

Homiletics Analysis: Psalms 70

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Psalms 70 is a brief, urgent cry for divine rescue. David opens with a compressed imperative — “Make haste, O God, to deliver me” — establishing the emotional and theological register for everything that follows. The psalm divides naturally into three movements: first, a desperate petition for personal deliverance (vv. 1–2a); second, an imprecatory request that enemies be shamed and turned back (vv. 2b–3); and third, a call for the righteous to rejoice and a reiteration of urgent need (vv. 4–5). The psalm is nearly identical to Psalm 40:13–17, where it appears as the closing portion of a longer psalm of testimony and trust. Here it stands alone as an independent, concentrated cry — stripped of the surrounding testimony and presented as a pure plea. Every word is freighted with urgency: “hasten,” “make haste,” “do not delay.” The brevity itself is part of the rhetoric. This is not a meditative psalm. It is a desperate one.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish two related things through this psalm. First, He is giving His people a vocabulary for desperation — legitimizing the raw, urgent cry as genuine prayer rather than a failure of faith. The presence of this psalm in the Psalter grants permission and form to those who feel they cannot wait, who feel the enemy closing in, who feel abandoned. Second, He is anchoring that desperation not in the sufficiency of the petitioner’s argument but in the character of the Deliverer: “You are my help and my deliverer” (v. 5). The psalm models how urgent need and covenantal confidence can coexist in a single breath. The intent is not merely to validate distress but to train the distressed soul to cry upward and covenantally — to the God who is already identified as their Deliverer — even when the deliverance has not yet come.

Subject Sentence: The righteous cry urgently to their covenant God for rescue when enemies press hard and help seems delayed.

Primary Claim: God places in His people’s mouths an urgent, covenant-anchored cry for deliverance — teaching them that desperate prayer is not a failure of faith but the precise form faith takes when the situation is beyond human remedy and the enemy is near.

Interpretive Evaluation

The most significant interpretive question in Psalm 70 concerns its relationship to Psalm 40:13–17. Some commentators treat Psalm 70 as a liturgical excerpt — a “scissors-and-paste” adaptation created for independent use in the temple liturgy, carrying less theological weight than the original. This reading undervalues what the editorial placement of the psalm accomplishes. The fact that this cry is preserved *independently* — standing on its own in the Psalter without the surrounding testimony of Psalm 40 — is itself a canonical statement: the desperate cry is sufficient as prayer on its own terms. It does not require the surrounding scaffolding of testimony to be valid. This reading should be **acknowledged** for alerting the expositor to the psalm’s editorial history, but its minimizing conclusion should be **refuted**.

A second interpretive question surrounds the imprecatory elements (vv. 2–3): “Let them be put to shame and confusion who seek my life.” Wesleyan and some evangelical interpreters treat imprecatory psalms as sub-Christian material — relics of an underdeveloped ethic later corrected by Jesus’s call to love enemies. This reading must be **refuted**. The imprecatory petitions are not failures of moral imagination — they are requests for *divine justice*, surrendering vengeance to God rather than executing it personally. They are expressions of moral order, not vindictiveness. The New Testament does not correct the imprecatory psalms; it fulfills their framework — the wicked are judged, not by the psalmist’s hand, but by God’s. Reformed interpreters (Calvin, Spurgeon, Longman) rightly note that the imprecations are prayers for God to act justly, and that the psalmist does not take matters into his own hands.

A third issue concerns the title’s reference to “for the memorial offering” (*lehazkir*). Some interpreters use this cultic designation to restrict the psalm’s use to liturgical settings — a specialized prayer for public corporate worship. This reading should be **qualified**. The liturgical setting is real but does not exhaust the psalm’s address. The Psalter as a whole is simultaneously liturgical and devotional, corporate and individual. The presence of the first-person singular throughout (“deliver me,” “I am poor and needy”) and the universal human condition it addresses mean the psalm speaks beyond its original cultic setting to every believer in urgent need.

The Reformed reading: Psalm 70 is a Spirit-inspired model of urgent, covenantally grounded petition — legitimate as a standalone cry, valuable in its very brevity and rawness, containing imprecatory elements that are morally and theologically sound, and addressing the universal condition of the believer under threat who awaits a deliverance not yet visible.

Key Canonical Support

- **Psalm 40:13–17** — The parallel text from which Psalm 70 derives, demonstrating that this cry sits within a larger context of testimony and trust; the independent

version in Psalm 70 strips the scaffolding to leave the pure plea, validating urgent prayer on its own terms.

- **Psalm 22:19–21** — David’s similarly urgent cry for haste (“But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!”) — showing that urgency in prayer is a consistent Davidic pattern, not an aberration of faith.
- **Romans 8:26–27** — The Spirit intercedes for the saints in weakness with “groanings too deep for words” — the New Testament theological grounding for why compressed, inarticulate, urgent prayer is not deficient prayer but Spirit-enabled prayer.
- **Revelation 6:9–10** — The martyrs under the altar cry “How long, O Lord?” — the eschatological continuation of the psalm’s imprecatory pattern, showing that the cry for divine justice is not eliminated by the New Covenant but carried forward into the consummation.
- **Luke 18:1–8** — The parable of the persistent widow, where Jesus explicitly validates urgent, repeated, importunate prayer to a God who will vindicate His elect “speedily” — the New Testament hermeneutical key for reading Psalm 70’s “make haste.”

Aim: To show that desperate, urgent, covenantally grounded prayer is a mark of faith — not its absence — and to equip believers to cry to God without shame when enemies press hard and help feels delayed.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Urgent opening petition: “Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me!”	Double imperative of urgency. Uses <i>Elohim</i> and then <i>YHWH</i> — full address to the covenant God. Nearly identical to Psalm 40:13.
2a	Petition against enemies who seek his life: “Let them be put to shame and confusion.”	The imprecatory petition begins — not personal revenge but appeal to divine justice.
2b	Continued imprecation: let those who desire his hurt be turned back and brought to dishonor.	“Turned back” — reversal of the enemy’s trajectory.

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
3	Specific imprecation against mockers: “Let them turn back because of their shame, who say, ‘Aha, Aha!’”	“Aha, Aha” — the taunting cry of the enemy who presumes victory. The mockery is taken seriously as a theological affront.
4	Positive petition for the righteous: “May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, ‘God is great!’”	The contrast with the enemy is stark: shame for them, joy and praise for the righteous. “Evermore” — continuous, not momentary.
5	Final plea, grounded in personal poverty and the character of God: “But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!”	The basis for the petition: not merit, but need + God’s covenant identity. “You are my help and my deliverer” — the theological anchor. Third use of urgency language in five verses.

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1	The Urgent Cry: “Make Haste to Help Me”
2	2–3	The Imprecatory Petition: “Let My Enemies Be Shamed”
3	4	The Positive Petition: “Let the Righteous Rejoice”
4	5	The Closing Anchor: “You Are My Help — Do Not Delay”

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The righteous cry urgently to their covenant God for rescue when enemies press hard and help seems delayed.

Primary Claim: God places in His people’s mouths an urgent, covenant-anchored cry for deliverance — teaching them that desperate prayer is not a failure of faith but the precise form faith takes when the situation is beyond human remedy and the enemy is near.

Applications (Five)

1. When you cannot pray well, pray urgently — God has given you this psalm for exactly that moment. (*Mind/belief*) Psalm 70 is five verses. It has no extended argument, no careful theology, no sustained meditation. It is a gasp. God inspired a gasp and put it in the Bible. Many believers stay silent in their worst moments because they cannot find adequate words. This psalm destroys that excuse. When you cannot construct a proper prayer, you have been given permission — even a script — to cry “Make haste, O God, to deliver me.” That is enough. The Spirit who intercedes in groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26) does not require your eloquence. He requires your honesty and your address — that you cry upward, to God, and not inward or sideways.

2. Bring your enemies to God and leave them there — imprecation is surrender, not revenge. (*Will/behavior*) The imprecatory petitions of Psalm 70 are not an invitation to personal hatred. They are a discipline of surrender. When David says “Let them be put to shame,” he is not picking up a weapon — he is putting one down. He is handing his enemies to God and asking God to act justly rather than acting himself. The application is concrete: when someone has sinned against you, sought your harm, or mocked your faith, bring them explicitly by name before God in prayer and ask God to act justly toward them. This is not a comfortable prayer, but it is a holy one. It transfers the burden of vengeance from your shoulders to God’s, which is precisely where it belongs (Romans 12:19).

3. Notice where your confidence actually rests when help is delayed — and correct it if necessary. (*Affections/worship*) The theological anchor of Psalm 70 is verse 5: “You are my help and my deliverer.” David does not say “I believe you *will* deliver me” — he says “You *are* my deliverer.” This is a present-tense confession of identity, not a future-tense hope contingent on visible evidence. When help is delayed and the situation worsens, the heart will reveal where it actually places its trust — in circumstances, in outcomes, in the help of people, in one’s own resources. Psalm 70 calls believers to anchor their confidence not in the arrival of deliverance but in the identity of the Deliverer. Examine where your heart goes when the delay extends. If it goes somewhere other than “You are my help,” there is an idol to address.

4. Learn to distinguish urgency from unbelief — and let David teach you the difference. (*Mind/belief*) Western evangelical piety has often trained believers to equate spiritual maturity with emotional steadiness — to be calm, to trust quietly, to not be too urgent in prayer. Psalm 70 overturns that equation. Three times in five verses David presses God: make haste, hasten to me, do not delay. This is not unbelief — it is covenantal boldness. The same Jesus who told the parable of the persistent widow commended her importunate urgency (Luke 18:1–8). There is a kind of urgent, pressing, repeated prayer that God rewards precisely because it expresses both the depth of need and the confidence that this God *can and will respond*. Learn to pray with that urgency. It is not faithless — it is the form faith takes under pressure.

5. Rejoice now, in community, over the salvation God has given — because Psalm 70 does not only cry, it also praises. (*Affections/worship*) Verse 4 interrupts the urgent petitions with a call to joy: “May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, ‘God is great!’” Even in the middle of a desperate personal prayer, David opens a window toward corporate praise. The application is to refuse to let personal crisis collapse the believer’s horizon to only their own distress. Even now, in the middle of what you are facing, others who seek the same God are rejoicing over what He has already done. Join that praise. Say “God is great” — not because your situation has resolved, but because the salvation is real and the God is real, and the joy of the righteous community is not contingent on your personal deliverance being complete.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Psalm 70 teaches that God is a covenant Deliverer who welcomes urgent, unadorned petition — that the character of God (“You are my help and my deliverer”) is sufficient ground for prayer even when circumstances have not confirmed His action. The psalm teaches the proper structure of imprecatory prayer: enemies are brought before God, not attacked by the petitioner, and the petition is for divine justice, not personal revenge. It teaches the coexistence of desperate need and genuine faith — that “I am poor and needy” is not a disqualification from prayer but its very occasion, because God’s help is given to the needy, not rewarded to the sufficient. And it teaches that corporate joy in God’s salvation (“God is great!”) is not contingent on individual deliverance — the righteous can rejoice evermore precisely because their praise is anchored in who God *is*, not only in what He has done in this moment.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Psalm 70 is a concentrated display of the Reformed understanding of prayer as covenant address — not a performance of merit or sufficiency but a cry grounded entirely in who God has revealed Himself to be. The basis for David’s petition is not his righteousness but his poverty: “I am poor and needy” — which is precisely the condition the gospel addresses. The psalm thus enacts the *sola gratia* principle in the grammar of prayer itself: the plea is grounded in grace, not in the petitioner’s worthiness. The imprecatory petitions demonstrate the Reformed conviction that moral order matters — God is a just God who will act against the wicked — without collapsing into personal vengeance. The closing confession, “You are my help and my deliverer,” is a sovereignty confession: God is already identified as Deliverer before the deliverance arrives, which means confidence in prayer rests on His character and covenant, not on visible evidence. This is the Reformed *ordo* of faith — from the character of God to the confidence of the believer, not from visible outcomes backward to theological conclusions.

Main Takeaway

You are allowed to be desperate in prayer. God inspired this psalm — five verses, three cries of urgency, no extended argument — and placed it in the Bible so that when you cannot find words and the enemy is close and help has not arrived, you would know what to say and *to whom to say it*. The ground of your prayer is not your composure or your track record — it is this: “You are my help and my deliverer.” Cry to that God. Cry urgently. He is not put off by the urgency. He invented it.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating Psalm 70 as a lesser or derivative psalm because of its relationship to Psalm 40.** The near-identical parallel in Psalm 40:13–17 can lead expositors to treat Psalm 70 as a liturgical footnote — an excerpt with less canonical weight than its source. This misreads what the editorial placement accomplishes. The fact that this cry stands alone in the Psalter is itself a theological statement: the urgent plea is complete in itself, valid without surrounding testimony. Preach Psalm 70 on its own terms.
- **Domesticating the imprecatory petitions into polite discomfort.** The imprecations in verses 2–3 are frequently softened in preaching — treated as a cultural artifact or as a private emotion David shouldn’t have expressed. This domesticates what the text is actually doing. The imprecations are morally structured prayers for divine justice. Preach them as the holy surrender of vengeance that they are, not as an embarrassing overreach to be explained away.
- **Preaching urgency as a problem to be corrected rather than a pattern to be followed.** Some expositions of Psalm 70 spend energy reassuring the congregation that God is sovereign and will act in His timing, implicitly correcting the psalm’s urgency as if it were an expression of doubt. This inverts the psalm’s intent. The urgency is the model, not the problem. Jesus commended the persistent widow’s urgency (Luke 18). Preach it as the legitimate, commendable form that faith takes under pressure.
- **Missing the coexistence of distress and praise in verse 4.** The pivot to joy and corporate praise in verse 4 — “God is great!” — is easily passed over in a rush to get to the closing petition. But that pivot is load-bearing: it shows that urgent personal prayer does not collapse the believer’s horizon into pure self-focus. Even in crisis, the righteous community is praising, and the psalmist joins that praise. Do not skip verse 4.

- **Failing to ground the application in the covenantal confession of verse 5.** “You are my help and my deliverer” is the theological anchor of the entire psalm. Applications that are generated from the psalm’s emotional register (“it’s okay to feel desperate”) without grounding them in this confession produce therapeutic rather than theological preaching. Every application should trace back to this: the God to whom David cries is already, presently, covenantally identified as the Deliverer. That identity — not the resolution of the crisis — is the ground of confident petition.
- **Reducing the psalm to a therapeutic validation of negative emotion.** Psalm 70 does not primarily say “God welcomes your raw feelings.” It says “God is your covenant Deliverer — cry to Him urgently and wait for Him to act justly.” The first framing is therapeutic; the second is theological. The feelings are real and the rawness is validated, but the psalm’s governing move is covenantal address to a character-defined God, not emotional permission-granting. Preach the theology, and the emotional validation will come with it.