to help me.... I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay.”*

And indeed God did step in and save me and whenever I tell anyone about this situation I say that the Lord was gracious and spared me, and so as not to leave you all in suspense as to how it happened I’ll quickly tell you how.

By the grace of God a few other long-standing and well-respected leaders started to see what was going on, and when the antagonist held a secret meeting and tried to call for a

vote of non-confidence in me, they undermined him and pulled their support in front of everyone else on the team and his attack failed. And within three months... he and his conspirators had all resigned and left the church and none of this had any significant impact on the congregation.

Praise the Lord. The Lord is great!

And there is no doubt in my mind brothers and sisters that when King David wrote Psalm 70 he was in some sort of similar situation where palace intrigue and politics had put him in a corner where he was unable to act without damaging his own reputation or leadership but if he didn't take any action there was the very real possibility that someone would succeed in taking him off the throne.

Of course, we know of one such incident in 2 Samuel 15 when his son Absalom betrayed him, lead a rebellion against him and tried to take the throne and David had to flee for his life, and wait on the Lord to sort things out... but I don't think that was the context for this particular Psalm.

Usually there will be better indicators of what is going on within the Psalm itself, or there will be some sort of note in the heading – like Psalm 51 where there's a specific heading *“A Psalm of David: When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.”* Or Psalm 60 with the heading *“A miktam of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”*

But Psalm 70 is devoid of any specific references that would help us connect it to a specific situation in the life of King David, instead its refence says that it's a petition, or more accurately *“for a memorial”* which means it was recited while making a memorial sacrifice offering in worship.

So it appears that we are not meant to know the specific circumstances that inspired David to write this Psalm – but he felt that his experience in seeking the Lord's help and deliverance was something that could benefit the average

ordinary Israelite and be of help them when they encountered situations where they needed to seek the Lord's deliverance. So, let's take a closer look at the Psalm does this through its poetic composition.

Now in English, our predominant way of creating poetry is having words at the end of sentences rhyme with each other. So we might say something like *"Oh I'm in trouble, God please help – come quickly to save me, before I yelp"* and that's really cheesy bad English poetry but that's how we do it.

Hebrew Poetry is more about the wording structure and development of ideas. So, in vs. 1 the first line is made up of three parts. i) Hasten, O God, to save me and the second half is ii) come quickly, Lord, to help me.

When you put them over top each other you can see how the second line expresses that very same idea, but emphasizes it and develops it further using different words.

Additionally – even though we might read the Psalm in a linear fashion, its poetic structure has arranged the themes and ideas in a particular way which is not linear and we need to make sure we can see this.

So vs1 and vs 5 are paired together because they both request for God to come and help, although vs 5 expands on this request by adding in a reason for requesting help *"I am poor and needy"* along with another phrase that increases the urgency of the request as the Psalm ends *"Lord do not delay!"* so you have vs 1 as A and vs v5 as A1. So, Psalm 70 is book-ended by these requests of A and A1 asking for God's help.

Then in the middle section we find some of the details on exactly what help is needed. Vs. 2 – 3 list specific requests about David's adversaries and there are 3 couplets that make these requests in these two verses.

The first lines of these couplets all describe what the attackers want to inflict on David; they are seeking his life, they desire his ruin, and they are pointing out his faults. The second lines

of these couplets describe what David would have his attackers reap for their actions; Shame and confusion and disgrace. So, we'll label this section of vs. 2 and 3 as B.

Then there is a second section of requests in vs. 4 comprised of two couplets. And in the first lines of these couplets David is asking on behalf of anyone who would seek God's help. And in the second line of the couplets the request is for the petitioners to celebrate receiving God's help.

So both of these sections in vs. 2-3 and vs. 4 deal with requests, so we can label the requests in verse 4 for as B also – however the subject of the requests changes from the enemies to everyone who asks God for help, so this second section we'll label specifically as B1.

Thus, the overall poetic structure of this psalm is ABB¹A¹ and what this communicates is that from front to back David is only looking to God, to Yahweh, for help with the requests that are contained in the middle of this psalm. He doesn't

start out asking God for help – but then end up relying on his own efforts, or on something else.

It also tells us this is a thoughtful request for God's help. David has put some effort into how this is put together, its organized, its clear, its well thought out, there's progression in it. This is not a panicked prayer or a collection of confused ramblings, or vague uncertain requests asking for revenge, it's very specific, intentional and measured... and it's confident.

Of course, that is because David has a covenant relationship with God – as a descendent of Abraham David is heir to the covenant promise where God says *"I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you."* (Gen 12:3)

Additionally as an Israelite David can claim covenant promises as God's treasured possession (Deut 14:2), and also as God's King over Israel David had his own personal covenant with God, 2 Sam 7, where God promised that David's line would always rule over God's people.

So, David confidently makes his well thought out requests to God within the context of his covenant relationship with God, depending on God' faithfulness and God's promises and God's character to come through for him – not his own virtue or innocence or sense of justice with regards to his situation. As the structure indicates, it's all focused on God from front to back. It's about God, Yahweh.

Of course, when someone does something that is well thought out, intentional and confident it can be helpful to other people as well – and so it was included in the collection of Psalms that Israel had available to help them come before God in their worship, and it has come to us as well, as part of God's Word – the Holy Scriptures.

Which means that the Holy Spirit makes use of, and empowers the structure, intention and confidence of this prayer so that it becomes useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training us to be fully equipped for every good work, and... also to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ. (2 Tim 3:15-16)

So, let's apply this Psalm to our lives this morning...

The first application for us is to realize it's ok to ask God for help in whatever adversarial circumstances you are going through.

I've discovered as a minister that people have all sorts of misunderstandings about what they can or they can't pray about and bring up to God, but this Psalm is deliberately broad so that it can be used in a variety of situations by anyone. Challenges in your workplace, conflict in your family, bullying going on at school... is someone spreading rumors about you, are people laughing at your mistakes, judging you and saying you deserve the consequences of what happened to you?

Are you just dealing with a lot of adversity in life?

Whatever it is brothers and sisters, you don't have to have King David-sized problems to pray Psalm 70, you don't have to have pastor sized problems like I did to use it! Whatever adversity or adversaries you are facing – no matter how small

or insignificant they might seem; you can ask for God's help and deliverance from them. *"Come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer!"* Amen?

Secondly you can be covenantally confident when you ask for God's help. But not because you're the victim of adversity, not because you're a good person who doesn't deserve what you're going through, not because you're in the right and someone else is in the wrong and doing you an injustice... but because God promised to help you, from his grace and mercy!

We have access to all of God's Covenant promises, they are all ours, through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus teaches His disciples in John 14:13-14 that He will do whatever we ask in His name to glorify the Father, and in John 16:23 that His *"Father will give [us] whatever [we] ask in [his] name."*

So that promise to Abraham; *"I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you"* that's given to us - in Christ... not through Christ – but IN Christ. We can ask God for His help

in dealing with those who have made themselves our adversaries and would curse us.

And that leads us to a third application, that we should identify, and articulate the motives of our adversaries - and this is what we present to God in our request for help. We're not going to God saying *"Lord so and so hurt me, Lord so and so is being mean to me, Lord so and so is just so difficult to deal with, they are not nice people, they are terrible people!"*

You see that's being reactive in your circumstances, that's taking it personally, that's letting your emotional state get the better of you and likely allowing yourself to be manipulated by your adversaries.

Now – I'm not saying that you can't pour out your emotions to God in prayer, absolutely you can and there are times when that's good to do. But realize brothers and sisters that emoting is different from making a petition of God about how He can help you.

You see maybe you're feeling like someone is set against you and instead of emoting to God about it – you ask God to help you understand their motives and spend some time reflecting on that - and you realize that all they are doing is trying to help you! Well that changes things...

Or perhaps, as we see in Psalm 70, their motives are to discourage you, to humiliate you, to make you fail – so then knowing this you can be articulate about it to God in prayer, and it becomes easier to know what to ask God to do about that and about them, and in a strange way you're less likely to react personally and make your prayers about vengeance...

Instead, your request can be measured and reasonable as we see in Psalm 70. Their motive is to take my life – so make them confused Lord. Whatever they are planning to do this, make them confused so it will fail. And may they be ashamed of planning to do this because it is a shameful thing.

They desire to ruin my reputation – Lord may they be turned back in disgrace. Let everyone see what they are trying to do

so that I will not be disgraced but they will be disgraced. Not because I'm attacking them personally in my prayers for spite but because they are acting disgracefully in what they are doing – its just the truth coming out.

Now have you ever felt ashamed of doing something, have you ever come to the realization that something you were doing was disgraceful? What did you do next? Likely you stopped what you were doing didn't you... But you know what can also come from that? Repentance, a change of heart and a change of attitude.

So what we find here in Psalm 70 is really what Jesus is getting at when He sets things straight in Matthew 5:44 saying *“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”*

This is why God's promise to *“bless those who bless us and curse those who curse us”* is for us IN Jesus. When it is IN Jesus, we are able to ask God to keep this promise without using it in a spiteful way, if we think it comes to us through Jesus – we think it is ours to use apart from Jesus for our own

personal vindication. So, love your enemies as Jesus taught us by praying in this way for those who are set against you.

Next, a fourth application, – don't seek revenge, seek God. Once the requests about the enemies have been made, they are left in God's hands. David doesn't come back to it, there's no indication that once God acts to bring shame and disgrace to his enemies that David will gloat about it or celebrate it or even feel vindicated and relieved.

Rather David shifts his focus to the fact that these circumstances have caused him to seek God, and if you have to seek out God is that such a bad thing? Vs. 4 says *"may all who seek you [God] rejoice and be glad in... you!"* And while the following couplet acknowledges the gratitude and praise we express when we receive God's saving help – before we get to that, first and foremost what is great about seeking God is who God is in and of Himself.

David wants this Psalm not only to direct people to seek help and deliverance from God – but to seek God, to be captivated by Him and to be delivered from themselves.

So now the fifth and last application from this Psalm 70 brothers and sisters, what have these adversarial circumstances, praying for your enemies and considering if you are only seeking God's help but not God, what has it revealed to you about yourself?

Well vs. 5 tells us – we are poor and needy. Not only are we powerless because we may be dammed if we do or dammed if we don't in our circumstances, but now we realize we also need God's help and deliverance to save us from our own sinful nature that makes the adversity all about us... instead of what God can do and will do through it - to sanctify us.

Genesis 50:20 – *"you meant it for evil, but God intended it for good!"* Romans 8:28 – *"in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* Hebrews 12:7,11 – *"Endure hardship as discipline... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."*

But we are poor and needy when it comes to trusting God to work like this, we keep questioning why God would allow this to happen, wondering what we did wrong to deserve this, struggling and wrestling with God instead of working with Him. Desiring to see Him strike down our adversaries and vindicate us.

All perfectly normal and understandable reactions brothers and sisters, I know... I go through it too - because... we're sinful human beings. We are poor and needy and we as Psalm 70:5 says as it ends *"come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay!"*

Here's the good news brothers and sisters – this prayer has been answered for us as the Lord Jesus has sent us His Holy Spirit.

"Come quickly to us o God... do not delay!" Brothers and sisters - He's already here, in fact His Spirit is already at work in you to help you come to realize that you need God's deliverance, to cause you to seek God in your circumstances!

"You are our help and deliverer" Yes, He is! In John 14:16 Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be our *"advocate who will help us"*

So brothers and sisters do not be discouraged as we discover that we are poor and needy, do not be discouraged that we must face adversity and seek God for His help.

Be encouraged, rejoice and be glad! We have been given the Holy Spirit – He lives in us, God is near to us, He is working to bring good out of evil, He will refine you and sanctify you from your sinful nature, He is preparing you for the world to come, but most of all – He is giving you Himself through all this...

So brothers and sisters, God is our help and our deliverer, but may all who seek the Lord rejoice and be glad... In Him!
Amen.