

Yes.

It’s time for me to say it once again!!

Children, do you know that one day  
*you are going to die?*

I know that in theory you know this.

But the sooner you understand this, the sooner you will start to think about life properly.  
What are you here to do?

Certainly, we can say with the Shorter Catechism,  
“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”  
But you will do that for all eternity!  
What are you here to do *in this life?*  
What does it mean to “glorify God and enjoy him forever” here and now?

Psalm 71 helps us with this.

You are here to declare the wondrous deeds of God to the next generation.

Psalm 71 is not really a lament – there are too many expressions of trust and confidence!  
It’s not really a song of confidence – there are too many expressions of trouble!  
It has aspects of trust, lament, praise, and even imprecation!

In other words, as we approach the end of Book 2,

we find a Psalm that covers the bases –  
a song that takes all the themes that we have seen over the last few months  
and weaves them together.

That’s why I call Psalm 71, “A Song for Aging Warriors.”

This is the song of one who has seen everything.  
And because he has seen everything,  
there is a rock-ribbed confidence that undergirds his song.  
In all his pleas for help – he knows that God will hear him.  
There is no *angst* – no anxiety that shakes him to his core –  
he pleads with God to save him from his foes –  
but he knows that God is faithful,  
and he almost laughs at the silliness of his foes:  
they say ‘God has forsaken him’ –  
but he replies with the wisdom of Psalm 70,  
“make haste, O God, to save me”!

There are two parts to Psalm 71 –

First, the question of what *God* should do (verses 1-13).

Second, the question of what the Psalmist should do (verses 14-24).

This fits the pattern that we have seen over and over!

Salvation belongs to the LORD – so God must act first.

But *if* salvation belongs to the LORD,

then we should sing, “Make haste, O God, to save me!”

and when God does what he has promised – and saves us –

then we should praise him for his mighty deeds.

And, you will notice from the outline in the bulletin,

both parts have the Psalmist’s story at the center.

In part 1, the story is about how the Psalmist has trusted in the LORD since his youth,  
and so now that he has reached old age, he asks God not to forsake him

(again, the focus is on what God *has* done – and what God *should* do).

In part 2, the story is about how he has declared God’s wondrous deeds from his youth,  
and how he desires to continue proclaiming God’s righteousness to another generation

(the focus is on what the Psalmist has done and will do).

So the central point that we need to see in Psalm 71

is that our hope and praise of God is rooted in what he has done in history.

But of course, as we sing Psalm 71, we need to keep another aspect in view.

Psalm 71 comes at the end of Book 2 of the Psalter.

Psalm 72 will conclude the book with a Psalm “Of Solomon.”

Psalm 71 is anonymous in the Hebrew.

Now, in the LXX, there is a title.

“Of David. Of the Sons of Jonadab and the first exiles.”

Was this title original, but got omitted accidentally?

Or was this title a late addition?

I would suggest that it provides *one* avenue for thinking about the application of the Psalm.

After all, Book 2 of the Psalter is a book of psalms that focus on the Davidic kingdom.

And the Sons of Jonadab are held up by the prophet Jeremiah (35:16)

as an example of faithfulness during the Davidic kingdom –

even while the rest of the nation apostatizes around them.

Maybe the LXX title was added later.

But it was added by a wise scribe who understood the content of the Psalm

and applied it well to the Sons of Jonadab.

As the Davidic kingdom is crumbling around us,  
we still believe in the God of our Salvation;  
we still cry out for him to make haste to save us;  
and we will continue to proclaim his righteousness to every coming generation!

European Christianity endured a sort of Babylonian captivity in the late middle ages –  
with a corrupt papacy doing great damage to the church.  
European and American Christianity are now enduring another sort of Babylonian captivity –  
with modernity wreaking havoc on mainline and evangelical churches alike.

It can take the faith of the Sons of Jonadab to believe Jesus' promise  
that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church!

But that is why we need to listen to Psalm 71 –  
and then learn to sing it!

**1. What Should God Do? Save Me, O God – Like So Many Times Before (v1-13)**  
**a. I Take Refuge in You – You Have Given the Command to Save Me (v1-3)**

There are lots of verbal parallels to other psalms in Psalm 71.  
Verses 1-3 parallel Psalm 31:1-3, with only a few changes.  
Verses 4-8 parallel Psalm 22:3-10 – with a few more changes,  
but taking over all the distinctive expressions from that Psalm.

Psalms 31 and 22 are both laments with strong elements of trust.  
Psalm 31 contains the famous phrase, “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (31:5)  
Psalm 22 starts, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (22:1)

Psalm 71 draws on both –  
but Psalm 71 is *not* especially a Psalm of the Cross.

While we can see Jesus as the singer of Psalm 71,  
the way that this Psalm draws on those Psalms makes it sound much more  
like the Psalm of a Disciple.  
Yes, if I am going to come after Jesus,  
then I must deny myself, take up my cross, and follow him.  
So it *is* a Psalm of the cross – but it is especially a Psalm of *my* cross that I must bear  
if I am going to be a disciple of Jesus.

Psalm 71 is very much a song of the church that she sings to her Savior –  
and in imitation *of* her Savior!

71 In you, O LORD, do I take refuge;  
let me never be put to shame!  
<sup>2</sup> In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;  
incline your ear to me, and save me!  
<sup>3</sup> Be to me a rock of refuge,  
to which I may continually come;  
you have given the command to save me,  
for you are my rock and my fortress.

The Psalm is book-ended by a concern for “righteousness” and “shame.”

Righteousness is what characterizes a well-ordered community.

It has to do with *doing* what is right – and *deciding* what is right –  
but not just as isolated individuals.

A righteous king is one who is not only “just” and “wise” –  
but also powerful enough to put his justice and wisdom into action.

You could easily have a “just” king  
whose kingdom was characterized by unrighteousness.  
(We’ll look at this more next week!)

But such a king would be shamed and disgraced.

Psalm 71 opens with a request that the LORD would never let me be put to shame –  
but rather, that *in your righteousness deliver me and rescue me*.

In other words – Yahweh is a king whose realm is characterized by the right.  
And because God’s kingdom is characterized by *the right*  
therefore I come to God and plead with him to deliver me, rescue me –  
indeed, that you will “incline your ear to me, and save me.”

If I am part of God’s people – God’s holy community –  
then it is *right* for God to deliver me.

Verse 2 emphasizes God’s action with three verbs:  
“deliver me” “rescue me” and “save me.”

But verse 3 emphasizes God’s being with three nouns:  
Rock of refuge, rock (or cliff), and fortress;  
a rock does not *do* anything;  
a rock, a cliff, a fortress is a safe place precisely because it is *there*.  
It doesn’t have to *do* anything to *become* a safe place.  
Its mere existence makes it a safe place.

These two verses emphasize the two moods of the Psalm:  
I want God to *do something!* (deliver me, rescue me, save me!)

But I'm not wondering where to go in the meantime –  
because God *is* my rock, my cliff, my fortress.  
He is a safe *place* for me to be –  
simply because he is *there*.

And the connection between who and what God *is* and what God will *do*  
is found in the phrase: “you have given the command to save me.”

It is God's *word* – God's *command* – that gives me confidence in the midst of difficulty.

**b. My Life Story: Rescue Me from the Unjust – You Are My Refuge (v4-11)**

**i. You Have Been My Hope from Birth (v4-6)**

<sup>4</sup> *Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,  
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.*

<sup>5</sup> *For you, O Lord, are my hope,  
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.*

<sup>6</sup> *Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;  
you are he who took me from my mother's womb.  
My praise is continually of you.*

Verses 4-8 then echo the language of Psalm 22.

If there were three verbs in verse 2 for God's action,  
and three nouns in verse 3 of God's being;  
now there are three enemies in verse 4:  
the wicked, the unjust, and the cruel.  
Rescue me, O my God, from these men.

The triads of the Psalm continue in verses 5-6 – but a little more intricately connected:

Verses 5-6 open and close with three statements about God:

“you are my hope, my trust... and my praise is continually of you”  
and the “innards” of the passage consist of three statements about myself:  
“my youth, my birth, and my mother's womb”

In other words, the story of my youth is the story of your faithfulness.

Even before I was born, I leaned upon you.  
You took me from my mother's womb.  
All my life is a story of God's faithfulness –  
for those who have eyes to see.

**ii. Many Marvel at My Life – Do Not Cast Me Away Now that I Am Old  
(v7-9)**

<sup>7</sup> *I have been as a portent to many,*

*but you are my strong refuge.*  
<sup>8</sup> *My mouth is filled with your praise,*  
*and with your glory all the day.*  
<sup>9</sup> *Do not cast me off in the time of old age;*  
*forsake me not when my strength is spent.*

Verses 7-9 then speak of the Psalmist as a “portent to many.”  
This is the word translated “sign” – as in “signs and wonders.”  
It is normally used when God performs mighty signs to Pharaoh in the Exodus.  
The Psalmist is a “sign” that God has shown to many.  
Isaiah will use the same language when he says,  
Here am I and the children God has given me,  
we are signs and portents to Israel from the Lord of hosts. (Is 8:18)

Nowadays we tend to be suspicious of “signs.”  
And it’s true that “signs” and “portents” tend to be dangerous guides to action.  
But signs are rarely designed to tell us what to do.  
Instead, signs are designed to show us what God has done –  
and to warn us not to go the route of the wicked!

Again, the Sons of Jonadab make a good example:  
Jeremiah uses them as a sign of faithfulness in the midst of a faithless generation,  
and concludes the example by calling Israel to be as faithful to God  
as the sons of Jonadab were to their father!

Verse 9 brings us to the central plea of the Psalm:  
“Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent.”

I don’t want to be useless in your kingdom!  
I don’t want to be laid aside – cast off – just because I’m old and feeble.

As you get older, you have less strength.

I think the Psalmist would entirely approve of Barbara Deliyannides great quote:  
Once she was asked how she was enjoying “the golden years.”  
She laughed – these are not the golden years!  
These are the rusty years.  
The golden years come hereafter!

You can hear the same tone in the Psalmist’s voice.  
Old age and gray hairs – my body is getting rusty.  
I do not have the strength I had as a young man.

### iii. My Enemies Say ‘God Has Forsaken Him’ (v10-11)

<sup>10</sup> *For my enemies speak concerning me;  
those who watch for my life consult together*  
<sup>11</sup> *and say, “God has forsaken him;  
pursue and seize him,  
for there is none to deliver him.”*

And so in verses 10-11 we hear about these enemies – and their conspiracy.

They are convinced that God has abandoned the psalmist.

He’s getting old and rusty – “God has forsaken him” – now is the time to strike.

I want you see something.

The enemies seem to know that if *God is with him*, then they are doomed.

Their only hope in assaulting the Psalmist is if God has forsaken him.

(Think of Jesus on the cross:

“He saved others, he cannot save himself.

He is the king of Israel;

let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him.” (Matt 27:41-42))

### c. Make Haste, O God to Help Me [an Echo of Psalm 70] (v12-13)

<sup>12</sup> *O God, be not far from me;  
O my God, make haste to help me!*  
<sup>13</sup> *May my accusers be put to shame and consumed;  
with scorn and disgrace may they be covered  
who seek my hurt.*

It is fitting that part 1 of Psalm 71 concludes with very close paraphrase of Psalm 70 (e.g, Ps 40).

I said last week that Psalm 70 is a fitting prayer for any occasion.

Well, if you are an aging warrior looking down the road at your enemies –

then Psalm 70 is a great prayer!

“Make haste, O God, to save me!”

Part 1 ends with the same plea for help/salvation as it began.

It also highlights the same theme of shame/disgrace

which appeared in verse 1, and which will appear again at the end of part 2.

Do not let *me* be put to shame –

but let my enemies be put to shame.

Shame is not particularly about “feeling ashamed.”

When you are beaten on the field of battle – you are put to shame.

Think of all the pastors who have been “disgraced” by their “shameful” conduct.

The Psalmist does not want to end his life disgraced and humiliated.

Rather, when God comes to his aid – when God makes haste to help him –  
then he will be able to respond with joy to God’s mighty deeds!

**2. What Should I Do? Hope in You, My God, and Praise You (v14-24)**  
**a. My Mouth Will Tell of Your Deeds of Salvation (v14-16)**

Verse 14 signals a shift in tone.

“But I”

In Hebrew, the pronoun is built into the verb,

so whenever you see a pronoun, the purpose is plainly to call attention to the pronoun.

Verse 14 begins – “But I” –

signaling the beginning of the Psalmist’s response to what God does/will do in v1-13.

Remember verses 5-6?

The Psalmist had said that God was his hope, his trust from his youth –

“My praise is continually in you.”

Now he fleshes out what this looks like:

<sup>14</sup> *But I will hope continually*

*and will praise you yet more and more.*

<sup>15</sup> *My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,*

*of your deeds of salvation all the day,*

*for their number is past my knowledge.*

<sup>16</sup> *With the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD I will come;*

*I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.*

Throughout part 2 (verses 14-24), the emphasis remains  
on how *God’s* action results in the Psalmist’s actions.

Why does he hope in God and praise him?

Because of “your righteous acts” – “your deeds of salvation” (v15);

“the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD” – “your righteousness, *yours alone.*”

Because God acts – therefore we praise.

**b. My Life Story: Your Righteousness (v17-21)**

**i. You Have Taught Me from My Youth (v17)**

<sup>17</sup> *O God, from my youth you have taught me,*

*and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.*

And so verses 17-21 provides a second window into “my life story.”

In verses 4-11, the Psalmist spoke of how God had been a refuge throughout life.

“my hope, my trust, from my youth...”

and so he had asked God not to “cast me off” now that I am old.



But that is because in part one of the Psalm, the focus is on who God is,  
and what God has done – and should do.

Part two of the Psalm focuses on what I should do.

You have taught me from my youth –  
*and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.*  
Because God has been faithful –  
therefore I speak.

God *has* been faithful.

If you are preoccupied with yourself, then you won't *really* get this.  
If you think that my chief purpose in life is to glorify myself and enjoy myself forever,  
then you will never be able to sing verse 17 wholeheartedly.

Children – I want you to notice something about verse 17.

“O God, from my youth, you have taught me.”  
God doesn't wait until you grow up to start teaching you.  
Your “youth” is not supposed to be a happy, carefree time  
when you can do whatever you want.

If you think that life is all about *my* happiness and *my* “fun” –  
then you will keep finding misery in all the stuff that isn't “fun.”

[Think about that when school work “isn't fun”!!  
If you find no enjoyment in the work God has given you –  
then you need to rethink your attitude.]

Because life isn't about “fun.”

And when you see that life is all about glorifying God and enjoying *him* forever –  
then you find that all that stuff that isn't “fun”,  
can actually be bearable – and perhaps even “enjoyable” –  
*because* you enjoy the one who orders all of life.

Work isn't always “fun” – but if you are enjoying *God*,  
then you can be content with the work that he has given you,  
and you can even enjoy *him* in the midst of your (unpleasant) work.

This is what it means to say, “*O God, from my youth you have taught me*”:

My prayer for all of you “youths”  
is that when you are old, and you look back on your life,  
that you will be able to sing Psalm 71 wholeheartedly.

That the lessons you learn in your youth would remain with you until old age –  
so that you also may say:

**ii. Do Not Forsake Me Now that I Am Old – until I Proclaim Your Might to Another Generation (v18)**

<sup>18</sup> *So even to old age and gray hairs,  
O God, do not forsake me,  
until I proclaim your might to another generation,  
your power to all those to come.*

We spoke earlier of “old age and gray hairs” signaling the “rusty years.”

But note – rusty does not mean useless!

My strength is spent – I cannot go out into battle like a young man would –  
but that does not mean that I’m all washed up!  
I may only last for another 20-25 years at Michiana Covenant (Lord willing!).  
I may need to hand over the work to a younger man by then.

But I don’t ever plan on “retiring.”

I want to proclaim the power of God to another generation.  
When your children are bearing children –  
I want to tell their children of God’s might!  
I may be so feeble that I need to do it part time – from a wheelchair –  
or maybe dementia will reduce me to being a sign –  
a silent reminder of God’s faithfulness to an earlier age! –  
but so long as I am alive, I want to declare God’s might to “all those to come.”

I love the way that my father – at age 81 – has decided that he is going to do whatever he can  
to spend time with his grandchildren, declaring the great power of God.

He doesn’t care whether it kills him – that’s the least of his concerns.

He wants to make sure that he is with the next generation –  
showing them God’s faithfulness.

So, in spite of his foot problems and his heart problems,  
he went on a 1.7 mile hike with 16 grandchildren through the redwoods,  
so that he could show them the greatness of God in his creation.

Sometimes he was too tired to say anything.

But he sat there – and he walked on – as a sign that God is a strong refuge.

**iii. You Have Made Me See Troubles – but You Will Revive Me Again (v19-21)**

<sup>19</sup> *Your righteousness, O God,  
reaches the high heavens.  
You who have done great things,  
O God, who is like you?*

<sup>20</sup> *You who have made me see many troubles and calamities*

*will revive me again;  
from the depths of the earth  
you will bring me up again.  
21 You will increase my greatness  
and comfort me again.*

So what does the aging warrior say about his impending death?  
Some think that when he says “do not forsake me” –  
“forsaking” means death.  
So if he dies, that means that God has forsaken him.

And there is *some* truth to that.  
After all, when Jesus said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”,  
the next thing that happened was *Jesus died*.

But verses 19-21 suggest that the Psalmist has a hope that goes beyond the grave.  
I know – most OT scholars don’t think so –  
but what *does* it mean for God to revive me again?  
Note verse 20: “from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again.”

The word translated “depths” is “tehom” – the abyss – the “deep”.

If the Psalmist merely hopes that in his old age God will increase his greatness  
so that he gets a couple more years of glory before he dies,  
then, quite frankly, Psalm 71 is pathetic.

We don’t know how clearly the Old Testament saints understood the doctrine of the resurrection.  
But Psalm 71 proclaims a hope beyond the abyss – beyond the depths.  
I have been through all sorts of troubles and calamities.  
Indeed, *you*, O God, have made me see these calamities.  
But *you*, O God, are also the one who will bring me up again.  
No, this is not an explicit statement of the bodily resurrection.  
We *don’t* know whether the Psalmist understood what the resurrection was all about.

But in the light of the rest of scripture,  
Psalm 71 can *only* mean that my hope is not  
that God will make my life a little better before I die;  
my hope is that God will raise me up,  
increase my greatness, and comfort me again!

And so Psalm 71 reminds us that my only comfort in life and in death  
is that I belong with body and soul to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ,  
who has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood.

And you see again that God's faithfulness results in our praise.

Remember what we saw a few weeks ago:

praise flows out of love.

Whatever and whoever you love, you will praise.

If you are half-hearted in your praise, then you are half-hearted in your love.

My goal for this football season is to be half-hearted in my praise of Notre Dame.

I want people to wonder seriously whether I am really devoted to ND.

But no one should be in doubt as to our love and devotion for the Triune God:

**c. And So I Will Praise You for Your Faithfulness (v22-24)**

<sup>22</sup> *I will also praise you with the harp*

*for your faithfulness, O my God;*

*I will sing praises to you with the lyre,*

*O Holy One of Israel.*

<sup>23</sup> *My lips will shout for joy,*

*when I sing praises to you;*

*my soul also, which you have redeemed.*

<sup>24</sup> *And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long,*

*for they have been put to shame and disappointed*

*who sought to do me hurt.*

The last three verses move the Psalm to its final mood.

We started with aspects of a lament –

though trust and confidence have never wavered in the whole Psalm!

We conclude with a joyful song of praise.

Verse 24 reminds us – though – that we are still dealing with an aged warrior in a perilous place.

My foes are still all around me –

*even as I am singing this exuberantly joyful song of praise!*

One man once told me that the Psalms have a gloomy view of suffering

in contrast with the NT's command to "rejoice in the midst of suffering."

Psalm 71 definitely calls us to rejoice in the midst of suffering.

Nowhere are we called to say that we *like* suffering!

Suffering is never *fun*.

But Psalm 71 says that you should sing praise to God –

that you should shout for joy to the Holy One of Israel –

because those who sought to do me harm

have been put to shame.

I may not see it yet with my own eyes!  
But in the resurrection of Jesus, this is *exactly* what has happened.

All of his and my foes were put to shame at the cross.  
No weapon forged against us can stand.  
King Jesus has triumphed – and he has overthrown sin, death, and the devil.

Therefore, our battle is fought against a defeated foe.  
Sin shall have no dominion over you –  
    because it has no dominion over Jesus.  
Death has no sting –  
    because Jesus is risen from the dead.  
Yes, Satan roams about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour –  
    but the prince of this world has been cast out,  
    and all the principalities and powers were put to shame in the cross of Jesus.