

A Song for Every Season – Studies in the Psalms (Part 3 of 10)

Thanks, With All My Heart!

Psalm 9

Mark Vroegop

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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. Higgaiion. Selah

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.

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! (Psalm 9:1-20)

This our third week in a study on the book of Psalms where we are selecting different types of Psalms and examining how they help us in a different seasons of life. And the more we look at the Psalms, the more we see why we love them so much. It really is remarkable how they speak with such understanding and compassion to the world in which we live. They really give voice to what is happening in our hearts. They are like a good friend or counselor that truly empathizes.

So far we've looked at Psalm 1 and 8. Psalm 1 served as an introduction to the entire book, identifying two paths in life: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Psalm 8

highlighted the amazing majesty and mercy of God as the Psalmist marveled at God's concern for him – "what is man that you are mindful of him?" Today we continue our journey by looking at Psalm 9 where we hear "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart" (v 1).

A Different Purpose for "Thank you"

Psalm 9 is a Psalm of gratitude and thanksgiving, but probably not in the way that you would initially think. Typically we think of saying, "Thank you," after someone does something that is kind, helpful, or considerate. That is fully appropriate, but it is just the starting point for what happens here.

Psalm 9 is full of statements that reflect on gratitude for the acts of God. However, the purpose here is to encourage the heart of a hurting person. The Psalmist is saying, "Thank you" not only because he's grateful, but because he is hurting. Don't miss this! David is praising God because he needs hope. He recounts what God has done – he says "Thank you" – for two reasons: 1) as a means both giving God the honor that he is due and 2) infusing hope into his heart. Or you could think of it like this: **praise for the past leads to trust in the crucible.**

What you will find in this Psalm and in others like it is a direct connection between praise, thanksgiving, and hope. Let's see how this works out in Psalm 9.

Praise for the Past (vv 1-12)

Psalm 9 and 10 probably comprise one collective Psalm and both are written in an acrostic pattern which means that each new section starts with a word whose first letter is the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Typically this form is used in order to highlight the linkage of the part to the whole. In other words, each section has to be understood as contributing a thought to the big picture message of the Psalm.

Intentional Focus

Verses 1-2 highlight the theme of praise for God's actions. Notice how decisive or emphatic David is and how broad the scope of his praise is: "I **will** give thanks to the Lord with my **whole** heart; I **will** recount **all** your wonderful deeds." David is echoing the command from Deuteronomy 6:5, the most basic of all commands – "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." With all his heart he is decisively committed to thanking God and recounting what He has done. David probably senses a divided heart, a sort of schizophrenia of the soul where one bounces back and forth from fear and trust – something in seconds.

The word "thank" and "recount" are important words here. The word translated as thank is the Hebrew word *yadah*, and its basic meaning is "to confess." In other Psalms – like 32:5 – the word is used for the confession of sin. But in Psalm 9, the word is used in respect to God's actions. David is acknowledging, recognizing, or professing the Lord's actions. He is confessing that when he looks

back on his life, he sees the Lord's hand. Therefore, the word is probably better translated as "praise" because David is not just saying "Thank you." He is worshipping.

The second word "recount" helps us see this theme even further. It is part of the parallelism of verse one. To recount is the Hebrew word *sopar*, and it is used of general mathematical activities – like when God told Abraham in Genesis 15:5 to "number the stars...so shall your offspring be." In Psalm 9, the idea is that, like numbering the stars, he is going to number off God's wonderful deeds. Therefore, he is going to declare the mighty deeds of God. Like the previous statement, he is going to look back and consider the innumerable ways that God has been gracious.

Verse two simply says the same thing but in a summary way. David declares that he is going to find his happiness and joy in God – "I will be glad and exult in you." Further, he says that he will "sing praises to your name, O Most High."

So at this point we have no idea what is going on in David's life, but one thing is clear: he is intentionally looking beyond himself at the beauty of God's works. There is an intentional spiritual focus **off** his circumstances and **on** God's gracious acts.

Insurmountable Faith

Verses 3-8 gives us hint of what is happening in David's life. It appears that there are people who are his enemies and those who are oppressing him. If we look ahead to Psalm 10, we get a clearer sense of this. The wicked man is described as arrogant (10:2), boastful (v 3), godless (v 4), prosperous (v 5), and over confident (v 6). But then it gets personal:

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" (Ps 10:7-11).

David sees two disturbing things that all of us are unfortunately familiar with: 1) the outrageous acts of a wicked person and 2) the lack of immediate justice or judgment. David sees that what is happening is awful, and worse: they are getting away with it. These are two very powerful and emotional thoughts.

However, in 9:3-8 David looks forward, anticipating a coming judgment based upon what he knows about God and what he has seen. He recounts these things to set his thinking on the right path. Let me summarize what he says in each verse:

- v 3 - God will personally rescue David, and His presence will be the decisive moment.

- v 4 – God will bring ultimate and true justice. The verb forms in this verse are such that David is saying that God’s judgment has already happened, but it is waiting enforcement.¹
- vv 5-6 – God has destroyed entire nations in the past causing them to be wiped off the face of the earth and remembered no more. David anticipates this to be done to his enemies.
- v 7 – Despite the chaos and evil on the earth, God sits on his throne and he has an eternal reign.
- v 8 – From his throne, God will bring judgment based upon true justice, righteousness, and uprightness. In other words, real justice based upon a real standard with complete fairness will finally be accomplished.

So, in the midst of very personal pain, David turns to praise. He specifically reflects on what God has done in the past while talking as if the judgment of God is already in motion. His confidence in what God has done in the past gives him such hope that he speaks about future deliverance with great faith. His praise leads him to great hope in ultimate victory. God will and already is making things right. David knows this and so should we.

Inspiring Fortress

Finally, David wraps up this section by getting very personal. Verses 9-10 are some great verses to have memorized as David rather succinctly communicates his hope in God. He uses the metaphor of a fortress or a stronghold to describe where God’s people can run: *“The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Ps 9:9)*. Further, David indicates that this citadel of strength is based upon the promise of who God is: *“And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you” (Ps 9:10)*.

David’s confidence extends further than just the immediate. He commands that praise be offered to God because he sits enthroned in Zion (9:11). He invites those who would read and sing Psalm 9 to worship because God will enact his justice, because “he is mindful of them,” and “he doesn’t forget the cry of the afflicted” (v 12).

Look at the entire picture. Notice that there is not a literal fortress that is a fortress of safety. Rather, it is the hope that David finds in God that *becomes* his fortress. David runs to a person and his trust in His promises makes God a fortress. Further, David rests his hope in God’s personal care, believing that he will provide ultimate deliverance and judgment.

Once again we hear the distant rumblings of the gospel, don’t we? David’s enemies in the Psalm are not entirely clear, but the New Testament makes very clear that man’s greatest enemy is sin. Further, the greatest oppression and trouble in life comes not from outside circumstances but from the indwelling presence of evil. Sin in us and sin around us are the defining problem for human beings, and they put people under the judgment and curse of God. Enter Jesus who comes in order to provide a sufficient atonement by dying on the cross such that those who trust in him (his name) as their Savior are forgiven of their sins. Listen to the parallels in Romans 10:

¹ Gerald Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary – Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2002), 227.

"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:9-13)

As such Jesus becomes the ultimate fortress, the perennial stronghold for those who flee to him for relief for the oppression of sin's guilt and the trouble of darkened heart. It is like the hymn-writer, Eliza Hewitt said in 1891:

My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.

I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.

Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him,
He'll never cast me out.

I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.

And it is this good news, rooted in your past that you come back to when life gets hard: *"The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed...those who know your name put their trust in you" (9:9-10)*. In fact, that is why we celebrate communion. It is a reminder of the past; it invites us to remember; it calls us to praise and worship. But it was never intended to be a static symbol. It was meant to be a reminder that God is worthy to be trusted in the past – **and right now**.

Trust for the Crucible (vv 13-20)

Now all of this praise and gratitude – twelve verses in all – turns to a heart-felt cry for help. David is in a hard place, and we begin to see it more clearly. If Psalm 9 is connected to the message of Psalm 10, then 10:1 gives us some glimpse into the tension in his soul: *"Why, O Lord, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"* David knows what you know: there are times when it feels as if God is far away. And he also knows what it is like to be praising the Lord one minute and in the next trying to fight to think right. Yet, notice how Psalm 9 builds.

Concern

Verse 13 is the most specific thing that David has requested in the entire Psalm. He asks for two things: 1) For God to be gracious to him, and 2) For God to see what his enemies are doing to him. "Be gracious to me, O Lord! See my affliction from those who hate me." This is what every hurting person wants: deliverance and justice.

David believes (even requests) that God's deliverance would result in even more praise to God. He is projecting how the mercy of God could spread the fame of God's name. He is hopeful that the answer to his prayer would fit with God's plan to be honored on the earth.

Consequences

David's horizon shifts again in verse 15-18 from his personal request to the fate of the wicked. He looks beyond his own circumstances and his request for concern from God to the ultimate destiny of those who oppose God. David longs to see the wicked caught in their devices of wickedness.

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. 17 The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God (9:15-17)

This vantage point of ultimate judgment gives David hope that the wicked will get the consequences that they are due. He knows that it is only a matter of time until the wicked are punished - *"For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever" (9:18)*

There are moments, no doubt, that David feels like he has been forgotten; there are situations where he feels that there is no hope. But he speaks with perspective that this will not be his lot forever. He is talking in faith.

Confidence

David concludes his Psalm with a crescendo and a flourish. It is almost as if he has convinced his own heart that God is worthy such that he voices what sound like a command to God. Verse 19-20 are all about God being victorious over proud men. Therefore, he calls for divine action. He lives in the moment as if the future is already upon him – the moment when God will be seen for who He is. And more importantly, man will be shown who he really is.

The Psalm ends with David nearly saying, "God, get them!" He wants God to be seen in might: "Arise, O Lord!"..."Put them in fear, O Lord" (v 19a, 20a). And he wants for mankind, specifically the wicked, to know their place: "Let not man prevail...let the nations know that they are but men" (19b, 20b). In other words, David is confidently calling God to set the record straight and show this arrogant world who is really in charge.

David has seen God's power in the past, and he longs to see it again. His present confidence, his immediate trust is rooted in what he has seen God do in the past. And so David ends not so much commanding God, but preaching to his own heart that God will be victorious one day. He is saying, "Arise O Lord!" But what he is really saying is "Trust, David. Trust!"

Important Lessons from Psalm 9:

This is a very helpful Psalm at so many levels that I think it is necessary to summarize what we've seen here so that we can remember what lessons we should learn:

- 1) **Gratitude brings grace.** Saying "thank-you" to God is more than just an appropriate reaction to God's blessings. It is certainly that, but it is even more. Gratitude for God's past actions bring an amazing amount of grace to our hearts as we remember what God has done in the past. Recounting the wonderful deeds of God is like oxygen to our drowning souls. Gratitude reminds us about what we are too quick to forget: that God is worthy of our trust. Need proof? Just look back.

The hym-writer, Johnson Oatman, rightly expressed it this way:

"When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

- 2) **You need a regular dose of the vertical.** We are constantly bombarded by various issues, temptations and trials from the world in which we live. If that is the only world that you live in, you will lose perspective on everything. You need to go vertical regularly. Prayer, private worship, corporate worship and the Word lift us to another realm, a realm that we so desperately need.
- 3) **Choose to make pain a platform for praise.** One of the keys to walking through any difficult season is making the conscious decision that you will not allow painful circumstances, destructive people, or a personal hardship to define you or take over your life. Pain is scary because it seems to control everything. But you make the same faith-filled choice that the Psalmist makes here: "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds" (9:1). Praise and gratitude can become the means by which you turn your focus around. For example Psalm 42 features a section that seems as if David is preaching to himself, almost dragging himself to make pain a platform for praise.

*5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; **for I shall again praise him**, my salvation 6 and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore **I remember** you... (Ps 42:5-6)*

Do you see how powerful God-centered praise can be?

By looking back David sees both the present and the future differently. By looking up he gains perspective on the pain of his life. Thanksgiving has become a balm to his hurting and fearful soul.

And this same God invites us to do the same thing today. He invites us to look back at his wonderful deeds of the past – not the least of which is the sacrifice of his own son. He invites us to consider the historical blessings of God so that our attention and our hope can be turned upwards, toward him.

In other words, praise for the past leads to trust in the crucible.

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Summer Challenge:

- Memorization – Psalms 34:1-3
- Reading:
 - --- Psalms 38-40
 - --- Psalms 41-44
 - ---- Psalms 45-48
 - ---- Psalms 49-51
 - ---- Psalms 52-56