

Psalm 10 “The LORD Is King Forever, Part Two: Why Does He Hide?” Nov 23, 2014
Psalm 9
2 Tim 1:12, 1 Peter 4:19, 1 Tim 1:17, Rev 11:15

This morning we looked at Psalm 9 – which forms a single acrostic with Psalm 10.
In the LXX and other early translations, the whole of Psalm 9-10 is a single Psalm.

Either Psalm 9-10 was written as a single Psalm,
or else Psalm 9 was written as a “half acrostic”
and Psalm 10 was composed later as “part two.”

Either way, Psalm 9-10 was designed to be read and sung together.
My voice problem seems to have been part of a Divine conspiracy
in order to get these two sermons into a single day!

This morning we looked at Part One (Psalm 9).
We saw that the title (according to ‘muth-labben’ or ‘death of a son’)
points us not only to the death of Absalom,
but even more to the pattern of the cross.
God was teaching David and Israel to see that glory only comes through affliction.
If you have not experienced the gates of death
then you will not recount the praises of God in the gates of the daughter of Zion.

And so we are to join King Jesus in giving thanks for God’s wonderful deeds –
because God has maintained the *just cause* of Jesus.

The LORD judges the world with righteousness and is a stronghold for the oppressed,
and so we sing praises to the LORD.

And when *we* are troubled – we may join in King Jesus’ cry to the LORD –
“be gracious to me, O LORD, that I may recount your praise” –
because we know that as we are conformed to the likeness of Jesus’ sufferings,
so also we will be conformed to the likeness of his glory!

And Psalm 9 concluded by reminding us that God will not forget the poor.
In the conflict between rebellious nations and the LORD God,
we ask God to remind the nations “that they are but men.”

Psalm 10 (or part two of Psalm 9) then reflects on how this *isn’t* happening right now.
The future hope of the poor is *not* a present reality!
And so we share the King’s perplexity at why God seems so far away (v1-11),
and we unite in the King’s confidence that God *will* make it right in the end.

3. Share the King's Perplexity at why God Seems so Far Away (10:1-11)

a. Why Do Hide Yourself, O LORD? (v1)

10 Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

We heard about “times of trouble” in 9:9 –

“the LORD is...a stronghold in times of trouble.”

Okay, which is it?

Is the LORD a stronghold in times of trouble?

Or does he hide himself in times of trouble?

If you look back at the history of redemption,

there are *very few* times when God did mighty deeds to rescue his people:

the Exodus in the days of Moses –

the Conquest in the days of Joshua –

a few scattered episodes in the centuries of the Judges and the Kings –

(notably in the days of David, Elijah, Hezekiah, and Josiah) –

and especially our Lord Jesus Christ.

But even *those people* – and especially Jesus! –

all experienced the distance – the hiddenness of God.

At precisely the moment when David needed the presence of God

(for instance, during the rebellion of Absalom)

God was silent for *eight chapters* of 2 Samuel! (ch 13-20)

Joshua experienced the silence of God when Israel was defeated at Ai.

And of course, Jesus experienced the hiddenness of God in Gethsemane –

and at the cross –

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And yet, Jesus could also say, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

The same God who had forsaken Jesus

is the very God into whose hands Jesus committed his spirit.

Notice how Psalm 10 describes this hiddenness –

the hiddenness of God is revealed in the prosperity of the wicked.

Read:

b. The Prosperity of the Wicked (v2-11)

i) Is There No God? (v2-4)

² *In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;*

let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

³ *For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,*

and the one greedy for gain curses^[a] and renounces the LORD.

⁴ *In the pride of his face^[b] the wicked does not seek him;^[c]*

all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

The heart of wickedness is rooted in the claim, "There is no God."

"All his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'"

The wicked may very well *profess* to believe in God!

David is not saying that "Atheism" is the heart of wickedness.

Notice that *all* his thoughts are, 'there is no God.'

What are the things that reveal *practical* atheism?

First, practical atheism is revealed when someone hotly pursues the poor.

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed.

The LORD does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

Therefore, the one who hotly pursues the poor is denying God.

Second, practical atheism is revealed when someone boasts of the desires of his soul –
and thus the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.

(the biblical authors could not bring themselves to say "curse Yahweh"

and so the Hebrew here says, "the one greedy for gain *blesses*
and renounces the LORD" –

when in fact, you are supposed to understand "bless" as meaning "curse.")

If you are obsessed with stuff –

if you are "greedy for gain" –

and you put acquisition of stuff ahead of love for God –

then you are cursing and renouncing the LORD.

Third, practical atheism is revealed when someone does not seek the LORD.

If you are too busy with your selfish agenda to spend time pursuing God,
then *all your thoughts are, 'There is no God.'*

This is sobering.

But it makes sense.

If God hides himself in times of trouble

then it is not surprising when people think that they can ignore him!

Incidentally, this also begins to explain *why* God hides himself.

As a father, I don't just want my children to be well-behaved when I am present.

I want them to love God and neighbor *all the time*.

If I am always *there*, hovering over them to make sure that they do the right thing,
then they will not develop their own sense of right and wrong.

In the same way, God hides himself to see whether we will love him or curse him.

Are we practical atheists?

Do we profess to believe in God in front of others –

but secretly pursue our own selfish desires when no one else is watching?

Verses 5-6 reflect on the inner thoughts of the practical atheist:

ii) Will They Always Succeed? (v5-6)

⁵ *His ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
as for all his foes, he puffs at them.*
⁶ *He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved;
throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."*

God's judgments are "on high, out of his sight" –
therefore he thinks that no one can touch him.

Sometimes you look at the rich – the famous – the powerful –
and it looks as though they are untouchable!
It doesn't matter what grievous things they have done,
"I shall not be moved"!

Verses 7-11, then return to the theme of verse 2 –
"the wicked hotly pursue the poor."

After all, if you do not fear God then you can do whatever you want to others!

iii) Will God Never See? (v7-11)

⁷ *His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*
⁸ *He sits in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places he murders the innocent.*
His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
⁹ *he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;
he lurks that he may seize the poor;
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.*
¹⁰ *The helpless are crushed, sink down,
and fall by his might.*
¹¹ *He says in his heart, "God has forgotten,
he has hidden his face, he will never see it."*

Notice in verse 11 that the wicked still *knows* that God exists –
confirming our diagnosis of 'practical atheism'!
"God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it."

It started – as we saw in verses 2-6 – in the *soul* (v3) and the *heart* (v6) of the wicked.
(And remember that the heart, in Hebrew, is the seat of *thinking*.)
At the heart of the wicked is the conviction that God won't do anything to stop me.
When you believe that God won't do anything to stop you,
then what will you do next?

Just look at all the terrible things that people say –
curses, deceit, and oppression – mischief and iniquity –
truly *words* are powerful!

Words have the power to heal and to comfort –
but they also have the power to tear down and destroy.

Think of the wicked man sitting in ambush in the village –
he has set up his target through cunning words (deceit and oppression).
Now he lurks in ambush like a lion in a thicket –
He lurks so that he may seize the poor;
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.
The helpless are crushed – they sink down – and fall by his might.

All of that started with *words*.
If someone had stood up for the helpless –
if someone had *said something* back in verse 7 –
then perhaps the power of the wicked would have been thwarted.
But no, we were silent in a just cause.
And so the helpless were overpowered and crushed.

Here is a *second* reason for the hiddenness of God:

If we are created in the image of God then we should reflect God's care for the poor.
Sometimes God is silent so that we can speak with his voice!

I'm not going to try to articulate what a just U.S. immigration policy would look like –
but whatever policy you advocate,
make sure that it does not hand over the helpless to the wicked.

(And be careful in your assumptions about who the 'wicked' are!

The wicked, according to the Psalmist, are those who are greedy for gain –
and thereby renounce the LORD
and mistreat the poor and helpless.)

Sometimes it may appear that everywhere you turn, all you can see is greed and puffery.

And that is why the Psalmist cries out to God!

Because when all you can see is greed and puffery
you know that our only hope is that *God* will make it right!

4. Unite in the King's Confidence That God Will Make It Right (10:12-18)

a. Arise, O LORD! For You Do See! (v12-15)

¹² *Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand;
forget not the afflicted.*

¹³ *Why does the wicked renounce God
and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"?*

In verse 1, the question was “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”

Now the question is “Why does the wicked renounce God?”

In 9:17-18 we heard that the needy would not always be forgotten –
Rather, the nations that forget God will turn to Sheol!

But now we join together with Israel’s king – our Lord Jesus –
and we plead with God “lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted.”

Do as you have promised, O LORD!!

As I reflect on the dastardly practices of the practical atheist,
I cannot really fathom *why* he does this!
Why do people think that they can get away with this forever?

Ultimately, they *know* that God exists!
They are simply banking on the possibility that God will forget
 (“He says in his heart, ‘God has forgotten...’”)

Okay, seriously, what are the odds of that?!
There is an omniscient, omnipotent Deity who has promised that he will judge all nations
and make all things right in the end.

“But maybe I can get away with it...!!”

Seriously?

Then again, to quote Mark Hanson, “Sin makes you stupid!”

Because, as verses 14-15 say:

¹⁴ *But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation,
that you may take it into your hands;*

*to you the helpless commits himself;
you have been the helper of the fatherless.*

¹⁵ *Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
call his wickedness to account till you find none.*

In you, the helpless has a helper!

And yes, this is the verbal form of the same word “helper”
found in Genesis 2.

The verbal form is used in 1 Samuel 7, at “Ebenezer” –
the “stone of help” – ‘hitherto the LORD has helped us’!

God is the one who does for the helpless what he could not possibly do for himself.
God is the protector of the widow who would be destroyed by herself.

God rescues the orphan who has no future alone.

*To you the helpless commits himself;
you have been the helper of the fatherless.*

And so David cries out:

“Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
call his wickedness to account till you find none.” (v15)

Why is David saying this?

Isn't David the king?
Couldn't David make things right?

NO.

David could not make things right.
I don't doubt that David was a very *good* king.

But David was overthrown by a coup, led by his son, Absalom.
And after Absalom's rebellion was quashed,
Sheba, the son of Bichri, rose up and took most of Israel with him!

The king can seek to do justice –
but his justice will only be as sound as the judges and magistrates
who execute his decrees.

The fact that “King David” must cry out and ask God to bring justice
is a sobering reminder for us!

Even King David must declare:

b. The LORD Is King (v16)

¹⁶ *The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations perish from his land.*

Behind and above David's kingship,

“The LORD is king forever and ever.”

The problem is that the king's justice will only be as sound as those who execute his decrees.

David was a good king –

but David died, and Solomon died – and Rehoboam *really* screwed things up!

But even David had failed to bring justice.

We need a good king who will rule forever.

So long as David's kingship and God's kingship remain divided
we will not see justice on the earth.

In other words, Psalm 9-10 is the perfect text for the last Sunday before Advent.
Psalm 9-10 leaves us with the conviction that the Davidic kingship
will only bring justice when God himself becomes king.

We need a King who is both God and Man –
the Son of God, and the son of David.

And today, we have such a King.
King Jesus sits on his throne!
“The LORD is king forever and ever”!

Of course, it still remains the case that a King’s justice is only as sound as his servants.
And he has appointed his ministers to declare his word to his people.
He has appointed his elders to shepherd the flock under their care.
It is a sobering reminder to those who hold office in the church!
People will judge Jesus based on us.

That shouldn’t surprise us (or bother us)!
Jesus told us that they would – indeed, Jesus told us that they *should*!

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)

And even more, Jesus went on to pray for us in John 17:21,
“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,
that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

If Christians are not “one” – if we do not love one another –
then the world has no reason to believe that the Father sent the Son.
“The glory that you have given me,” Jesus says in John 17:22-23,
“I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,
I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one,
so that the world may know that you sent me
and loved them even as you loved me.”

The King’s justice is only as sound as those who execute his decrees.
That’s why I don’t mind when unbelievers expect more of Christians
than they do of pagans.
Those who believe in Jesus should be held up to a higher standard than those who don’t.

But, we need to remember that the *standard* by which we are judged
is not the world’s standard!

The question is *not* whether Christians are the *niciest* people –
the most *tolerant* people –
or the most *enlightened* people!

Rather, the question is whether we love God and neighbor – *according to the standard of Christ*.
Do the afflicted and the oppressed find refuge in Christ’s church?
Are we a place where the weary find rest?
Are we a people who reflect the justice of the Lord Jesus?

Because there is another side to that “refuge” language!
The oppressor must find *no comfort* in the church!
Remember the language of verse 15 – where David called on God to
 “Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
 call his wickedness to account till you find none.”
Or here in verse 16 –
 “the nations perish from his land.”

The theme of the “perishing” nations runs throughout the opening of the Psalter:
Psalm 1:6 – “the way of the wicked will perish”
Psalm 2:12 – “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way”
Psalm 5:6 – “you destroy [same verb ‘you cause to perish’] those who speak lies”
Psalm 9:3 – “they perish before your presence”
Psalm 9:5 – “you made the wicked perish”
Psalm 9:6 – “the very memory of them has perished”

As the gospel goes forth and brings justice to the earth,
 the wicked nations perish.

But remember that most of these verses that talk about the wicked perishing
 are not talking about ‘the nations.’

Most of these verses are talking about wicked Israelites.
After all, the church is a mixed bag.
God had said of Israel, that the nations around them should be in awe of their Law.
 I don’t think that too many nations in the ancient near east
 were in awe of Israel’s Law!
Israel of old was a mixed bag –
 wheat and tares grew up together in the same field.

We shouldn’t be surprised that we find wheat and tares growing up together in the church!
But that doesn’t mean that we allow wickedness to flourish!
The oppressor – the one who crushes the needy – should have his arm broken!
 (David is not speaking *literally* here –
 after all, he is speaking to *God*,
 asking *God* to stop the wicked in his tracks!)

And we ask God to do this because *he* is the one who *does hear* the cry of the helpless.

c. The LORD Will Do Justice, so that Man May Strike Terror No More (v17-18)

¹⁷ *O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted;
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear*
¹⁸ *to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.*

God will make all things right.

You can see how these last two verses emphasize every word in that sentence.

God will make all things right.

You hear the desire of the afflicted.

Man – who is of the earth – inflicts terror.

God brings justice!

So yes, *God will make all things right,*

But also *God will make all things right!*

You will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear.

We don't see it yet.

Even those who are rulers on the earth (like King David –

like elders in the church today)

aren't always able to bring justice.

And that's why it is important that God will *make all things right.*

To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed

God's makes it right – he *does justice.*

There will be a final judgment – a last reckoning –

when all the earth will stand before God.

When God will make *all things right.*

*So that man who is of the earth may strike terror **no more.***

As Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17:30 –

“The times of ignorance God overlooked,

but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

because he has fixed a day

on which he will judge the world in righteousness

by a man whom he has appointed;

and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Or as the Father said:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased – listen to him.” (Matt. 17:5)