

Psalm 9 “The LORD Is King Forever, Part One: Sing Praise!” November 23, 2014
Psalm 2
Hebrews 2

How do we sing Psalm 9 as a Christian?

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

If you have ever been afflicted –
if you have ever suffered because of someone who was better connected,
better able to manipulate “the system” –
then you will understand how to sing Psalm 9-10.

Today we bring our mini-series on Psalms 1-10 to a close.
Book 1 of the Psalter sees David and his sons on the throne –
the world as it should be
(and the laments and complaints focus on disruption *within* the world as it should be)

David was supposed to fulfill all that Israel failed to do and to be
(just like Jesus *has* fulfilled all that *we* failed to do and to be),
but also, when David (and his sons) do justice from the throne of Israel,
that makes Israel whole –
just like Jesus makes us whole.

The Psalter begins with the blessed man of Psalm 1,
the one who walks in the way of the Lord—and not in the way of the wicked.
Our Psalm of response, Psalm 2, then spoke of the Son of God, the Davidic King, the Messiah,
who is the heir of all things.
And Psalm 2 closes with the call, “blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

Psalms 3-7 then explore the theme of refuge,
showing that the Lord is our refuge, who delivers us from all our enemies.

Psalm 8 (which is quoted in Hebrews 2) speaks of man in the glorious language of creation.
“You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings” (literally Elohim, God/gods)
“And crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over all the works of your hands;
You have put all things under his feet.”

What you have in OT Israel is a picture of the Kingdom of God,
a picture of the new creation.
And so in Psalm 8, David rejoices in the picture.
He sees by faith that the kingdom of God is being restored.

He sees the son of man sitting on the throne in the midst of the Promised Land,
and sees the fulfillment of what God had promised to Adam.
“O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength.”
Israel is a puny, feeble nation—and yet because the God of heaven and earth dwells here,
because he has put all things under the feet of the Son of David,
this will stop the mouths of the wicked.

And that day has now come.

Hebrews 2 understood that Psalm 8 was not talking about Genesis 1-2.
Hebrews 2 sees that Psalm 8 was talking about the Davidic king (Hebrews 2:5-8)
And in Jesus Christ, what was spoken of by faith in Psalm 8 has begun to come about.
2:8 admits that “at present, we do not yet see everything subject to him—
but we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels,
namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death,
so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

What is man, that you are mindful of him?
What is the son of man, that you care for him?

What is man?
I'll tell you who man is.
Man is no longer Adam.
Man is no longer the rebel and the cursed one.
Man is now Jesus Christ.
Man is now the obedient and the blessed one.
Jesus has been made perfect through suffering.
Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor as the Second—indeed, as the Last Adam,
the one who restores humanity to the fellowship of God
and the dominion over creation.

And that vision of the King as the Son of Man – the Son of David –
is essential for understanding Psalm 9-10.

Because Psalm 9-10 has a single title:

Introduction: “According to Death of a Son”

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

In light of the Absalom theme that we have seen in the opening songs of Book One,
I would suggest that ‘mot labben’ – death to a son –
has reference to Absalom’s rebellion and death.

Most scholars reject this because Psalm 9 is oriented toward “the nations” – and Absalom’s rebellion was an internal rebellion.

But given that Absalom has spent several years with his grandfather
Talmai the king of Geshur,
it would not be surprising if Absalom had foreign support for his rebellion.

But whether he did or not – if you think about it,
whenever the people of God rebel against the LORD’s anointed,
then they are acting like the nations –
and that is *very much* the point of Psalm 9-10.

When Christians rebel against Christ, they are acting just like pagans!

Remember Psalm 2?

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed...”

This pattern explains why Psalms 9 and 10 fit together so well.

There are several reasons for thinking that Psalms 9-10 were originally one song:

First, they form an acrostic poem –

with the first letter of each verse

coming from a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet;

Second, from Psalm 3 through the end of book one of the Psalter

every psalm in book 1 has a title –

except Psalm 10.

Third, the poem moves seamlessly through the transition between 9 and 10,

applying the same set of themes to the nations in Psalm 9

and to wicked Israelites in Psalm 10.

And Fourth, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT)

treats Psalms 9-10 as one song,

suggesting that in the 2nd century B.C.,

they were still viewed as one.

The title, “according to the death of a son,”

shows us how Absalom and his fellow-conspirators

were acting like the nations – were apostatizing from Israel.

At the same time, the Hebrew text breaks this song into two.

And it is *possible* that Psalm 10 was a later addition

designed to complete the acrostic and apply the themes of Psalm 9 to Israel.

My way of handling this two-part Psalm is to preach a two-part sermon!
This morning we will look at the Psalm 9 portion of the text.
This evening we will look at the Psalm 10 portion of the text.

1. Join the King in Giving Thanks for God's Wonderful Deeds (9:1-12)

a. I Will Sing... (v1-2)

*9 I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart;
I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.*

*² I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.*

Verse 13 makes it clear that the King's affliction is a present reality.
And yet Psalm 9 opens with whole-hearted thanksgiving to God.
Pastor Jon made this point to us Sunday evenings in his Philippians series.
We may rejoice – even in the midst of trials –
because we know that the way of the cross is the only way to glory.

It's the same point we saw in Hebrews 2 –
“we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels,
namely, Jesus,
crowned with glory and honor *because of the suffering of death* –
so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

In Psalm 9 King David declares
“I will give thanks...I will recount...I will be glad...I will sing praise”

And as the King declares the wonderful deeds of the LORD,
all Israel is drawn into his proclamation.
Hebrews 2 points out that Jesus says
“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” (2:12)
When the King gives thanks to God, he draws us into his celebration of God's mercy.

Jesus draws *you* into *his* gratitude to our Father.

We tend to be an ungrateful people.
People do things for us all the time – and yet we don't say “thank you” very often.

We do this to each other a lot.
When was the last time that I thanked the Sunday school teachers
for all their work with my children?
Let me do it publicly –
in the midst of my brethren!

Thank you, Phyllis!

Thank you, Betty! – and Jamie – and Sally – and Jacob – and Hugh –
and Karie – and others who have helped and taught over the years!

I give thanks to the LORD who has done wonderful deeds –
wonderful deeds that *you* have taught to my children.
Thank you!

It's fitting to reflect on this as we head into Thanksgiving week!
Gratitude is powerful.

And of course, this is especially true in our approach to God.

How often do we “recount his wonderful deeds”?

How often do we sing praise to his name?

Sure, we do it in church on Sunday –

and that's good (that's what David is doing here!) –

but it's really important that our *corporate worship*
fuels and drives our *daily life*.

b. For You Have Maintained My Just Cause against the Wicked Nations (v3-6)

In verses 3-6, David explains *why* he gives thanks to God.

What are the “wonderful deeds” that he recounts?

He starts with God's justice:

³ *When my enemies turn back,
they stumble and perish before^[c] your presence.*

⁴ *For you have maintained my just cause;
you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.*

It's rather poignant to reflect on the fact that the song is titled “Death of a Son.”

Perhaps this is why David grieved so much when Absalom died!

He knew that God would destroy those who rise up against the Lord's Anointed.

And so he grieved that it was his own son

who stumbled and perished before God's presence.

In Psalm 7:12, the Psalmist said that “if a man does not repent” (if he does not *turn back*)
then God will whet his sword –

God will bring judgment upon his foes.

The theme of “turning” is crucial to this opening series of Psalms.

If God does not turn his face toward us, then we are doomed! (6:4)

And if man does not *turn* towards God, then he is doomed. (7:12)

But here, when my enemies *do turn* they stumble and perish before God.

Here, turning is plainly *not* a turning to God in repentance.

My enemies have no regard for God –

they turn this way and that – without considering the LORD.

But God sits on his throne, giving righteous judgment (v4) –

just as David had said in 7:6-7

“Arise, O LORD, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;
awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.

Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you;
over it return on high.”

When God returns to his heavenly throne,

then justice comes to all the earth!

As Psalm 9 continues in verses 5-6:

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

How many nations have disappeared from the face of the earth?

Where now are the Hittites?

Or the great civilization of the Incas?

The Potawatomi or the Zulu?

The Ottoman Empire was a major world power only a century ago.

All of them have perished.

But not only do the wicked perish –

even the memory of them perishes.

God blots out their name forever.

Historians like to point to all the kingdoms that have come and gone,
but historians don't like to admit that there are some kingdoms
of which we know *nothing*.

Kings who left no trace in the history books.

We may have a little rubble left to show that *someone* lived there –
but their names and their deeds are forgotten.

In verses 3-6, David says that God has done this to *his enemies* –
those who oppose his Kingdom.

In verses 7-8 the Psalmist broadens his focus from God's justice for David to God's justice for the whole world:

c. The LORD Judges the World with Righteousness (v7-8)

⁷ *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.*

Because God is faithful to David,
therefore we may have confidence that God will be faithful to all the earth.

You can see how the “David and Israel” theme connects to “Christ and the church.”
Because God is faithful to Jesus – because God has judged Jesus justly –
therefore we may have confidence in him,
because we have been united to the justified One!

Notice how the Psalmist does this:

in verse 4, the emphasis is on how God has “maintained *my just cause*” –
in verses 7-8, the focus broadens to how God “judges the world with righteousness” –
and so, in verses 9-10, this is applied to *you* who endure “times of trouble.”

d. The LORD Is a Stronghold for the Oppressed (v9-10)

⁹ *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.*

The theme of “refuge” pervades these opening Psalms.

The word is only used a few times,
but the theme is everywhere in Psalms 1-20.
The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed.

The ‘oppressed’ of verse 9 are the ‘afflicted’ of verse 12
(also called the ‘needy’ and ‘the poor’ in verse 18).

When you think of the “poor” – what do you think of?

Most middle-class folks tend to think of poverty in terms of material possessions.
In that sense “poor people” are those who lack *stuff*.

But Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert have pointed out
that poor people themselves rarely talk in terms of material resources.

Rather, they describe poverty in terms of *shame*, *helplessness*, or *hopelessness*.

Listen to the words the Psalmist uses:

the oppressed (those who are *crushed* by others),
the afflicted (those who are *humiliated*),
the needy (those who *lack* material goods),
the poor (the same word as “the afflicted”).

In our early years of marriage, I was a graduate student.

We made \$18-20,000 a year for the first five years of our married life.
In material terms, we *easily* fell *far* beneath the ‘poverty line.’

But we were not *poor*.
We were not *needy* or *afflicted*.

Nothing particularly bad happened to us –
but if something bad had happened,
we had access to the power and resources to take care of it.

We were not *oppressed*.

If you would see “the poor” in our community,
look at the Hispanic couple who went to one county office to take care of some matter;
the clerk looked at the document in their hands, and said simply,
“this is the wrong office.”
When the Hispanic couple asked what they should do,
she replied only with, “I’m sorry, there’s nothing I can do.”

She didn’t even give direction to the proper office.

They are the afflicted.

They had no one to help them in their affliction.
They were embarrassed and helpless – and, for that matter, hopeless.

If they were not *materially poor* before, they soon would be –
as those who knew and understood how to manipulate the system
would crush them and take all that they had.

And David thanks God that “those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”

God is a refuge – a fortress – a stronghold for the oppressed!

And therefore Jesus, the Son of David, calls us to:

e. Therefore Sing Praises to the LORD (v11-12)

¹¹ *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.*

Because God is faithful to David – and to David’s Son –
because God brings justice to all the earth, because he does justice to his King –
therefore we sing praise to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion!

He avenges the afflicted (9:12) a theme that we have seen from 3:7, 6:10, and 7:9.

It is *right* to want vengeance –
to long for the day when God will make all things right!
David tells Israel that the LORD (the one who avenges blood)
is mindful of the poor –
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

All these words and ideas will come back in Psalm 10 (as we’ll see tonight):

“the oppressed” (9:9 and 10:18)
“times of trouble” (9:9 and 10:1)
do not “forget the afflicted” (9:12, 10:12)

Indeed, also the concluding plea:

“arise, O LORD” from 9:19, will also appear in 10:12.

So, we join the King in giving thanks to God for his wondrous deeds (verses 1-12) –
and we also echo the King’s cry to God when we are troubled (verses 13-20).

2. Echo the King’s Cry to God when You Are Troubled (9:13-20)

a. Be Gracious to Me, O LORD that I May Recount Your Praise (v13-14)

¹³ *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.*

We’ve seen that David calls us to praise God because God does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

And in verse 13, David uses the same word of himself.

“See *my* affliction.”

Now, it might seem a little odd that David would classify himself among the “poor” – the “afflicted” –

after all, he is the King of Israel!

But David understood something that too few politicians ever understand:
you can only rule effectively if you have first endured affliction yourself.

David had endured oppression from Saul (and from the Philistines).
David had been afflicted by his own son, Absalom, and the traitor, Ahithophel.

David had experienced oppression and affliction –
and so he became a wise and faithful king.

He understood that the way of the cross is the only way to glory!
And he understood that even though he was the LORD’s anointed –
the Messiah! –
he was still dependent upon the LORD to rescue him from ‘the gates of death.’

In verses 13-14 he contrasts “the gates of death” with “the gates of the daughter of Zion.”
There are two ways –
the way of death and the way of life.
And those two ways lead to two sets of gates –
the gates of death and the gates of the daughter of Zion.

You can see that the “gates of the daughter of Zion” means something more
than just “the city of Jerusalem.”

David does not simply mean ‘Whew! I didn’t die – I get to go home!’
Rather, David sees his restoration to the throne in Jerusalem
as a picture and pattern of how God relates to the afflicted.

Notice how this works in verses 13-18:
David pleads with God to be gracious to *him* so that *he* may rejoice in God’s salvation.
Then he points out that the LORD executes judgment on the wicked –
they are snared in their own traps – sunk in their own pit (v15-16) –
then he extends the image beyond himself and his foes
to include the broader pattern of “the wicked...nations that forget God”
and the “needy” who “shall not always be forgotten” by God (v17-18).

If God is faithful to David and his heirs,
then God will be faithful to all Israel – and indeed to all the earth!

But that faithfulness will mean *righteous* judgment –
and so those who lay snares for others, will fall into their own traps:

b. The Nations Are Snared in Their Own Traps (v15-16)

¹⁵ *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. Higgsion.^[d] Selah

We saw this last time in Psalm 7:15-16.

God does not lay snares for the innocent.

Rather, he uses the wicked's own snares in order to judge them.

I recently saw a tragic example of this.

A man sought unjustly to deprive other men of their livelihood.

But the way he went about his efforts

resulted in him losing his job.

And that's the way God often works.

He executes judgment by snaring the wicked in the work of their own hands.

Think of Pharaoh – who ordered that all the male children of Israel be killed.

The end result was that Pharaoh's firstborn son died –

together with all the firstborn of Egypt.

(Though it's worth noting that any Egyptian who observed Passover that night

would have had their firstborn child spared!

Just like any Israelite who refused to observe Passover

would have lost their firstborn child!)

Those among the nations who repent and believe the gospel will be saved.

Those among the church who apostatize and act like the wicked will be condemned!

c. Those Who Forget God vs. Those Who Shall Not Always Be Forgotten (v17-18)

Verses 17-18 return to our theme of forgetting and remembering:

¹⁷ *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.

The wicked will perish – they shall return to Sheol (the grave).

“Return” is probably the wrong word

(after all, it's not like they were in Sheol before!)

But this is simply our word “turn” or “return” or “repent”.

It keeps popping up over and over!

When God returns to his throne – and when God turns his face toward us –
then the people of God will return to him,
and the wicked shall turn to Sheol.

And the reason is simple:
it is because the needy shall not always be forgotten.

God will remember them.

The hope of the poor – the hope of the afflicted –
shall *not* perish (like the wicked!).

Rather, the Hope of the poor – the one who was stricken, smitten, and afflicted –
will be raised from the dead – remembered by the Father –
and exalted to his right hand!

d. Arise, O LORD! Let the Nations Know that They Are But Men (v19-20)

¹⁹ *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*

Arise O LORD!

There it is again! (9:19) and 3:7, 7:6
Calling on God to arise –
just like Moses did every time the ark set out from camp
(as we are told in Numbers 10).

And when God arises, then the nations are judged.

Here at the end of Psalm 9

(or perhaps, at the *middle* of Psalm 9 –
since Psalm 10 seems to have been part of the same Psalm at first)
the Psalmist makes a sharp contrast between *man* and *Yahweh*.

Man has been in rebellion against the LORD ever since Genesis 3.
Arise, O LORD, let not man prevail!

Let the nations know that they are but men!

As long as the nations arise against the LORD and against his Anointed,
we will need to pray that God will arise and put his enemies to flight.

Perhaps in the light of Islamic extremism it's easier to understand how to pray Psalm 9:19-20.
"The hope of the poor shall not perish forever."
Jesus, the righteous King – the one who united God and Man in one person –
is the one who will judge the nations and make all things right.

And, because this is what our *King* is like –
we should reflect him to others.
We'll look at this more tonight –
because our Psalm isn't really over yet!

We have seen that we are to join the King in giving thanks to God for his wonderful deeds,
and we have seen that we should echo the King's cry when we are troubled –
but we also need to share the King's perplexity when God seems so far away,
and unite in the King's confidence that God *will* make all things right.

But for now, let's sing Psalm 9.