

Psalm 68

This is a psalm of David who leads us in praise of God. There is nothing measured or pedestrian about this song. We are urged to rejoice, to extol, to sing, to proclaim but not for its own sake. David does not merely tell us we are to get excited. He sets God before us and urges us to respond appropriately.

This is the God who fights for his people. (1-3) This King knew all about God's help in battle. The Lord leads his people (7-10) He turns his listeners attention back to the Exodus where Israel were led by the pillar of cloud by day and the fire by night. The Lord dwells among his people. (15-18) He is not only the One of Sinai (8) but *the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary.* (17) When David brought the ark to Jerusalem his demeanour announced that a great king was taking up residence in the capital.

To read the psalms of David is to be given a preview of King David's descendant the Lord Jesus. The NT takes up v18 (Eph 4:8) and sees it fulfilled in his ascension and his equipping of his church with gift of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

It is his victory over our ultimate enemy that gives us most to sing about. His church is not simply a place for God to dwell by his Spirit, it is a home for the fatherless and the widow. It's a place of community for the lonely and provision for the poor. (v5,6,10) The book of Acts lets us see these things being realised in the life of the early church. There is no unreality here. We may be the Lord's people but we encounter burdens. Yet what an encouragement to know the truth of v19.

- We get excited about lots of things. The psalm invites us to consider who the Lord is and what he has done for his people. Can we fail to respond?
- The great and powerful often confine themselves to their own kind. The Lord would lead his people out to care and support the most vulnerable.
- What burdens are you bearing at present? Read v19 again and hear Christ invite you to cast your care on him.

Psalm 69

This, another of David's psalms, reminds us that his route to the throne went by way of suffering. As he is forced to flee from Saul and lives the life of a fugitive in the desert of En Gedi this psalm provides a glimpse behind the scenes. At times he feels himself to be a drowning man. (1,2)

But like the previous psalm we are given a unique glimpse into the suffering of the Son of David as we read these words. He knew what it was to be consumed with zeal for Gods house (John 2:17) and his experience at his execution is accurately described in v21. (Matt 27:34 & 48)

But it's more than a record of suffering. We see the Lord's passion for his Fathers reputation. (9) As he drives the traders out of the temple, he condemns the generation that have turned his Fathers house into a den of robbers. He does so despite the inevitable consequences. *The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him.* (Mark 11:18) We see his selfless concern that his behaviour under pressure should not bring disgrace on those who hope in God. (6) Above all we see his unwavering trust in his Father expressed in prayer. Although 'worn out' (3) he continues to pray. He looks to his Fathers 'great love' and 'sure salvation' (16) He does so with absolute confidence that there will be a good outcome. *I will praise God with song and glorify him with thanksgiving.* (30)

In one respect though the Son of David exceeds the outlook of his ancestor. David prays for the destruction of his enemies. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and prayed for his persecutors to be forgiven. His ministry was one of salvation not condemnation. It ought to prompt renewed wonder at such extravagant grace.

- The suffering and vindication of the Lord Jesus underlines for us there are no situations from which God is unable to rescue his people.
- Doing what is right does not mean things will necessarily turn out well. But it does mean we can rely on the protection of God's salvation. (29)
- Jesus would lead us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Will we follow him?

Psalm 70

Although this is a psalm of David there is no information in the introduction to locate it to a particular time. It either belongs to his days as a fugitive from Saul or to the time of Absalom's coup. It maybe significant that the language is less ruthless than psalm 69:24ff *May they be blotted out the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.* (28) Rather he prays that they would be put *to shame and confusion and turned back in disgrace.* (2) This is precisely what he asks for Ahithopel's counsel, his chief advisor who crossed over to Absalom's side (2 Sam 15:31). The softer response is also in keeping with David's sense of culpability for these events.

David has things to teach us about how to pray in a crisis. He undoubtedly pleads for God to act speedily on his behalf but his concerns do not stop at his own well-being. The dividing line is not drawn between those support him or attack him. He places his attention elsewhere. *But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.* (4) These are the people *who long for your saving help.* No doubt there were many things to concern Mary on the news she would bear the Messiah, not least Joseph and the shame that went with being an unmarried mother. But her preoccupation is with the Lord: *My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour* (Luke 1:46,47) Its in his character and ways that security is found.

The psalm ends as it began, on a note of urgency. But this time there is more stability. As he has prayed for 'those who long for your saving help' he is reminded of what God would be to him. *You are my help and deliverer, do not delay.* (5)

- Past failure may restrain us from seeking Gods help. David with his many flaws would encourage us to believe Gods ears are open to his struggling people.
- Next time you are tempted to become preoccupied with your own struggles, follow David's example and pray for others to be able to rejoice in God.
- God did come swiftly to David's help. Be encouraged that prayer is heard and help delivered.

Psalm 71.

This psalm opens with a plea for rescue (1-4) but ends on a note of enthusiastic praise. (22-24) How can we make that journey in our own lives particularly when we are under pressure or on the receiving end of injustice?

The psalmist has learned who God is. ... *you are my rock and fortress* (3) Picture a churning sea with towering waves but there standing out from the storm is a great rock. The unshakable rock is a place of refuge in the storm.

He sees himself not as a product of chance but as someone 'brought forth from his mother's womb' by God's deliberate will and plan. (6) The birth of the Messiah bears all the hallmarks of God's involvement; dare we believe that our existence has been similarly planned by God? If so learning who God is and what his priorities are will be key.

Ours is a youth culture. Everyone is preoccupied with looking young and cool. It's hard not to feel the 21st century finds old people a nuisance. Twice the psalmist asks God not to forsake him when he is old and weak (9 & 18) There are plenty of illustrations of old people in the Bible who were sustained and accompanied in their latter years. If you read through Isaiah recently you will know the promise of God to his people: *Even to your old age and grey hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. (Isaiah 46:4)* But the psalmist is not looking for a quiet retirement. He prays for God's strength in his 'old age' so that he can *tell of God's righteousness (14)* And specifically he is eager to 'declare God's power to the next generation' (18)

The psalms because of their strong connection to David remind us of the great Son of David. You could imagine Jesus reading this psalm as particularly applicable to him. *Though you have made me see troubles many and bitter you will restore my life again from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. (20)* Ultimately it is because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that we can be confident that God will restore our lives and enable us to share in the resurrection of his Son. We have every reason to sing God's praise.

- We live in a culture that because it regards everything as random it treats life casually. Can we see ourselves as those whom God brought forth from our mother's womb and who has been our confidence since our youth?
- How do we relate to those who are 'old' and whose strength may be gone? Is there any way in which we convey that they are neither forsaken by God or by us?
- Are you concerned about the next generation? Will we pray and endeavour to declare God's marvellous deeds. (17)

Psalm 72

As Solomon takes the throne he does so as someone in possession of great promises. He is the Son of David of whom God has said: *Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established for ever. (2 Sam 7:16)* The promises of the Bible are not made to promote fatalism, they are given to direct our prayers. We don't know the author of this psalm but clearly he is intent on asking God to do for the new king what he has promised.

The first concern is that the King will operate justly. It is a great thing if rulers see their first responsibility as defending the afflicted and crushing the oppressor. (4) This is the essence of Solomon's request when God comes to him. *So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. (1 Kings 3:9)* We are familiar with the phrase; "all power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely" It is our complete dependence on God that will keep us from that consequence.

The psalm highlights the benefits that flow from the rule of a godly King. The country enjoys peace (7). Kings bring tribute. *The Kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts (10)* Turned out to be the Queen! There is an abundance of food (16) The writer of Kings tells us of life under the rule of Solomon: *The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. (1 Kings 4:20)*

It is though when we get to v17 that we are caused to pause. *May his name endure forever....Then all nations will be blessed through him.* Solomon's legacy was at best mixed. His international policy is less about blessing the nations and more about his love of foreign women. His waywardness at this point undid so much of the earlier benefits of his reign. If we are looking for a king who will bring blessing to the nations we must direct our attention to King Jesus who takes the promises to the Son of David to a whole new level.

- What specific promises of God are fuelling your prayers at present?
- Pray for kings and those who rule over us to do so justly with a concern for all their citizens. Pray that they may be kept from the corrupt influence of wielding power.
- The psalm gives us a glimpse of the coming Kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Allow it to create some grateful anticipation in your life.