

Book II concludes with a three psalm finale. Psalm 70 brings the “save-me” psalms to a quick and decisive climax. Psalm 71 follows with the joyful prayer of a resilient saint who expresses lifelong confidence in the Lord. Psalm 72 is a royal psalm dedicated to Solomon’s reign with a prophetic vision of the coming Messiah, the ideal king, who will rule and reign over the global Kingdom of God.

Psalm 70 brings the worshiper back to a theme that has dominated Book II. The human condition is fallen and broken. We are in danger from every conceivable angle, from our own sinful nature to a vast array of enemies who lurk in the shadows ready to pounce. The cry, “save me!” has run through Book II as a dominant theme. It is fitting then that a quick spontaneous cry for help should bring these deliverance psalms to a clear finish.

Save Me

Hasten, O God, to save me;
come quickly, Lord, to help me.
Psalm 70:1

The plea for help remains even after great psalms of hope and salvation. David has given us an exhilarating sense of the grand sweep of redemption and creation (Ps 65) and a compelling invitation to join all the earth in shouting praises and singing hymns to God for his awesome deeds (Ps 66). David unites the blessing of God and the mission of God in a redemptive trajectory that encompasses all the nations (Ps 67) and leads us in a rousing crescendo of praise (Ps 68). Psalm 69 is a vivid reminder that the glorious march to Zion goes by way of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 70 is an almost word for word repetition of Psalm 40:13-17. It is apparent that the psalmist was convinced that this “hurry, help me” prayer of utter dependence on the mercy of God was necessary near the end of Book I and II. The psalm brings the followers of Christ back to the daily need for deliverance, but it does so in the light of Christ’s ascension, great commission, and atoning sacrifice. As we pray through the psalms the meaning of salvation grows and deepens.

Patrick Reardon emphasizes that “there are no circumstances in life when it is not supremely proper to pray: ‘O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me.’ This prayer. . . should never be absent from our lips.”¹ Drawing on the early church, Reardon lists the exceptional features of this short psalm. “It contains an invocation of God in the face of any crisis, the humility of a devout confession, the watchfulness of concern and constant fear, a consciousness of one’s own frailty, the assurance of being heard, and confidence in a protection that is always present and at hand, for whoever calls unceasingly on his protector is sure that he is always present. It contains a burning love and charity, an awareness of traps, and fear of

¹ Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, 137.

enemies.”²

Saving Help

May those who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.
May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!”
turn back because of their shame.
But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
“The Lord is great!”

Psalm 70:2-4

The psalmist is in the company of enemies and saints. There are those who seek his life and desire his ruin and there are those who seek God and long for God’s saving help. The psalmist turns to God to thwart the purposes of those who seek his ruin. He does not calculate his own resources to wage war against those who want to destroy him. His prayer is neither vengeful nor vindictive. He pleads with God that all the hate that is coming at him would boomerang back on his enemies. The crux of the prayer request is that the evil and shame that his enemies have plotted and planned for him would fall back on them.

The psalmist is not alone and his plea is not just for himself. He remembers his friends who join him in looking to God for salvation.³ He is in the company of God’s people and he wants them to see the greatness of the Lord. God’s justice brings joy to all who seek God and his righteousness inspires devotion. “People who love the Lord’s salvation are those who watch and pray for it.”⁴ In spite of the enemy’s threats the righteous rejoice and say, “The Lord is great!”

Urgency

But as for me, I am poor and needy;
come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer;
Lord, do not delay.

Psalm 70:5

There is a hint at the end of the psalm that in spite of his right thinking about the judgment of evil and the company of the saints he still feels very vulnerable and desperate for God’s action. The “but as for me” implies “But I’ve lost it. I’m wasted. God – quickly, quickly! Quick to my side, quick to my rescue! God, don’t lose a minute” (Ps 70:5, The Message). As we remarked earlier

² Reardon, Christ in the Psalms, 138.

³ Okorochoa, African Bible Commentary, 676.

⁴ Ross, Psalms, 508.

on Psalm 40, David fostered no illusion of grandeur. “Yet I am poor and needy,” is a worthy refrain of a thankful king, who sees himself as fully dependent upon the Lord.

His self-assessment reminds us of the first line of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins where David leaves off, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The poor acknowledge their desperate need for God and their inability to merit salvation. The psalmist concludes in the spirit of the first beatitude, “You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.”

Augustine applied David’s phrase, “I am poor and needy” to himself. “There is nothing in me that may be praised as mine own,” he wrote. “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). “For I am poor and needy.” And again, “Now I am not rich, because I am not proud. . . ‘Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!’ (Luke 18:13), adding, but “as for me, I am poor and needy.” Augustine used the phrase, “I am poor and needy,” to describe the Christian life. “The members of Christ – the Body of Christ extended everywhere – are asking of God, as one single person, one single poor man, and beggar! For He too was poor, who ‘though He was rich, yet became poor, that you through his poverty might be made rich’ (2 Cor 8:9). It is He that makes rich those who are the true poor; and makes poor those who are falsely rich.”⁵

⁵ Augustine, Psalms, 127-128.