

Homiletics Analysis: Psalms 69

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Psalms 69 is one of the longest and most theologically dense of the lament psalms, and among the most frequently cited in the New Testament. The psalm moves through four major movements: (1) an urgent cry from one who is drowning in affliction, sinking in deep waters, exhausted from calling to God (vv. 1–4); (2) a confession of sin combined with a protestation of innocence — the psalmist has not sinned against those who hate him, yet he bears shame on account of his zeal for God’s house (vv. 5–12); (3) sustained petition for rescue, accompanied by a devastating description of social rejection, mockery, and isolation (vv. 13–21); (4) an imprecatory section calling for divine judgment on enemies (vv. 22–28); and (5) a closing doxology of praise, confidence in God’s saving purpose, and hope for the restoration of Zion (vv. 29–36).

The psalmist — identified in the superscription as David — presents himself as one who suffers not merely from external enemies but from bearing reproach for the sake of God. His zeal for God’s house has consumed him; he has become a stranger to his brothers; those who mock God turn their reproach on him (vv. 7–9). The suffering is covenantal in texture: it arises from loyalty to YHWH in the face of a hostile world. The lament reaches its most poignant moment in vv. 20–21: “Reproach has broken my heart, and I am in despair... they gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” The psalm ends not in resolution of the suffering but in confident praise — the LORD hears the needy, does not despise His prisoners, and will save Zion (vv. 33–36).

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish several interlocking effects through Psalm 69. First, He is giving His afflicted people a vocabulary for honest, unguarded lament — permission to name the depths of suffering without domesticating it into polite prayer. Second, He is anchoring suffering-for-God’s-sake within a theological framework: the servant who suffers for zeal toward God is not abandoned — the LORD hears and will act. Third, through the New Testament’s pervasive use of this psalm as a lens for understanding Christ’s passion, God is embedding within Israel’s psalter a prophetic-typological witness to the Suffering Servant whose reproach, isolation, vinegar, and bearing of others’ sins would exceed David’s infinitely — and whose vindication would be resurrection. The intent is that the reader — whether the suffering individual, the community in exile, or the believer meditating on Christ’s cross — would find in this psalm both honest solidarity with their own suffering and grounded hope in a God who does not abandon those who suffer in His name.

Subject Sentence:

The righteous sufferer cries from the depths, bearing reproach for God's sake, and trusts in YHWH's saving faithfulness.

Primary Claim:

God meets the one who suffers for His name's sake in the depths of their affliction — and the depth of that suffering, far from signaling abandonment, is the very place where His saving faithfulness is most fully displayed.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Imprecatory Sections (vv. 22–28)

The most contested portion of Psalm 69 is its sustained call for divine judgment on the psalmist's enemies — a passage Paul quotes in Romans 11:9–10 and which includes the severe petition that the enemies' names be blotted from the book of life (v. 28). Three broad interpretive approaches exist.

A purely *devotional* reading — common in broad evangelical piety — tends to excise or minimize the imprecatory verses, treating them as sub-Christian emotion that the New Testament corrects. This reading must be *refuted*: it imposes a canon-within-a-canon, fails to reckon with Paul's inspired use of precisely these verses, and domesticates the Old Testament's robust theology of divine justice. The God who hears the cries of the afflicted is the same God who is righteously wrathful against those who perpetrate and celebrate injustice against His servants.

A *Christological* reading — dominant in patristic and Reformed interpretation — notes that if this psalm is typologically fulfilled in Christ, then the imprecations are best understood as Christ's (and the church's) appeal to divine justice against those who set themselves against God's saving purposes. This reading *acknowledges* that the imprecations express genuine covenant zeal and should not be psychologized away. However, it must be handled carefully: in the New Testament era, the church prays for the conversion of its enemies (Rom. 12:14–21) even as it appeals to God's ultimate justice. The imprecatory passages are not a license for personal vindictiveness but a prayer that God's justice would be done — a prayer that may be answered through conversion (as in Paul himself, cf. Romans 11) or through eschatological judgment.

The *Reformed* reading holds together three things: (1) the historical integrity of David's prayer as genuine lament within covenant — these are not embarrassments to be explained away; (2) the typological and prophetic function of the psalm as pointing forward

to Christ's suffering, vindication, and the judgment that fell on those who rejected Him (cf. Luke 19:41–44; Romans 11:9–10); and (3) the application to believers who, in union with Christ, may bring their suffering honestly before God and appeal to His justice without taking vengeance into their own hands.

The Confession of Sin (v. 5) and the Protestation of Innocence

A seeming tension exists between v. 5 (“O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you”) and vv. 4, 9 (suffering for what he did not steal; zeal for God's house consuming him). Some interpreters read v. 5 as undermining any typological-Christological reading — Christ had no folly and no wrongs. The Reformed reading resolves this not by ignoring v. 5 but by recognizing the psalm's dual-level function: David speaks as a sinful servant who acknowledges his own failures *even as* he suffers unjustly from enemies. The psalm's Christological application is typological, not one-to-one — Christ bears the pattern of the suffering righteous one, the bearing of others' reproach, the vinegar and gall, the isolation and rejection, without bearing personal sin. The New Testament authors consistently apply Psalm 69 to Christ in its experiential and covenantal contours, not in a mechanical, every-verse-is-Christ fashion. Verse 5 remains in the psalm as David's honest self-assessment before God; it does not invalidate the typological freight of the surrounding verses.

The Scope of the Promised Restoration (vv. 34–36)

Some dispensational interpreters read the closing section's promise of restoration for Zion and the cities of Judah in a strictly national, land-promise framework — awaiting fulfillment in a future national restoration of Israel. The Reformed reading *qualifies* this: while the historical and covenantal grounding of the hope is genuine (the land, the city, Zion), the New Testament development of this hope — rooted in resurrection and the inheritance of the new creation — fulfills and expands the Zion-promise beyond geography. The final praise of Psalm 69 is not abandoned in the New Testament; it is expanded: the Servant who suffered has been vindicated, Zion has been established in the church, and the inheritance of God's servants transcends the land. Noting the historical particularity is not dispensationalism's error; flattening the New Testament's fulfillment of these promises into mere postponement is.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 52:13–53:12** — The Suffering Servant who bears the sins of many and is despised and rejected; the closest Old Testament parallel to the covenantal suffering-unto-vindication pattern in Psalm 69; the two passages interpret each other across the canon.
- **John 2:17; 15:25; 19:28–29** — The New Testament's direct citation of Psalm 69:9 (zeal for God's house), 69:4 (hated without cause), and 69:21 (vinegar/gall) as

fulfilled in Christ's passion — the most concentrated canonical grounding for the psalm's typological function.

- **Romans 11:9–10** — Paul's citation of the imprecatory section (vv. 22–23) in the context of Israel's hardening, demonstrating that the Holy Spirit's inspired use of even the most difficult portions of Psalm 69 is not incidental but structural to Paul's argument about divine judgment and mercy.
- **Hebrews 5:7** — "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" — the New Testament's direct appropriation of the lament pattern of psalms like Psalm 69 for understanding Christ's suffering; grounds the Christological reading exegetically, not merely typologically.
- **Revelation 6:9–11; 16:5–7** — The martyrs' cry for justice and the affirmation of divine righteous judgment — the New Testament's eschatological appropriation of the imprecatory tradition, showing that the appeal to God's justice is not sub-Christian but integral to the final vindication of God's servants.

Aim:

To bring the suffering believer face-to-face with the God who does not abandon those who suffer for His name — and to ground that assurance in the suffering and vindication of Christ, in whom Psalm 69 finds its fullest and most concrete expression.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Opening cry: "Save me, O God! / The waters have come up to my neck."	Drowning imagery — existential urgency; not metaphor but felt reality
2–3	Sinking in deep mire with no foothold; exhausted from crying; eyes fail waiting for God	Physical exhaustion from sustained lament; trust has not produced rescue yet
4	Many enemies hate without cause; must restore what he did not take	Unjust accusation; innocent suffering; NT applies to Christ (John 15:25)
5	God knows his folly and wrongs	Honest confession; distinguishes unjust suffering from sinless perfection — David is not Christ but patterns the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		Christ
6–7	Petition: let not those who hope in God be put to shame through him; he bears reproach for God’s sake	The suffering has corporate stakes — his shame reflects on all who trust YHWH
8–9	Estrangement from brothers; zeal for God’s house has consumed him; reproaches of those who reproach God fall on him	Covenantal texture of suffering — NT applies v. 9a to Christ (John 2:17), v. 9b to Paul’s argument (Rom. 15:3)
10–12	Weeping, fasting, sackcloth — all met with mockery and scorn; becomes a byword	External acts of piety produce additional reproach from the hostile world
13–15	Renewed petition for rescue “at an acceptable time”; prayer for God to draw him from the deep	Temporal language — he prays for God’s moment of intervention; continues the drowning imagery
16–18	Appeal to God’s steadfast love (<i>hesed</i>) and mercy; urgent: do not hide your face	Covenantal vocabulary — appeals not to his own merit but to YHWH’s covenant character
19–20	God knows his disgrace, shame, and dishonor; reproach has broken his heart; no comforters	“Broken heart” — the lament reaches its affective depth; isolation is complete
21	Given poison for food; sour wine for thirst	Directly applied to Christ’s passion (Matt. 27:34, 48; John 19:28–29) — one of the most striking typological details
22–25	Imprecation: let their table become a snare; let their camp be desolate	Appeals to divine justice; Rom. 11:9–10 cites vv. 22–23; Acts 1:20 cites v. 25 (applied to Judas)
26–28	The enemies have added to the grief of the wounded; let them be blotted from the book of life	Severe covenant curse — reserved for those who actively persist in afflicting God’s servant
29	“But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O	Pivot from imprecation to personal petition; the “but”

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
30–31	God, set me on high” Vow to praise God with a song; this pleases more than ox or bull	marks the turn Praise as sacrifice — anticipates the new covenant diminishment of the sacrificial system
32–33	Invitation to the humble and seekers of God to be glad; YHWH hears the needy and does not despise His prisoners	Communal broadening — the individual’s vindication grounds others’ hope
34–36	Doxology: heaven, earth, seas — all praise God; He will save Zion and the cities of Judah; servants will inherit and dwell there	Eschatological and covenantal scope; Zion-hope as the horizon of the psalm’s resolution

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–4	Cry from the Depths: Drowning, Exhausted, Unjustly Accused
2	5–12	Suffering for God’s Sake: Confession, Estrangement, and Covenantal Reproach
3	13–21	Sustained Petition: Hessed-Appeal, Broken Heart, and the Depths of Isolation
4	22–28	Imprecation: The Appeal to God’s Righteous Justice
5	29–36	Doxology and Hope: Praise, Promise, and the Vindication of the Humble

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The righteous sufferer cries from the depths, bearing reproach for God’s sake, and trusts in YHWH’s saving faithfulness.

Primary Claim: God meets the one who suffers for His name's sake in the depths of their affliction — and the depth of that suffering, far from signaling abandonment, is the very place where His saving faithfulness is most fully displayed.

Applications (Five)

1. (Mind/Belief) Suffering for God's name is not a sign that your faith is wrong or that God has forgotten you — it may be the precise sign that you are where you should be.

The psalmist suffers *because* of his zeal for God's house, not in spite of it. The reproach falls on him because it is directed at God and he is standing in that line of fire. Western Christianity frequently operates with an implicit theology that faithfulness produces comfort and that suffering produces doubt about one's standing. Psalm 69 directly contradicts this. If your obedience and your alignment with God's purposes have made you a stranger to people who once knew you, a target for mockery, or someone who prays in exhaustion with little apparent answer — the psalm is written for you. Reframe what suffering in God's name means: it is not evidence of abandonment but of enlistment.

2. (Affections/Worship) Give God your actual condition — not the sanitized version — and discover that He already knows it and is not scandalized by it.

Verse 5 is one of the most striking verses in the psalm: “O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.” The psalmist does not hide his sin from God in order to maintain the moral credibility of his lament. He brings both his unjust suffering *and* his personal failure before the same God at the same time. This is full-person prayer. The common tendency is to present God with the version of our suffering that makes us look sufficiently righteous to deserve help. Psalm 69 invites full disclosure — and the implicit answer is that God hears not on the basis of our presented righteousness but on the basis of His *hesed*. Pray what is actually true. The God to whom you pray already knows your folly and is not waiting for a cleaner version of you before He acts.

3. (Will/Behavior) When reproach from the world is causing you to shrink from visible identification with Christ, resolve to bear that reproach as the pattern Scripture promises and as the cross Christ bore for you.

Verses 7–9 describe a man who has become a stranger to his own family and a byword among the community because of his alignment with God. The reproaches meant for God have landed on him. For the believer in a hostile environment — whether a family that mocks faith, a workplace that treats Christian conviction as disqualifying, or a culture that has made the gospel an embarrassment — this is not a unique experience. It is the pattern. Hebrews 13:13 calls us to “go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.” Psalm 69 is the Old Testament ground of that call. Do not negotiate your visible identification with Christ to manage the social cost. Bear the reproach as those who know what the end of that story is.

4. (Mind/Belief) Understand that the honest expression of grief, complaint, and even imprecatory prayer is not a failure of faith — it is the language God has given His people to pray in the hardest places.

The middle of Psalm 69 is not a passage about getting prayer right. It is prayer that sounds like a drowning man, an exhausted crier, a person whose heart has been broken and who has no comforters. The imprecatory section does not dress up its appeal — it asks God to judge. The entire tradition of lament prayer in the Psalter (Psalms 22, 44, 69, 88, and others) exists precisely because God knows that His people will face conditions that cannot be addressed with praise songs and will require something more raw. If you have been in a season where the language of normal Christian devotion has felt dishonest — too cheerful, too resolved — Psalm 69 is not only permissible; it is God-given. The psalm does not stay in the lament; it moves through it. But it does not skip it.

5. (Affections/Worship) Meditate on Christ in Psalm 69 until your suffering is located within His — and let that location change how you endure.

The New Testament writers cite Psalm 69 more than almost any other passage in the description of Christ's passion. The zeal for God's house that consumed Him (John 2:17). The hating without cause (John 15:25). The vinegar and gall (John 19:28–29). The isolation, the broken heart, the reproach of God's enemies falling on the one who stood in God's name — all of it finds its ultimate expression in Jesus of Nazareth, abandoned by His brothers, mocked by the crowds, given sour wine on the cross, and crying out in the darkness. When you suffer for Christ's sake, you are not suffering in a place He has not been. You are suffering in a place He has already been — to greater depth, to greater isolation, bearing not only the reproach of men but the wrath of God — and out of which He was raised. That is the ground of the psalm's doxology. Locate your suffering in His and let resurrection hope be the note on which the psalm ends.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance:

Psalm 69 teaches that God is a covenant God who hears the cry of the afflicted — not on the basis of their moral perfection but on the basis of His *hesed* (steadfast covenant love), to which the psalmist appeals repeatedly (vv. 13, 16). The psalm also teaches that suffering in covenant loyalty to God — bearing reproach for His sake — is not anomalous but structurally expected within the economy of God's purposes. The God of Psalm 69 is not a God who insulates His faithful servants from suffering but one who receives their suffering as prayer, who takes account of their isolation and broken-heartedness (v. 33), and who acts to vindicate them in His time. This is not a mechanical prosperity theology nor a theology of resignation — it is a theology of the God who saves, whose timing is sovereign (“at an acceptable time,” v. 13), and whose purposes move through suffering toward vindication. The psalm also displays the doctrine of divine justice: God does not

eternally tolerate the oppression of His servants, and the appeal to His righteousness in judgment is itself an act of faith in His moral character and sovereign governance of history.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance:

Psalm 69 is a pillar of the Reformed understanding of union with Christ in suffering. The New Testament's dense application of this psalm to Christ's passion is not eisegesis but the fulfillment of what Clowney and Ferguson call the typological-prophetic pattern embedded in the Psalter: David as the royal servant suffers covenantally, and his suffering patterns and anticipates the greater Servant whose rejection, isolation, and death would bear the weight of the covenant curse entirely. For the Reformed tradition, this means that the believer's union with Christ extends to participation in the pattern of cross-before-glory — Romans 8:17, "fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him," is Psalm 69 in doctrinal form. The imprecatory sections, rather than being embarrassments, display the Reformed conviction that God's justice is not in tension with His mercy — the same cross that bears the curse for the elect is the ground of judgment for those who finally and persistently reject it. Finally, the psalm's movement from raw lament to confident praise without bypassing the suffering demonstrates the *ordo* of faith under the cross: honest cry → appeal to covenant faithfulness → sustained petition → imprecatory trust in God's justice → doxology. This is the shape of Reformed spirituality under affliction — not triumphalism, not stoicism, but faith that endures through the valley precisely because it knows the Shepherd who accompanies it.

Main Takeaway

The God who met David in the depths — exhausted, isolated, heartbroken, and bearing reproach for His name's sake — is the same God who, in Jesus Christ, went into depths David never reached: abandoned by His brothers, mocked by the nations, given vinegar in His thirst, and bearing the wrath that David's sin and yours deserved. That God did not leave His Son there, and He will not leave you there. Bring Him your actual condition — sin, exhaustion, broken heart, and all — and trust that His *hesed* reaches deeper than your suffering does.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Skipping or apologizing for the imprecatory sections.** The temptation to move quickly from v. 21 to v. 29, treating vv. 22–28 as an unfortunate detour in an otherwise devotionally accessible psalm, produces a truncated theology of justice and misses Paul's inspired use of these very verses in Romans 11 and the

application to Judas in Acts 1. The imprecatory sections are not David at his worst — they are David appealing to God’s justice in the only way available: prayer. Preach them as such.

- **Collapsing the psalm into a Christological lecture without engaging its pastoral force for suffering believers.** Because Psalm 69 is so richly applied to Christ in the New Testament, there is a real danger of preaching it as a typological exercise — “look, this points to Jesus” — without ever bringing the lament home to the congregation member who is drowning, exhausted, and socially isolated for their faith. The Christological fulfillment is the ground of the comfort; it should not replace the comfort.
- **Using v. 5’s confession of sin to disqualify the psalm from Christological application.** This error reads the psalm too flatly. The typological application of Psalm 69 to Christ in the New Testament is selective and purposeful — John, Paul, and the other authors apply specific verses and patterns. The presence of personal confession in v. 5 is David’s genuine transparency before God and does not invalidate the typological function of the surrounding material. Handle this tension honestly; do not pretend it does not exist, but resolve it exegetically rather than by abandoning the Christological reading.
- **Preaching the lament sections without the doxological resolution.** The flip side of skipping the imprecations is preaching only the pathos of the lament (vv. 1–21) and treating the psalm as a permission slip for grief without following it to its actual destination — the confident praise of vv. 30–36. The psalm does not end in the mire. Preaching that stops at the broken heart produces a half-gospel of empathetic solidarity without resurrection hope.
- **Treating “the acceptable time” (v. 13) as a vague platitude about God’s timing.** The phrase carries covenantal weight — it is an appeal to the moment of God’s appointed intervention, rooted in Isaiah 49:8 and cited by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:2 as fulfilled in the gospel. “The acceptable time” is not generically “God is in control of the timing” — it is a specific eschatological category. In its fullest sense, the acceptable time has come in Christ. Preach the phrase with that depth.
- **Applying the psalm moralistically as “be zealous for God like David was.”** This is the Clowney trap in its Psalm 69 form. The psalm’s power is not primarily that David is a model of faithful suffering to be imitated — it is that God is a God who hears, upholds, vindicates, and saves His afflicted servants. The application flows from who God is and what He does, grounded in Christ, not from David as a motivational example of spiritual intensity. Applications must be tethered to the Primary Claim — God’s faithful presence in the depths — not to David’s admirable zeal.