

A Life “Gone to the Dogs?”

Psalm 59

Studies in the Psalms #60

HAVE you ever heard the phrase “gone to the dogs?” It’s a saying that means someone’s life has gone from bad to worse. We even use it for companies and countries. I read an article that said General Mills has “gone to the dogs.” Or we say, “Greece has ‘gone to the dogs.’” We certainly feel this way from time to time, don’t we? You go in for back surgery only to come out in worse chronic pain than before. You know you’re a sinner saved by grace but you feel like a worse sinner now than before your conversion. We can resonate with the Psalms as they often have this feeling. Yet, even in Psalms like this, we hear a note of triumph! How? By seeing the Psalms as prophetic of Jesus we see our suffering and triumph in him. I know we believe and try to emulate here in sermons a Christ-centered approach to Scripture, but I want to be more explicit tonight to demonstrate it and therefore giving you hope when you feel like you have A LIFE “GONE TO THE DOGS.”

We oftentimes think of prophecy *horizontally*: David was a prophet in 1000BC and he spoke of things to come. But we also need to think of it *vertically*. It’s not just that David spoke of the Messiah to come; instead, the eternal Son of God revealed himself through David way back when and because of that spoke of the Messiah to come. So it’s not that David was

teaching Jesus what to say when he came; no, the Son was teaching David.

And by teaching him he teaches us.

A PROPHECY OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF JESUS (vv. 1–8)

David's cries for deliverance echo A PROPHECY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS. **Deliver me from my enemies, O my God**, the sinless Son in human flesh cries. **Protect me from those who rise up against me** (v. 1) like all the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, Romans, and everyday people we've read about in the Gospel of John. **Deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men**, who when they had a chance to spare his life cried out for Barabbas instead. Why is our Lord so earnest? **For**, which is a word that explains a reason for the request, **behold, they lie in wait for my life; fierce men stir up strife against me** (v. 3). At every corner of the road, at every event someone lie in wait to test Jesus so that they could arrest him.

What makes his cries *that* much more fervent is the end of verse 3 and beginning of verse 4: **For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD, for no fault of mine, they run and make ready**. These are the three main Old Testament terms for sin. For David, he's saying in context of the Psalm that there's nothing he did to deserve the treatment he's getting. As Andrew Bonar said, "if a disciple can use this language, much more the Master."¹ Ultimately

only Jesus can pray this. And praise God he can! “He who knew no sin became sin for us” so that we sinners might become righteous! (2 Cor. 5:21)

So the Lord pleads with his Father: **Awake, come to meet me, and see! You, LORD God of hosts—his battle name—are God of Israel. Rouse yourself—an image of God as Warrior to fight—to punish all the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil** (vv. 4b–5). Look at that word **nations**. It’s the Hebrew *goyim*, but it’s being used here to describe those in Israel who are *acting* like the nations that oppose the anointed king.² One of the curses of the covenant was wild dogs roaming the land not as pets, but as vicious pests. Israel is like that: **Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city. There they are, bellowing with their mouths with swords in their lips— for “Who,” they think, “will hear us?”** (vv. 6–7) Can you feel our Lord’s lifelong agony as sinless substitute for you and me? In the Gospels we mostly get an account of his life; in the Psalms we get behind the veil into his heart.

A REFRAIN OF PRAISE (vv. 8–9)

Your life might feel like it’s “gone to the dogs,” brothers and sisters, but you and I can sing and trust the Lord *because* of all that Jesus did in his life and death:

But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you hold all the nations (*goyim*) in derision. O my Strength, I will watch for you,³ for you, O God, are my fortress (v. 9).

A PROPHECY OF THE RESURRECTION & RETURN OF JESUS (vv. 10–15)

David's cries turn to confidence with verse 10 as he echoes A PROPHECY OF THE RESURRECTION AND RETURN OF JESUS.

We hear of his *resurrection* in verse 10: **My God in his steadfast love—chesed**, his covenant faithfulness—**will meet me; God will let me look in triumph on my enemies** (v. 10). Paul says Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15) and “when he [was] raised...[he was] seated...at [the Father's] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:20–23).

We hear of his *return* to destroy his enemies in verses 11–15. Notice this destruction takes place in three phases. First, he says *don't kill them yet so that the church will learn from them*: **Kill them not, lest my people forget; make them totter by your power and bring them down, O LORD, our shield!** (v. 11)

Second, he says *let them be captured so that they reap what they sow* (v. 12): **For the**

sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their pride. For the cursing and lies that they utter. Third, he says *let them be consumed that your sovereignty is known to the whole world: consume them in wrath; consume them till they are no more, that they may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth* (v. 13). Until then, **each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city. They wander about for food and growl if they do not get their fill (vv. 14–15).**

A REFRAIN OF PRAISE (vv. 16–17)

Until Jesus comes again, you and I can sing and trust the Lord *because of* all that Jesus has done in his resurrection and therefore what he will do in his coming. You can do this even if your life feel like it's "gone to the dogs":

But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

Notes

¹ Andrew A. Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1859), 180.

² Bonar, 181; Futato, 203.

³ Verse 17 has, “I will sing praises to you.” If one Hebrew letter is emended from Shin to Zayin we get the same here. Futato, 203.