

“Looking for My God” (Psalm 69:1–3, 29-36)(7.12.20)

Psalm 69:1–3 (NIV84)

¹ Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.

² I sink in the miry depths,
where there is no foothold.

I have come into the deep waters;
the floods engulf me.

³ I am worn out calling for help;
my throat is parched.

My eyes fail,
looking for my God.

Psalm 69:29–36 (NIV84)

²⁹ I am in pain and distress;
may your salvation, O God, protect me.

³⁰ I will praise God’s name in song
and glorify him with thanksgiving.

³¹ This will please the Lord more than an ox,
more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.

³² The poor will see and be glad—
you who seek God, may your hearts live!

³³ The Lord hears the needy
and does not despise his captive people.

³⁴ Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and all that move in them,

³⁵ for God will save Zion
and rebuild the cities of Judah.

Then people will settle there and possess it;

³⁶ the children of his servants will inherit it,
and those who love his name will dwell there.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Looking for My God”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever had a negative experience in the water? Maybe someone threw you into the pool and you were not expecting it. You gulped a bunch of water, started choking, and then panic set in. Or, there was overly exuberant horseplay, kids dunking one another, and it got out of hand.

When I was about twelve years old, I went to Misquamicut Beach in Rhode Island with a friend’s family. The waves were a little higher than usual and that was exciting. We liked to ride the waves and bodysurf towards the sandy beach. It was a beautiful day and we were having a lot of fun.

We had been playing in the water for a while. Maybe I was a little tired. Maybe the wave was bigger than I expected. When the wave broke, it drove me to the bottom. I missed my footing and the wave pressed me headfirst into the hard sand.

After swallowing a bunch of seawater, I was choking. Being out of air, I began to feel desperate, struggling to get to the surface. Having no control like this was a new experience and I had no idea what to do. As I flailed about, I found myself on the beach with the water receding. The whole incident lasted seconds, but it felt like a long time. I slowly stood up and walked over to a beach blanket, sitting down until that dreadful feeling passed. I had felt so weak and powerless.

BODY:

In our first few verses, King David is using the metaphor of drowning and despair that is not momentary or a short term scare. Instead of an isolated incident or a brief encounter with death, it is a long term accumulation of trial and tribulation. It is more like the flood waters of a river that is steadily rising. He is unable to maintain any footing because the ground is no longer solid, but mucky and miry.

So far, it has come up to his neck. He probably has to tilt his head back so that he can continue to call on God to save him. This has been going on for a while – David has spent all his energy. Ironically, surrounded by water, his throat is parched. This muddy water cannot soothe his throat as he continues to call on God, “Save me.”

There has been an accumulation of persecution and hardship that is about to completely overwhelm David. We find the details in the verses we did not read; verse 4 through 28. There is a multitude of people that hate him for no reason. He has many enemies that want to destroy him and he doesn't know why. David is being forced to pay the penalty for thefts, for sin, he hasn't committed.

Can you feel the water rising? He is not saying he has not sinned against God, but not against those who are pursuing him. David is scorned and shamed. Those that should support him, even family and friends have turned away. Some of this persecution is a result of David's faithfulness to the ways of the God of Israel.

David is in mourning, crying and fasting. Even for these things he is scorned and mocked - Not only by important people at the city gates but also by drunkards making jokes and singing songs of derision. In his disgrace and shame, David prays fervently for rescue. He feels as if his grave is being covered over. King David feels alone and helpless. His heart is broken but there is no one to give him comfort, no one that is sympathetic. They tamper with his food and give him vinegar to drink. He prays for justice to come upon his enemies because their crimes mount up layer upon layer. It is clear that David is overwhelmed by his life.

The metaphor of drowning also extends through these verses: Rescue me from the mire. Do not let me sink. Deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. Floodwaters engulf, depths swallow. In your mercy Lord, come near and rescue me. Redeem me from my foes.

I cannot imagine any Coast Guard veteran like myself whom wouldn't be touched by David's desperate description of a person perishing in the storms of life. Here is the chorus from the Coast Guard Anthem, *Semper Paratus*, which means Always Ready:

We're always ready for the call,
We place our trust in Thee.
Through surf and storm and howling gale,
High shall our purpose be.
"*Semper Paratus*" is our guide,
Our fame, our glory too.
To fight to save or fight and die,
Aye! Coast Guard we are for you!

But, the Coast Guard has not always been able to effect rescue. The ocean is vast and obstacles can be substantial. Sometimes, like in the account in *The Finest Hours*, which I shared with you last year, it is clear the hand of God was on the Coast Guard rescuers. At other times, the only visible hand was that of the Almighty.

One such case was made into the movie “*Adrift*.” I read three different accounts and there was some variation in the facts. Primarily, I will share the 1983 news story from United Press International.

HILO, Hawaii -- A woman who spent 41 days alone in a boat damaged by a Pacific hurricane said she 'cried a lot' during the ordeal and considered suicide but 'didn't know how.' {In another account, it said she put a rifle in her mouth but an “inner voice” told her to stop.}

The woman, Tami Lee Oldham, 23, of Point Loma, Calif., was left on her own when Hurricane Raymond battered the 43-foot sailing vessel Hazana and swept her fiancé overboard.

'I prayed to God a lot even though I wasn't a religious person,' Ms. Oldham said Monday. 'I thought I was going to die and a couple of times I thought I was going to kill myself, but I didn't know how to kill myself.'

Ms. Oldham was rescued in seas just off the island of Hawaii Sunday.

She said she was with her fiancé, Richard Sharp, 34, of Cornwell, England, in Papeete, Tahiti, when Peter and Christine Crompton of Southampton, England, asked them to sail the Hazana to San Diego, Calif.

The Cromptons were tired of cruising, she said, and wanted to get the boat to California to sell it.

Ms. Oldham and Sharp left Tahiti aboard the vessel Sept. 22. Nineteen days later they encountered the 120-mph winds of Hurricane Raymond about 1,600 miles southeast of Hawaii.

She strapped herself under a table while Sharp stayed on deck hooked to the boat with a safety line. She said she heard her fiancée scream, "Oh my God." The boat rolled completely at least once as the hurricane swept by and she was knocked unconscious. {One account said that the boat went over bow to stern.}

When she awoke about {twenty seven} hours later she said she was feverish and had bruises and blood on her body. The boat was badly damaged and both masts were broken.

Sharp's safety line was still hooked to the boat but his harness had snapped, she said. Sharp is officially listed as missing at sea by the Coast Guard.

'I had a lot of days of crying fits but after a while I started to accept my fate and quit crying,' she said.

Ms. Oldham said she rigged up a makeshift sail, used a sextant to navigate by the stars and gauged the distance she traveled each day with a digital watch.

She arrived off the coast of Hawaii at about 1 a.m. HST Sunday but decided to wait until daylight before attempting to enter Hilo Harbor.

At dawn she spotted the Japanese vessel Hokusei Maru, which was in the area conducting squid research, and fired flares. The Japanese ship towed her boat to the harbor breakwater where Coast Guard officials brought Ms. Oldham to shore.

'The lady has some guts,' a Coast Guard rescuer said.

Yes she did. She was quite resourceful in using the few tools and equipment she had left. But, the most important thing she did was to cry out to God in prayer. We have the great promise of verse 33: **The Lord hears the needy** and does not despise his captive people.

While there are many similar scriptures, I will share just one more. It intersects with Oldham's experience of a great storm and King David's description of the overwhelming drowning feeling, Jonah is in the belly of the great fish. Jonah prays in Jonah 2:2 (ESV) ²saying,

"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,

and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice."

In my nearly 29 years in the US Coast Guard, I was involved in many search and rescue cases. While I never did anything heroic, some of them were pretty interesting. One case was pretty famous and you may have heard of it. I was stationed at Air Station Miami when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986.

Search and Rescue is the primary mission of the Coast Guard. Nearly everyone is trained to perform this duty. If the vessel still has communication capability, it is fairly straight forward. Otherwise, Looking for someone in the water can be quite challenging. The ocean is vast.

You determine the last known position. Then you check the weather from that point and monitor it through your planned search area. You need to know the winds, the tides, and the currents. You broadcast a description over the radios asking the boating community for information.

Once you know the search area, aircraft and various surface vessels coordinate the search. From the air, even a small boat is difficult to see, a life raft more difficult, and person in the water extremely difficult. The higher your altitude, the more area you can cover but the likelihood of seeing them decreases. If there are whitecaps, it is even more difficult. The glare of the sun can be blinding. You are trained in proper scanning techniques, but it takes discipline to remain focused. Your eyes get tired and it can be hypnotizing to stare at the water for long periods.

Depending on all your data and the resources available, you determine your search patterns. There are Victor Sierra search patterns and expanding square patterns among others. Communication between assets is important. The Search and Rescue Coordinator will use charts and navigating tools to map out the progress of the search.

Nowadays, technology is a great benefit. Computer modeling and tools increase effectiveness. Today's vessels are equipped with Emergency Location Transmitters. Global Positioning Systems are almost universal. And still, people lose their lives at sea and on our waterways.

Sometimes we can become overly dependent on technology. And, it can fail. On the 4th of July, our family went to the Renault Winery to watch the fireworks. While we were waiting for darkness and the show to begin we talked about various things. While trying to guess where the fireworks would be launched from, someone asked where the compass directions were. Carol and I both have compass apps on our smart phones. When we compared them, true north differed by 30 degrees. Make sure you are always oriented to your spiritual true north.

We, as a nation, have become greatly dependent on technology, on our human capability. We enjoy great wealth and abundance. Advancements in medicine, in surgical techniques, and in diagnostics have given us great confidence in our healing power. Modern psychology and pharmaceuticals have made counseling a cure-all. Science and the Internet have made data and information a god. Cell phone technology gives each person greater access to human knowledge than the computers that we used to put a man on the moon.

What has it taken to bring us to our knees? It has taken an invisible virus. Andrew Hessel is a distinguished research scientist. In 2016, he started an article like this:

"Viruses are the most common organisms on our planet. They're also invisible to the human eye — and largely ignored. Out of sight equals out of mind for most people. But just because they can't be seen doesn't mean they're not out there."

Wow, I find that description very close to the way most people treat God.

We do not have the time to even list all the ways the coronavirus is affecting us. Obviously, there are the direct health issues and the ripple effects on getting other medical treatment. There is a great economic impact of which we do not even see the horizon. Then there are the social and societal relationships that continue to isolate and separate us. The fractures in the fabric of society are resulting in cultural ruptures.

With all of our human advancement, we have been unable to cure the sin sickness of the human heart. No amount of education. No amount of money for social programs. No federal initiatives. Even our faith communities are being struck dumb in our inability to overcome the fatal human condition. We are drowning in our own sin, muck and mire, selfishness, greed and covetousness. We are up to our neck in strife and chaos. The flood of foolishness and folly engulf us.

Is COVID-19 from the LORD? I cannot be sure. Romans 11:33 (ESV) Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

But, let us imagine something for ourselves. We are the parents of a brilliant child. They are very wealthy. They are also self-centered and self-indulgent. They pursue every sexual impulse; they use drugs and alcohol to alter their consciousness. They know nothing of God and they are destined for hell. As a loving parent, what extremes would you go to bring them into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus?

Saint Augustine was one such child and his mother prayed incessantly for him. And God heard her needful cry and Augustine came to faith. Hear what he says about looking for God:

"I look for my God in every bodily creature, whether on earth or in the sky, but I do not find him. I look for his substance in my own soul but do not find him there. Yet still I have pondered on this search for my God and, longing to gaze on the invisible realities of God by understanding them through created things, "I poured out my soul above myself," and now there is nothing left for me to touch, except my God.

For there, above my soul, is the home of my God; there he dwells, from there he looks down on me, from there he created me, from there he governs me and takes thought for me, from there he arouses me, calls me, guides me and leads me on, and from there he will lead me to journey's end."

CONCLUSION:

Do you know anyone that needs to find God? Are they looking for the Lord? Maybe they are like David: they feel surrounded by enemies. They are being oppressed; falsely accused and persecuted. They are drowning in depression. Maybe they are like Tami Oldahm: the sailboat of their life has been overcome by storms. Their vessel has been capsized and their masts broken off. Maybe they are like Jonah, on the run from God's call on their life. Maybe their life is like the Space Shuttle Challenger: instead of a soaring success it has exploded into countless pieces, scattered across the ocean. There is destruction and great grief over lost lives. How about you? Are you the one that needs to look for God?

Psalm 69 is one of the most quoted psalms in the New Testament. Jesus quoted verse 4 directly, "They hated me without reason." It is this Jesus that I proclaim to you today to be the Savior. Jesus is the redeemer. May your soul draw near to Jesus. May your heart be revived and may you really live.

King David is confident that his God hears the cry of those in distress and his God will save those that love his name. We can proclaim with David, "I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving."

On that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene excitedly told the other disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

Yes, my friends, Jesus is alive forever more. Look for God and do not grow weary until you can claim him as **my** God; **my** God; **my** God.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.