

Praise the LORD!

Psalm 9

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Over the past few months, our church has seen a lot of babies born in it. It is exciting to celebrate the birth of these children, and we have more babies on the way. We have had young couples getting married, and we celebrate that. These are amazing and joyful events in the lives of those families and our church. For these blessings and future blessings, we give thanks and praise to God. However, despite all these blessings and good things happening, there are still evil things occurring in the world and in our lives.

This past Wednesday, a shooter opened fire at Annunciation Catholic School in Minneapolis. The shooter killed two children and injured eighteen others. This is heartbreaking news. We should be praying for the students who were injured, the families whose children died, and the students and faculty of that school who survived.

I tell you all of this because these events —the joyful ones and this act of evil —illustrate Psalm 9. Every day, we live between two realities. We enjoy the love and graciousness of God in our lives, and yet, there is the ever-present reality of sin and evil.

Psalm 9 reminds us that while we experience wonderful joys in this life, we still live in a sin-marred world that is filled with violence and injustices. It doesn't take long to scan through your news feed, see the unrest that is in our world, and the anxiety that accompanies it.

Our Lord Jesus made it clear that, even though we, as His disciples, find wonderful Christian community in our local church and with other believers, we will still experience the harshness of this fallen world. Jesus told His disciples in John 16:33,

In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

The good news is that God is never caught off guard or surprised when we go through tribulation in the world. He is never perplexed or trying to figure out what to do. He doesn't sit back, scratch His head, and say, *"Well, I didn't see that coming. Now what do I do?"*

Psalm 9 reminds us that God reigns over all of the chaos in our world. So, while there is still evil in the world, God remains in charge, and one day the storm of all this sin, evil, injustice, and pain will come to an end. One day, it will be brought into the light of the justice and judgment of Almighty God. On the last day, God will preside over all unbelievers and their evil, and His justice and wrath will reign down like a flood. He will heal all the hurts of His people and make all things right according to His righteousness.

However, until that Day, we are called to trust in the One who reigns and rules. We learn to pray as Jesus taught us, *"Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever."* We also ask the Lord to *"Deliver us from evil."*

King David's aim in Psalm 9 is to lift our eyes so that we see beyond the darkness of this world. He wants to help us fix our eyes on Jesus. He also aims to help us see into the world to come, where His perfect righteousness is the air we breathe and shines like the sun. He wants to lift our eyes so that we see the unending joy, peace, and beauty in the glorious presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Before we dig into Psalm 9, I need to give you some background on this Psalm. Many theologians and scholars believe Psalm 9 and Psalm 10 were once a single Psalm. The *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) combines Psalm 9 and Psalm 10. Translators based their decision to combine these two Psalms on two factors. One is that Psalm 10 doesn't have a superscript at the beginning. Psalm 9 has the superscript that reads,

"To the choirmaster: According to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David."

By the way, we don't know what "*Muth-labben*" means. It seems to identify a particular type of tune to sing this Psalm to, but no one is sure.

Secondly, Psalm 9 is an acrostic Psalm based on the Hebrew alphabet, but it is incomplete. Psalm 9 breaks off from the acrostic, and Psalm 10 appears to pick up where it left off, but it omits the Hebrew letter *daleth*.

So, due to the length of each Psalm, I will preach on Psalm 9 and Psalm 10 separately. Yet, we must recognize that these two Psalms are related and actually complement each other. However, while they share similarities, there are also significant differences. Let's pray and begin to work through Psalm 9.

The main point of Psalm 9 is: *Because Yahweh rules with perfect justice and righteousness, we can praise Him with confidence and joyfully seek Him as our refuge, even while the nations rage (Psalm 2).* Psalm 9 provides us with six reasons to praise the LORD in the midst of a world filled with both joy and suffering.

Remember, we live between these two tensions: joy and suffering. Often, we begin to lose hope in life when we lose sight of the perspective that Jesus said we would have tribulation in the world. We desire joy, and no one wants to suffer; therefore, when we suffer, even as Christians, we tend to lose our current perspective, and we can definitely lose our perspective on the future.

We need Psalm 9 to lift our eyes so that we see Jesus ruling and reigning in this world, while also anticipating the justice that will be given in the world to come. Let's examine the six reasons Psalm 9 gives us to praise the LORD while we live within this tension of joy and suffering.

I. We can praise God for His faithfulness (vv. 1-2)

David begins Psalm 9 by calling us to praise Yahweh with our "*whole hearts*." He uses five synonyms to call us to praise God for His faithfulness. So, circle or underline them in your Service Guide or Bible. Here they are: "*give thanks*," "*recount*," "*be glad*," "*exult*," and "*sing praise*." These five synonyms call us to examine our hearts so that we make sure we are giving *whole-hearted praise* to God as opposed to *half-hearted praise* to God.

To help us give whole-hearted praise to God, David calls us to engage our minds and hearts with the truth of God's marvelous work of salvation. This is what we would call the gospel-work that is in Psalm 9.

David doesn't call us to give some vague praise. He doesn't call to simply say, "*I praise the LORD.*" Instead, he calls us to remember God's glorious work of salvation and praise Him based on His saving work in our lives. It is as if he is saying, "*I praise you, LORD, because You have saved or delivered me.*"

Commentator Patrick Reardon says that the Hebrew word "*recount*," in v. 1, is the idea of narrating God's story in your prayers and praise.¹ He is saying we need to think of retelling the story of salvation God has provided for His people through our prayers, praises, and singing. In essence, we are engaging our hearts and minds with the narrative of the gospel in our songs, praises, and prayers.

For David and those in the Old Testament, they looked back at the Exodus and retold the story of God's incredible deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It also looked forward to when God would send the Messiah to deliver His people from a greater slavery – the slavery of sin.

Now, on this side of the cross and resurrection, we look back at what Jesus has done to fulfill God's promises in the Old Testament by living a sinless life and then dying in our place as our substitute on the cross, thereby paying for our sins or delivering us from our sins. Then Jesus victoriously rose from the dead on the third day by walking out of the tomb. He defeated death and Hell for all who will repent of their sins and trust in Him, and thus they are saved. All who trust in Christ have been born again to a new life in Christ. Their relationship with God, which was previously broken, has been restored through their faith in Jesus. So, in our prayers, praises, and songs we recount the work of Jesus to save us. Essentially, we are remembering the gospel in all aspects of our worship.

Friends, when we pray in our quiet times, with others, or in our worship services, it is good that we praise God by retelling the story of how Christ saved us by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. When we gather for corporate worship, we recount and retell the story of God's great deliverance He accomplished in Christ through our readings, singing, prayers, and preaching.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we must practice rehearsing God's works in our own lives. *Gratitude fuels our trust in Christ when we are overwhelmed by current troubles.* Remembering God's past faithfulness strengthens our faith and enables us to persevere as we patiently wait on the LORD.

II. We praise God for His righteous judgment (vv. 3-6)

In vv. 3-6, David reminds himself of all the times God had been faithful to him. When he looked back at how God had defeated his enemies and Israel's enemies. For this, he praised God. Listen to what he says:

When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence. ⁴

For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment. ⁵ You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever. ⁶ The enemy came to

¹ Patrick Hentry Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, 17.

*an end in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them
has perished.*

Friends, without getting into a long theological discourse on what it means to love our enemies and pray for them, we simply need to remember that God and God's people have enemies. While it is true that Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for them, we must remember that some will never turn from their sin and to Christ. Some have made it their purpose to destroy Christ and His church. Yes, we should pray for them and call them to repent. We should share the gospel with them. However, if they do not repent, they will stand before God in judgment. *Friends, it is in this state of mind that David praised God for His righteous judgment against his enemies.* He's asking God to end the evil.

Listen, God doesn't just see wickedness — He confronts it. He rebukes it. He brings it to nothing. The LORD made David's enemies stumble and perish.

We must recognize the contrast that we find in these verses. Friends, human power fades, BUT God's judgment endures forever. Evil may seem powerful for a season, BUT in time, God rebukes and destroys it. *We should be grateful and praise God that He will not allow evil and injustice to ultimately prevail. He will judge it and bring it to an end.* We can ask God to do that in His time and in His way, while we trust Him in the midst of our suffering.

We need to think of the application of these verses in at least two ways. First, *as followers of Christ, we look back to the cross of Christ as the guarantee of our salvation and final victory.* When Jesus returns to take His people home, the victory will be full, final, and complete, and when this day comes, we will praise God.

Second, *Christians must remember that no evil power—whether political, spiritual, or personal—will last forever.* Ultimately, God will silence the wicked on the Day of Judgment. We must keep this truth before us so that when injustice looks overwhelming, we will not fall into despair but instead give praise to God as we look forward to the Day of Judgment.

III. We can praise God for His eternal rule (vv. 7-8)

Look in vv. 7-8 and let's consider God's eternal rule:

*But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, ⁸
and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with
uprightness.*

Friends, kingdoms rise and fall, but the Lord's throne is eternal. Not only that, but David uses Hebrew parallelism to drive his point home in v. 8 when he says:

[The LORD] judges the world with righteousness

[The LORD] judges the peoples with uprightness

This kind of language about ruling, reigning, as it relates to governments and kingdoms, is foreign to us. First, the LORD's throne is an eternal throne. We are finite, and we really don't have a category in our minds for

how perfectly and eternally God reigns, rules, and judges. Second, the LORD judges in perfect righteousness. We don't have a category for what it means to rule, reign, and judge in perfect righteousness.

We struggle to grasp this point in vv. 7-8, because we have only experienced corrupt governments and corrupt leaders. Judges can be bribed. Courts can be crooked. Leaders can be corrupted. Presidents are up for election every four years. Kings and queens live and die. However, God's throne isn't up for election. He can't be impeached. His rule is for all eternity. His justice is perfect because He judges with *righteousness* and *uprightness*.

Friends, this means our security rests on a throne that cannot be moved. So rejoice — King Jesus is on the throne, and He judges in righteousness. He will always judge in perfect righteousness because, as Saint Augustine said,

"[Christ] prepared his [throne] when he himself was judged, for through his endurance and suffering, [mankind] won heaven."

When God's judgment and justice fell on Jesus for our sins, the verdict of not guilty was declared for all of those who have trusted in Christ. All who have turned from their sins and to Jesus have been declared righteous because Jesus paid for the guilt of their sin on the cross. The declaration of not guilty of sin is an eternal judgment because the One who sits on the throne is enthroned eternally. Transition: This leads us to our fourth reason for praising God.

IV. We can praise God because He is our Refuge (vv. 9-10)

*The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.¹⁰
And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.*

Friends, God is not only our eternal Judge but He is also our Refuge. Here's the beauty of God's justice. For the wicked, it means judgment, BUT for His people, it means safety. God is the stronghold for those who know His name and trust Him. God is the Hope and Help of all people who will seek their refuge in Him.

Speaking on the last phrase in v. 10, "*For you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you,*" John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, said:

It was with such strength and comfort on my spirit, that it was as if ([this] Psalm) talked [directly] with me."

The question is: Do you take these words to heart? Do you run to God as your Refuge in times of trouble—or do you run to distraction, bitterness, or self-reliance? Knowing God's glorious name and the truth of His beautiful character means we can trust in Him and in His promises when life is hard. When we turn to God in this way, He becomes our Refuge.

Friends, when you reflect on the gospel narrative and recall all that Jesus did to redeem you, you realize that you can run into His arms. Friends, on the cross, Jesus was forsaken, so that you would never be forsaken. Jesus redeemed you so that you can run into His arms in times of trouble. He is your Refuge.

V. We can praise God for His glorious works (vv. 11-14)

In these verses, a transition occurs in Psalm 9. It transitions from recounting past deliverances to praying for future deliverance. David's heart was renewed as he reminded himself of the salvation God had wrought in his life, and this propelled him to pray in confidence, asking God to bring relief and deliver him from those who were persecuting him.

First, look in vv. 11-12:

Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! ¹² For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

David renews his call to praise the LORD who sits enthroned forever in Zion. Then his worship becomes witness as he declares that God is just and will not abandon or forget His people Israel, who are being afflicted and oppressed.

Then in vv. 13-14, David's prayer transitions from a corporate prayer of deliverance to a personal prayer of his need for deliverance.

Be gracious to me, O LORD! See my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the gates of death, ¹⁴ that I may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation.

David asks God to *consider his affliction* and deliver him from his enemies who hated him and sought his life. David felt like he was almost dead. He says he was at the very *gates of death*. He wanted God to deliver him so that he could declare God's praises among His people at the *gates of the daughter of Zion*. And indeed, God saved him, and he was transferred from the *doors of death* to the *doors of the people of God*, where he proclaimed the goodness of God.

Friends, this is what Jesus has done for us. When we were at death's door, in darkness, and the very enemies of God, Christ died for us and transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter says to us:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

When worship becomes witness, we proclaim God's glorious works before all people.

VI. We can praise God for His future justice (vv. 15-20)

Again, as David looks to the future, he reminds us to have confidence in the LORD for His future justice.

First, look in vv. 15-16:

The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught. ¹⁶ The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.

Higgaion. Selah

David reminds us that the wicked ultimately fall into the very trap they have created. Evil is self-defeating and is undone by its own schemes.

The word *Higgaion* most likely refers to a movement in the accompaniment that fits with *Selah*, which means to meditate on what was read or sung.

Next, in vv. 17-18, David illustrates how the evil of the wicked is returned to their own heads.

The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God. ¹⁸ For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

David says the wicked will *return to Sheol* because they have forgotten God. In other words, the penalty of forgetting God is to be forgotten by God. So, unless those who have forgotten God remember and return to God, their destiny is to be forgotten by God. However, the poor and oppressed will not be forgotten.

Just to be clear: Verse 17 says, "*Those who have forgotten God return to Sheol.*" This doesn't mean they were in Sheol before. This phrase serves to illustrate the contrast between the arrogance of pretending to know God and persisting in that arrogance until the final judgment. Then at that time their darkness will be complete and eternal.

David ends Psalm 9 with an urgent plea for God to judge the nations.

Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you! ²⁰ Put them in fear, O LORD! Let the nations know that they are but men! Selah

David asks the Lord to judge the men and nations that believe they are somehow above God. He calls on Yahweh to rise up and remind them that they are mere mortals.

David's view of this judgment is projected into the future at the judgment seat of Almighty God, where there is no more opportunity for them to repent. All is said and done; the books have been closed, and the accounting is complete. Now is the time for judgment, and David wants to see God glorified as He judges those who have brought wickedness and suffering upon people by oppressing them.

Finally, there is good news to be found in vv. 19-20. These verses help us lift our eyes from the darkness of this world and fix our eyes on Jesus. Here's the good news in these last two verses: At the cross, God's justice and mercy came together. Justice fell on Jesus when He died as our substitute on the cross and paid for our sins. When Jesus rose from the dead, He became a refuge for us. Now, all who turn to Him in repentance and faith know Jesus as their Stronghold in times of trouble. Finally, one day, Christ will return, the Judge of all the earth, and when He returns, He will set everything right.

Let me close with a word about what it means to praise the LORD. Friends, we don't praise God because He is somehow deficient in praise and needs to be built up. God has no needs. He lacks nothing. We praise Him because He is the most beautiful, most exciting, and most captivating being in the universe. We praise Him for the salvation He has so graciously and freely given us in Christ. We praise Him because we didn't deserve to be saved, and yet He saved us.

C. S. Lewis said this about the importance of giving praise to God:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed [fulfillment] . . . the delight [praise] is incomplete [until] it is expressed.²

The bottom line is that our joy in God is incomplete until we express our joy in God for His salvation in Christ. Our praise must be expressed in whole-hearted gospel-centered praise.

² C. S. Lewis quoted in James A. Johnston, *Preaching the Word: Psalms*, 107.