

*Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 4*  
***Reproaches Fell on Me***  
Psalm 69: 6-13

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Jesus lived among us as a man with a consuming passion. Love for his heavenly Father was Jesus' true north. The Father was his magnetic pole, always drawing him up in prayer and self-offering, in intimacy, joy and obedience. I can hear him praying to his Father, "I want to be with you. I want to do what you want me to do. I want others to know you. You sent me here, and I want to return to you having gathered all those you gave me. I want the world to know you as I know you." Christ's driving energy was his Father. So he loved prayer. He loved worship. He loved little ones and lost ones. And especially he loved the Scriptures. For in those ancient words he encountered, in each present moment, his heavenly Father.

And so do we. One of the deepest cultural traits of this congregation is the love of God's Word. We have a zeal to meet God as he makes himself known in the Scriptures. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm so happy here. We share a thirst for Scripture. We quest for Christ together through his Word. We know what a miracle the Bible is. A child of 5 can understand the basic story line of the Bible. God made us. God loves us. We disobeyed God. But he sent Jesus to bring us back close to him. Now he sends us to share that news as we love others. One day everything will be made right. Creation. Fall. Redemption. Mission. Consummation.

That simple story line ever wraps around Jesus our Savior and Lord. Simple, yet it contains unfathomable depths. The Scriptures, written by more than two dozen different authors over centuries yet hold together with a unity that no other writing anywhere can rival. The truths of Scripture that a child grasps hold up under the most dire circumstances anyone can go through. The God revealed in the Bible has inspired the greatest music, painting, science, and compassionate service in the world. We love the Word of God for good reason. The more we give ourselves to know and love the Word, the more passion it awakens in us.

So it has been weird, sad and even baffling over the last year to encounter a distancing from Scripture in several believers I know. I'll give you just one example. I had a visit with a longtime friend who used to be my Bible study leader in college. As usual, our discussions ranged far and wide through many topics. At

one point, I brought in a passage from Revelation that shed light on the issue. He said, “I forgot how you bring the Bible into everything.” I was a bit taken aback. I replied that of course I did. The Scriptures are what has been revealed to us, what God wants us to know. He pretty much implied that I was naïve to look to the Bible. Later, he questioned how we can really know what Jesus said. The scholars he knew think the church made up a lot of it for their own purposes. In fact, Christians keep distorting the faith to excuse their own desire for wealth and power and a good life. So how can you trust the message? If you do, you become just like *those* people, those Christian nationalists.

My feeling reaction to this was complex. It stung. For I felt like a little brother getting scolded by his big brother for not being old enough to know what the world is really like. I felt embarrassed like I was fool for being a believer. I felt ashamed that I was so unsophisticated. And I also felt angry. I wanted to battle. Hey, I stand in a great, deep tradition. And our believing scholars have shredded the skeptical arguments against knowing Jesus through the Word. Plus, do you really think you can dismiss our living, pulsing, questing church with some reductionist slur? I’m still dealing with the embarrassment and the anger.

But then something else kicked in. I’m not ashamed of the gospel. I’ve seen the transforming power of Jesus in lives all around me. I’m not ashamed of the Scriptures. We can trust them. We can know what they say. We meet the living Jesus through them. What you’re resisting is not really me. It’s not really the hypocrisy in so many Christians. You’re resisting the Lord Jesus himself. You, my dear friend, have had a failure of faith. I realize the truth in Psalm 69 when David prays to the LORD, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” David prayed that his own words and actions would not disgrace the LORD whom he served. And he also recognized that the antagonism he experienced went beyond anything he could have done. Those who scorned David and mocked him were reacting against the LORD he served. They actually reproached the God who had disappointed them. They resisted the God they feared would take away their freedom. They resisted the claim upon them. So David bore the scorn as representative of the LORD. Sometimes, so do we.

But usually I try to avoid such reproach. I want everyone to like me and I try to maintain relationships. So I haven’t been that direct with my friend. I’m still trying to figure out how best to respond. Jesus, though, had a lot more courage and clarity. His passion for his Father drove his advance against the powers that bind and diminish his people. Jesus came to clear out anything that blocked our connecting with his Father.



So let's take a look at the Gospel story in which lines from Psalm 69 are placed on the lips of Jesus. This 16<sup>th</sup> c. painting by Quentin Matsys graphically depicts Christ driving out the merchants and money changers in the temple.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover, he went to the temple. The great outer court was where people from all over the world could gather to pray or to hear teachers expounding the Scriptures. They could gaze upon the architecture of the magnificent temple which only Jews could enter. There Jesus encountered a courtyard full of merchants. People came to offer sacrifices and so

there were animals for sale. Just like you'd see in a great livestock market. But you had to use the temple currency to pay for them, so there were money exchangers, just like you'd find in the airport in London or the train station in Rome. No doubt there were all kinds of other goods being sold. The court was so full of trade in sight and sound that no praying could be done. The whole sacrificial system itself, though established by the LORD, was clogged and could not heal the deep, estranged heart of humanity.

Jesus grew more and more impassioned. He had come to announce the arrival of God in the midst of this broken world. He wanted people to connect to his Father through him. Carefully he wove together some cords into a whip. This took time. Then, with the controlled force of a considered action, and with the power of a deep internal authority, Jesus created upheaval. He overturned tables of merchants. He poured out the coins of the money changers. With his whip he drove out the animals and their handlers. This painting evokes the sense that Jesus turned everything upside down. He radiated such potency that no one dared stop him. But when it was over, business was in chaos, temple trade shredded, pilgrims frustrated and Passover itself in jeopardy. In our terms, this would be a Christmas to remember--with horror.

John's Gospel tells us that when the disciples reflected on this scene, they put the words of Psalm 69 on Jesus' lips. "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Jn. 2: 17, Ps. 69:9). Jesus did not come to leave things as they are. He came to clear out the whole temple apparatus. He himself is the new temple. He is the meeting place between God and humanity. He is the location of atonement. He is the Passover by which we pass through death into life.

Jesus was confident and authoritative. But that doesn't mean this was easy. That doesn't mean he didn't have to question and answer over and over if all this upheaval was really necessary.

I can well imagine Jesus praying this part of Psalm 69 just before he entered Jerusalem, "Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O LORD. Let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God." In other words, "Here we go Father. I'm going into the Holy City to change everything. I'm going to create upheaval. O don't let me mess this up. I'm going to shake up the complacent. But don't let the one who trust in you stumble after they see me. I'm going down there to get myself killed. But don't let any little ones fall away."

When we read Luke's account of this story, we see how Jesus paused outside the city. And wept. He wept for the disbelief. He grieved that though he had come to save them, most people did not understand who he was. He lamented that people just wanted a political solution to Rome's dominance. They just wanted a king who could meet Roman power with a military revolt. But that would never work. The Jews tried it a few years later, and the temple, as Jesus predicted, got levelled to the ground. No, the Father had a plan to save the Jews and the whole world that involved the way not of might but of weakness. Not first of triumph but of sacrifice. And most people just would not get it.

Jesus' zeal for his Father led him to enter the city and bear the reproach of disappointing all those awaiting a military messiah. He who loved the Father with all his being would be slandered as a God-hater and a blasphemer. So the rest of the verse from Ps. 69 would be placed on his lips by Paul. "The reproaches of those who reproached you have fallen on me" (Ps. 69: 9, Rom. 15: 3). Jesus' passion for his Father would lead him to take a heap of shame on his Father's behalf.

He knew that's what the opposition was really about. Humans resist the love of the Father, because the Father makes a claim on our autonomy. He demands to be first. He offers us intimacy with God. But that also means we have to lay down our idols. We have to lay down putting ourselves first, not only for God but for one another.

It grieves me when people I care about can be so dismissive of what matters most to me. Unbelief baffles and saddens me. But these experiences give me a deep connection to Jesus. I understand just a taste of what it was like for him. Jesus is the very Word of God in the flesh. And yet, "he came to his own and his own

received him not.” It grieved him to his soul. I need to connect with Jesus in this, when I want to be defensive, or get mad and take it personally, or fight, or just clam up. Rather, I need to press into Jesus. “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” OK, I can take that for you Jesus in order to be with you. To keep loving, keep sharing, keep praising you in front of the world.

Will I, Lord Jesus, bear reproach for you?  
I always take criticism so personally.  
I figure it must be my fault,  
For all I do is tainted with weakness and self-interest.  
I hate the shame, so I avoid giving any cause for it.

But am I in my self-protection  
Just flinching from the dread of God  
That those who resist you must feel?  
Am I holding back my praise  
Of your wondrous salvation,  
Dampening my zeal for your glory,  
Just to avoid the mixed emotions  
Which follow others being angry with me?

O help me, Jesus, to get clear in my soul,  
To live as you did,  
From a completely devoted heart,  
All in with your worship and mission.  
Give me greater passion,  
Not wilting, retreating fear  
So that should I face rejection for your name,  
I can know that I bear reproach with you,  
In deepened intimacy, heart to heart  
With my savior and God.