

Making Sense of Our Time

Psalm 9

Studies in the Psalms #9

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BROTHERS and sisters, what is going on in our time? Have you, like me, been asking that question? What's going on in the world? What's going on in the nation? What's going on in the church? I was talking with someone Friday night and I said that my earliest recollection of politics was the Reagan-Mondale debates. We both said the same thing: "At least if you didn't agree with them they did have some civic virtue." And I don't think it's a stretch to say that we are living in a time unlike any other in our nations' history. I said a while ago in our sermons through Romans 1 that what we are seeing is our society being given over to unrighteousness.

The good news is that we're not alone. It's not like we are the first ones to go through this. Over 1,500 years ago another Christian looked across the Mediterranean Sea towards Rome and contemplated its decline politically and spiritually. As that city fell another rose in Aurelius Augustine's mind and heart: the city of God that has "foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10; KJV). As we turn to Psalm 9, the Holy Spirit takes us back even further, 3,000 years ago to King David, who knew what it was to see the

earthly city of God assaulted on all sides from outside Israel as well as from inside his own family. What was his hope? What should our hope be? Psalm 9 is a prayer that helps us in *making sense of our time*.¹

Remembering the Lord's Past Work (vv. 3–6)

Making sense of our time means *remembering the Lord's past work*.

Look at verses 3–6. David is thinking of a time when the Lord did a work to deliver him and his kingdom: **When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence (v. 3). Why? For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment (v. 4).** The Lord upheld David as king from the Lord's heavenly throne.

It was the famous Henry Ford, inventor of the Model-T, who was also famous for saying “history is bunk.” One of the virtues we are learning from the Psalms is to value history because it is *his*, that is, God's, story. And when we try to make sense of a civilization and a church that are like sand castles on the beach, slowly being eroded by the constant waves, we need to remember what God has already done, first and foremost in the resurrection

¹ The Septuagint and Vulgate combine Psalms 9–10 while many Hebrew manuscripts divide them into two. There is only a heading for Psalm 9 with none at Psalm 10. They're also acrostic, although incomplete. And so men like Kidner say these are two distinct but related Psalms. *Psalms 1–72*, 68–69. Others such as Futato, Longman, and Motyer say they are one Psalm: *The Book of Psalms*, 55–60; *Psalms*, 83–84; *Psalms by the Day*, 26–27.

of Jesus Christ. That's when the anointed king greater than David was upheld; that's when Jesus stepped on Satan's head as he stepped over Satan's corpse on his way out of the tomb. David was anticipating things to come and speaking of them as if they were already accomplished. This is what we call the prophetic perfect, which means he speaks of things in the future as already being done. The resurrection of Jesus is the preview of the final judgment: **You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever. The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished** (vv. 5-6).

Expecting the Lord's New Work (vv. 13-15)

Children, how do you know your mom and dad will be at your event, or will get you what they promised you? They say the words, but how do you know they'll come true? You think about what they've done before, don't you? And for us in our relationship with God, it's God past work that we can read in black and white in the pages of Scripture that gives us confidence for his working again in our lives. And in verse 13 the Psalm transitions from David's remembering the Lord's past work to his present expectation. David

underwent yet another struggle and he needs the Lord to act again. Look at verses 13–15 where David teaches us that making sense of our time means *expecting the Lord's new work*. **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, that I may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation** (vv. 13–14). And then he speaks of the doom of his enemies as he did before: **The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught** (v. 15).

What I want you to take away from this, brothers and sisters, is that our God is a God of action. We confess in Scripture that our God is the living and true God (1 Thes. 1:9). And Jesus is alive because he burst the bonds of death and out of the silence of the tomb he says, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17–18). So before we get too depressed about our local church’s situation or the broader church’s situation or our cultural situation, let’s remember that countless other believers have felt this way and have gone through it all in worse ways than us. There is nothing new under the sun, including God’s activity! If he didn’t

act over the course of history, we wouldn't be here today! And so we should expect God to hear our pleas and to act to answer them.

Trusting the Lord is Able to Work (vv. 7-8, 16-17)

But it's one thing to know that God acted in the past and even to expect him to act for me, but it's quite another to know *why* he can. I was sharing with a complete stranger recently that God makes no promises to give us exactly what we're asking for, but what he has promised is that we can rely on him because he is able to give us exactly what we're asking for. In the end, the Lord provided exactly what this person asked for, which is what they needed.

And so David teaches us that making sense of our time means *trusting the Lord is able to work*. At the heart of Psalm are verses 7-8: **But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.** When you know the Lord is able to work on your behalf, it's like having a master key that you can use every time you feel like God has locked you out of his presence when a hard providence comes. What's the key? The Lord is king!

And isn't this a beautiful prophecy of our Lord Jesus Christ? We can trust the Lord to work for us because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven, and session at the right hand of God the Father: **But the LORD Jesus Christ sits enthroned forever** at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Responding Appropriately

Now what? We remember what God has worked, we expect him to work again, and we trust he is able to work; so what? As the Psalm helps us in making sense of our time, I want to lead you in three ways we it teaches us about *responding appropriately*.

Knowing that Jesus is King, first, we respond with *praise*. No matter the chaotic hurricane of the world's politics and power struggles, we go on doing what we've always done—praise the Lord! We praise him for who he is—I will give thanks to the LORD...I will be glad and exult in you (vv. 1, 2). We praise him for his works—I will recount all of your wonderful deeds (v. 1). The word translated **wonderful deeds** is used elsewhere in the Psalms for miracles (Ps. 106:7, 22). And so we praise him for his miraculous words in the past, knowing he can do them again! We praise him for his

revelation of himself—**I will sing praise to your name, O Most High** (v. 2).

This is the name David promised to praise in 7:17: “I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.” This is the name he praised in 8:1 and 8:9: “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” We praise him for being king—**Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion!** (v. 11) We praise him by telling others—**Tell among the peoples his deeds!** (v. 11)

Knowing that Jesus is King, second, we respond with the *promises*. Our modern media thrives off your discontent. They make money when you are afraid. They can manipulate you when you are worried. That’s why you need to know the promises of God in the Word so that you can tell them to yourself and so that you can pray them back to him. Look at how many precious promises are found in just this Psalm. It’s like opening a treasure chest and gold, silver, and jewels are overflowing out!

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble (v. 9).

And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you (v. 10).

For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted (v. 12).

For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever (v. 18).

Knowing that Jesus is King, third, we respond with *pleas*. Look at the two pleas at the end of the Psalm. The first is a plea for God to act and get the glory: **Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you!** (v. 19) The second is a plea for what we want God to do: **Put them in fear, O LORD! Let the nations know that they are but men!** (v. 20) That word **men** is the Hebrew word we saw in Psalm 8:4, “what is man that you are mindful of him.” It speaks of the frailty and weakness of humanity. We need to pray that our politicians and leaders would have a healthy dose of their frailty and weakness as human beings and that they are not gods. During the days of the Roman Empire, when the Emperor would enter Rome on a chariot in a public triumph after a huge victory, a slave would stand behind the Emperor in his chariot holding the laurel crown over his head, saying, *memento homo*, “remember, you are a man.”

Everything seems to be reversed before our eyes. Men and women are like gods, and God is nowhere to be found. But to make sense of our time, we know that Jesus Christ is King, and princes and politicians are mere mortals. They may have the praise for a time, but Jesus Christ is praised forever. Amen.