

Calling Down Judgment

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2013

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] Well, please be seated. It's a joy to be back at Holy Trinity and to see many familiar faces and to meet some new folk as well.

Thank you for your prayers over the past year while I've been living in Malaysia and working in Asia. And I do encourage you, if you can, to come during this week or next week when I'm speaking at different Bible study groups, even if you're not a member of those groups, then you're welcome, I think, to attend.

So if you want some further details of addresses and times and so on, please do ask me after church or check with the church office during the week. And I have some CMS brochures on the table by the exit door and a couple of books, one of which is new that I wrote recently and was published in Malaysia recently on the book of Amos.

So good to see you and I look forward to catching up with many over the next couple of weeks. If you turn in the Bibles to Psalm 69, I've been asked to preach from the Psalms as part of this series of sermons on the Psalms.

And so Psalm 69, page 576. And let's pray. Our God and Father, you've caused all Holy Scripture to be written to make us wise for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 2 6] And we pray today that your word will be written in our hearts, that it will bear much fruit, that we may live for your glory, that we may live knowing Jesus as our Savior.

All this we ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Well, you probably don't need me to tell you that this is election year. But not just here.

Of course, Australia has changed prime ministers with and without elections in recent times and changed political parties as the governing party through elections several times, indeed in my lifetime.

Malaysia, where I live mostly, hasn't changed government in all the years of independence of Malaysia, which began before my lifetime.

But we had an election this year in Malaysia. The election in Malaysia is a little bit different from the election here. They're both countries are called democracies.

[2 : 3 6] One is and one isn't. Malaysia is a corrupt country. And the election was a fascination for me to see the level of corruption involved in making sure and guarding the governing parties to continue governing.

So, for example, people were paid not to vote. Voting is not compulsory there. People were paid to vote for the government and not the opposition.

People were prevented from voting in some places. And indeed, whole swathes, plane loads and bus loads of foreigners, mainly from Bangladesh, apparently, were given temporary citizenship so that they could come and vote for the government and then be sent back again to Bangladesh.

There are a whole range of other policies, let me tell you, that went on at the time. And opposition members were threatened. And people found that, especially opposition voters, found that somebody had already voted in their name.

Others found that there were dead people on the electoral roll who happened to vote for the government, of course. And so on and so on and so on. On and on and on it went. Huge amount of electoral fraud.

[3 : 49] The trouble is that the Electoral Commission in Malaysia is under the authority of the government and therefore not independent. The judiciary and the police are under the government and therefore not independent either.

And yet, remarkably, over 51% of Malaysia voted for the opposition, but 60% of the seats are still with the government.

Because there is a gerrymander system that favours the small areas of government supporters. Just before the election, in the midst of all of this, day by day by day, allegations and accusations of the corruption, bribery, scandals and so on that abound in Malaysia.

One of my students posted on Facebook, May they rot in hell, referring to the governing parties. And at the time, it sort of jolted me.

I thought, wow, this is very strong language. Do I agree with this? I was tempted to sort of engage this student with some discussion about, is this really a Christian response?

[4 : 55] Why not forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do? Wought we not love our enemies? But may they rot in hell? Wow.

But as I began to think a little bit more about that reflection, it occurred to me that some of the Psalms, for example, the one we're looking at today, echoes similar thoughts.

Was he in fact right? Is it fair to pray or say about those who are perpetrators of racism?

Malaysia is the only officially apartheid country in the world today, thoroughly racist in constitution and practice. A government and country that is anti-Christian, increasingly so.

Is it in fact right then to pray? May they rot in hell. Two Sundays ago, I was preaching in Bangkok. I met a lady with her husband and three sons.

[6 : 02] They had fled Pakistan in recent months because a group of Muslims had raped her and killed her eight-year-old son. Basically, unless they converted to Islam.

Forced out of the country. Thankfully for them, they went to Bangkok and not Australia, where they would be treated just as badly, probably, in my opinion, by either governing party in this country.

So they have some asylum in Bangkok rather than in a prison on a remote island. And they are now under the United Nations refugee system, seeking asylum.

What would she pray for those who raped her and killed her son? Why not pray, may they rot in hell? Or what about my Burmese Christian friends after Cyclone Nagas in 2008 where the Burmese military junta did absolutely nothing for days and days and days.

With regard to the hundreds of thousands dead and many more homeless after a cyclone. May they rot in hell.

[7 : 15] Or the sister of somebody I know, or met rather. A Pakistani again who was part of a preaching conference that I was teaching at two years ago.

In February last year, kidnapped, no doubt now dead. A Christian worker in a Christian hospital in Karachi. The sister, family members, friends.

What would they pray? What would they pray? May they rot in hell. Or Chinese Christians. A colleague of mine in China was under house arrest for months and months and months.

Part of a house church in Beijing. Part of a house church that was resisting the government. And his position at a university was stopped for some time.

What do they pray? For their persecutors and oppressors. Let them be blotted out of the book of life. May they have no acquittal from God. May they rot in hell.

[8 : 16] Today's psalm expresses all of those things and it grates. There are people who've written and spoken about this psalm who call it simply a mistaken prayer. Or rather an example, a dangerous excess of zealotry.

Something that is thoroughly pre-Christian. Non-gospel. And Jesus would never use these sorts of words. So let's look at this psalm.

Let's reflect on what we should say and pray in situations like this, even if these situations are a little bit more than we've ever experienced personally. We don't know the circumstances precisely of David in the plight that he's here.

He uses poetic imagery of a flood. So he begins the psalm, Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths where there's no foothold. And probably not literally is he under the water almost.

He's probably using this poetically to describe a situation that he's facing. In some ways, the poetry of the psalms enables the expression of emotion better than prose and often better the expression of extreme emotion.

[9 : 25] That's why so many of our songs are love songs because prose sometimes just doesn't capture the intensity of emotion. And so in this case here, David expresses in this vivid poetry the extent of his desperation and his anguish at facing what potentially is a life-threatening situation for him.

The water is up to my neck and I'm worn out calling for help. My throat is parched. My eyes fail. My eyes have gone dim with looking for or waiting for my God.

David's been experiencing this dilemma, it seems, for some time and feels perhaps even close to death. The issue gets revealed a little bit more in the next verse.

Verse 4, Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head. Well, we don't know if David was bald. But on the assumption that not strictly bald, there were probably many opponents for him, against him.

Many are my enemies without cause. We don't know again the precise issue, but here is an issue of some injustice and unfairness.

[10 : 45] David is the king. There are enemies against him without cause. It's not that David claims to be perfect. He says in verse 5, Oh God, you know my folly.

My guilt is not hidden from you. But it's clear that on this issue, even though David in general is not perfect, on this issue, there is injustice and unfairness with those who are against him.

The end of verse 4 he says, and it's sort of like a rhetorical question actually, Am I forced to restore what I did not steal?

Our translation here expresses it simply as a sentence which loses part of its irony and intensity as well. David perhaps is being accused of some stealing or fraud or something like that.

Is he being asked to repay or to recompense something that is actually not his fault? Even though in general terms, David knows that he's not perfect. These accusations are false.

[11 : 46] So David's described something of his plight in poetry and maybe then something a little bit more literal. And as in this psalm, he describes himself and then he moves to turn to God and then he comes back to more description, back to God, back to description, back to God, three or four times through this psalm.

So he turns to God in verse 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7, 7, 8, 8, 8, 8, 9, 9, 9, 10, Even in the midst of this plight, this life-threatening situation, this anguish and opposition, David is concerned for others.

He says in verse 6, May those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me. The end of the verse, May those who seek you not be put to shame because of me.

What a noble motive in his prayer. David recognizes that these false accusations are being heaped upon him by his opponents. As we'll see, part of this is because David is so closely allied with God.

And so he's worried that as a result of this, others who are aligned with God will face embarrassment or shame or further opposition because of what's going on, David.

[13 : 15] How often that happens? How often that happens when we see Christians act badly and it brings some dishonor or shame and rebounds on us.

I'm sure most of us have got non-Christian friends and in the media or in the public eye, when a Christian acts in a bad way, how often such people will say to us, and you call yourself a Christian, look what that person did or that pastor did or that church did or that person said.

Some ways, maybe we felt that cringing embarrassment even in this past week. When one who claims to be Christian had such an aggressive response to a Christian pastor on the issue of gay marriage and retaliated with such an unbiblical response.

And maybe we feel, well, we feel a bit embarrassed and ashamed that maybe we're aligned with God. Well, maybe that's what David's fearful of here.

That as these accusations, false ones are heaped upon him, that somehow God's name is going to be embarrassed, that God's reputation will be brought down in Israel.

[14 : 26] Certainly the opposition David faces is because he's allied to God. He says in verse 7, I endure scorn for your sake and shame covers my face.

That is the opposition against David is not because of David's stupidity or David's wrongdoing or David's sin, even though he knows that in general terms he's a sinner. It is an opposition against David because David believes in the God of Israel, in our God.

Can't say David's a Christian because it's pre-Christ, but you know what I mean. Because of David's alliance with God, because of David's strong commitment and allegiance to God, because as verse 9 says, zeal for God's house consumes him, he is facing great opposition.

It may be literally when David says in verse 9, zeal for your house consumes me. David had great passion to build the temple in Jerusalem, though in the end it was his son under God's instruction who built it.

Could it be that David's zeal to build, his plans to build, his aim and prayer to build is what's heaping the scorn? Or maybe it's just more poetic as he says, zeal for my, your house consumes me.

[15 : 40] Whatever it is, it's because David belongs to God that this opposition is abounding against him. And David is therefore concerned that because he, the king, is attracting such opposition, that others who are zealous for God and allied to God, that they may be put to shame, they may be embarrassed, they may even turn away from God or distance themselves from God.

David is concerned for others in the midst of his own plight. Indeed, his own piety is a cause of mockery. In verse 10 he says, When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn.

When I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. Have you experienced that? Where people show some scorn or some mockery of you for your Christian stance?

Oh, I'm going to Bible study. You're going to Bible? You read the Bible? Have you ever attracted that sort of mockery? Or you're going to a prayer meeting, or you support missionaries, or you're giving to the church, or even belonging to the church, or reading the Bible, or whatever it may be, in your own acts of piety and devotion to God.

What ridicule and mockery have you faced? That's what David is facing here. That as he practices his devotion to God, his opponents are heaping more scorn, laughter, ridicule, mockery against him.

[17 : 05] Because he's a faithful believer in Almighty God. David's lament here is not full of self-pity. Woe is me.

I know when things go wrong with me sometimes, I can plunge into self-pity like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. And self-pity, if you experience the same as me, is introspective.

You don't actually look out for others, and actually it becomes slow to pray and turn to God. David's model here is not self-pity. David keeps coming back to God time and again through this prayer.

And what he says here is that he's been turning to God and praying and seeking and waiting for God for some time. And as well as that, as we've seen, he's concerned for others that they may not be brought down or brought low by David's own suffering.

David's concerns here are quite godly. Concern for God and concern for God's people, even above concern for himself in the middle of this sort of lament.

[18 : 10] And nor is David burning in his focus on his enemies either. His attention is fundamentally to God, although he'll turn his attention to his enemies in a few verses time.

From describing his plight, turning to God in verse 6 onwards, then he comes back to think about his situation in verses 8 onwards.

He's a foreigner in his own family, so some of his children perhaps are mocking him. We know that from the story of David's kingship in the books of Samuel, that some of his own sons turn against him and rebel against him.

Verse 12, those who sit at the gate mock me. Now, those who sit at the gate are not sort of retired people who just sit in their front garden, anxious to talk to somebody who walks down the street.

The gate here is the place of judgment and transaction. In an ancient city, a wall around it, the gate would be the place where you go to do deals, to buy property, where Boaz went to deal with the kinsman so that he could go and marry Ruth, where justice is done, that sort of thing.

[19 : 22] This is the upper end of Collins Street in the ancient world. This is the stock market, the places of parliament, the places of decision. Those who sit at the gate are mocking David the king.

And then he says, I'm the song of the drunkards. From the upper end of society to the bottom, people are mocking, laughing at King David. But, he says, I pray to you, Lord.

Back to God in his focus. From verse 13 onwards. But, I pray to you, Lord. In this little section, time and again, David repeats words of pleading to God.

In verse 13, he says, answer me with your sure salvation. In verse 14, rescue me, deliver me. In verse 15, don't let the floodwaters engulf me.

Verse 16, answer me. In verse 16, at the end, turn to me. In verse 17, do not hide your face from me, and answer me. In verse 18, come near to me, rescue me, deliver me.

[20 : 30] Words by words, this sequence of pleading to God, turn to me, answer me, come to me, help me, deliver me, rescue me. Shows the intensity of his desperation with the repetition of those sorts of pleas.

David is lamenting in faith, not in self-pity. He's turning to a God whom he knows, not to some empty space. Oh God, if you're out there, if somebody's there, please help me.

Here is God turning to a God whom he knows, and whom he knows, knows him. In verse 5, you know my folly. In verse 19, he says here, you know I am scorned.

And David knows God because he appeals to his steadfast love. In verse 13, it says here, great love. It's a bit weak actually. It's a Hebrew word that's very hard to translate, but steadfast, long-suffering, persevering love is what that word captures in fact.

So David knows God, and he knows that God knows David. And it's on the basis of that relationship that David is praying indeed with such faith.

[21 : 34] Here is an honest anguish being expressed, a heartbroken hope that he's pouring out to God. He's groaning in patience. He's despairing, but in faith.

And then he turns in his prayer to regard his enemies. These are the words that great for many. These are the words that echo my students' Facebook posting.

May they rot in hell. But David unleashes his anger. He vents his wrath about his enemies here. What's called an imprecation. As though he's calling down from God a curse upon those who are against him.

See what he says from verse 21. They put gall in my food. They gave me vinegar for my thirst. May the table set before them become a snare.

For David, they'd added insult to his injury, so to speak, by giving him some gall poison and vinegar to drink. It may again be simply poetry.

[22 : 42] It may be that David is saying that that they've just, when I'm down, they've kicked me. Or it may be quite literal that they've tried to poison him or mock him by giving him something nasty to eat or drink.

But in response, David is saying to God, may their table set before them become a snare. That is, what he's praying for here is a fair justice.

That they have tried to do something with my food and drink. May you, God, do the same back to them. So he's picking up what they've done and echoing it in the curse that he's calling down upon them.

Earlier we saw that David's eyes were dim with trying to see God and wait for God. And so he now prays in verse 23, may their eyes be darkened so they cannot see and their backs bent forever.

Again, a fairness of justice as David is suffering and crying out and crying out and crying out to God with eyes that are getting dim or hard to see, maybe again poetically, may the same happen to his enemies.

[23 : 51] Then his prayer escalates a bit. Pour out your wrath on them. Let your fierce anger overtake them. May their place be deserted. That is an end to them and their families.

Let there be no one to dwell in their tents. For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. So charge them with crime upon crime.

Do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous. Strong words.

Is it an excess of zealotry? Is it simply a mistaken pre-Christian, non-gospel type of prayer? It's a deep cry for vengeance and justice.

But let us note a few things. Notice how David is asking God to bring justice. David is not trying to take matters into his own hands.

[25 : 01] David's not particularly filled with personal hate so much as justice and a desire for what is fair and right. David's not retaliating evil with evil.

He's not taking arms to the equivalent of Tora Square in Cairo to try and overcome evil with evil. David knows that justice is required and so he's appealing to the judge.

The one who judges and will judge the living and the dead. The one who knows all. The one who judges impartially and fairly.

In David's appeal here harsh words though they are he is trusting in fact that God is Lord of all and judge of all and that ultimately God will bring what is a fair justice to all.

David also knows that his enemies are God's enemies. That David is right in his relationship with God not perfect but righteous in God's eyes and that part of the opposition and persecution he has faced is because he belongs to God and therefore his enemies are God's enemies and God is the judge and God will judge his enemies and bring them down in God's timing in God's way in God's place.

[26 : 28] Calling for justice you see which is a calling for punishment on the enemies of God which is a calling for punishment on those who are corrupt evil those who oppress God's people those who are self-seeking those who hate others is a godly thing to do the right thing to do it's not for us to take up our arms necessarily and fight for justice in bad ways or evil ways but rather to call upon God with faith knowing that God is the judge many of those who are evil in our world who persecute God's people who are corrupt and hatred and show hatred against God's people they'll not be brought to justice in this world the chief minister of Sarawak in East Malaysia is worth billions and billions and billions of dollars fleeced from his state in disgraceful despicable ways

I doubt that he will die in the prison that he deserves he will die hugely wealthy probably surrounded by his multitude of very rich family the same for most of the prime ministers of Malaysia the former military leaders of Burma the leaders past and present of Pakistan etc. etc. etc.

around the world I doubt that those who persecute Christians in many parts of the world will face the proper judgment in this life I doubt that those who kidnapped and murdered the person I met last two years ago in Pakistan I doubt that the people who raped this woman I met two weeks ago and murdered her son I doubt that they will face justice in this life and serve the prison sentence that is due to them I doubt that it may happen but under God they will face the judgment they deserve and it is right and godly that justice is done and it is right to pray that God will bring the proper judgment and part of that will be words that echo these words and my students words may they rot in hell that doesn't exclude the possibility of repentance and faith it doesn't exclude the possibility that they turn to God for forgiveness and find indeed the salvation that God offers in Christ not at all but may they rot in hell for the deeds they've done is justice and is fair and that's what David is praying and that's what this psalm amongst others models indeed for us because God wants us to call for justice

God wants us to see God being vindicated God wants us to join with God and pray that his enemies will be brought down God wants us to have zeal for his honour God wants us to have the same passion as David has for the honour of God now and indeed for eternity God wants us to be angry when wrongdoing and evil is perpetrated against God's people God wants indeed our holy passion the danger of injustice is that we may respond in the same way with unjust and evil actions or maybe the greater danger is that we do nothing say nothing and pray nothing and just keep living on another danger is that we become consumed with hatred I must say living in Malaysia it's hard to have some sympathy with the government it's easy to despise it in every way

I find David's psalm remarkably is not merely an Old Testament psalm we cannot dismiss this as words that are pre-Jesus and therefore redundant and outdated for this is a Christian psalm when Jesus chased out the money changes of the temple the disciples remembered this psalm zeal for my house will consume me Jesus and David Jesus himself said that he fulfilled this psalm in the first reading we heard from John's gospel they hated me without a cause when Jesus was dying on the cross offered vinegar and gall to drink fulfilling the pattern of suffering from this psalm this psalm in fact is quoted more times than any other psalm in the New Testament with one exception following David Jesus attracts the insults that belong to God Paul refers to that in

[31 : 35] Romans 15 when Judas dies after betraying Jesus it's this psalm that gets quoted and remembered let his home be desolate but even more striking perhaps as Paul reflects on the rejection by the Jewish people of Jesus in his own day he quotes this psalm may their eyes be darkened so they cannot see pour out your wrath upon them it's not that Paul hated Jewish people he was one he loved them he preached the gospel to him and gave his life for them but even so this psalm forms a basis of his prayer that those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ may face the right wrath of God one day for as long as people reject God as long as people act unjustly as long as people scorn the servants of God as long as God's people suffer persecution for their faith then we're being invited to use this psalm for our prayers to pray that God may save us that God may vindicate us that God may vindicate his own name that God may bring the appropriate wrath and judgment on his enemies and on the enemies of his people but that's not where this psalm ends a bit like a

Melbourne summer's day where the oppressive heat changes to cold weather in 15 minutes something that I find never ever happens in Malaysia David swings from bringing down curses of judgment to praising God he says in the end of this psalm verse 30 I will praise God's name in song well a minute ago he's complaining that the waters are up to his neck that he's sinking in the miry depth and now he says I will praise my God in song not because something's changed not because his prayer has been answered but because David has confidence and faith that his prayer will be answered and so because of faith and trust in a God of steadfast love David says I will praise God's name in song I will glorify him with thanksgiving and this will please the Lord more than a sacrifice of an ox or a bull but it doesn't stop there either it's not just that David will does praise God now in the midst of this opposition and persecution but he invites the poor and the needy to join him in praise so verse 32 the poor will see and be glad you who seek God may your hearts live the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his captive people let us praise the Lord the poor and the needy even who remain poor and needy not that they will praise

God in the future when they're no longer poor and needy but here and now with David still suffering we praise the Lord in faith and confidence because God is good but it doesn't stop there because this praise of God takes a third ripple out and he invites the whole of creation indeed to praise God verse 34 let heaven and earth praise him the seas and all that move in them for God will save Zion Jerusalem his people and rebuild the cities of Judah and the people will settle there and possess it the children of his servants will inherit it and those who love his name will dwell there David is inviting the whole universe to praise God because God is the judge God is Lord of all and God will bring justice a justice we can trust in a justice we can anticipate a justice that liberates us from vengeance a justice that liberates us to forgive a justice that liberates us from retaliating with evil to those who do evil when evil oppresses God's people here in Asia where I work when evil rapes a woman and murders her son when evil kidnaps an evangelist in

Karachi when evil means Bibles are confiscated in Sarawak or burned in Penang when evil means that Christians are forbidden to evangelize in Malaysia when churches are unable to be built or burnt down in parts of Malaysia when evil prospers as it does time and time again in place after place after place this is our psalm this is David's psalm this is the son of David's psalm save us oh God rescue and deliver your suffering people may your enemies eyes be darkened may your wrath be poured out upon them may their names be blotted out of the book of the living may the Lord's name be praised because he hears and he sees and he knows and he saves and thank God for the cross where wrath and mercy meet and may Jesus the judge come soon Amen