

Psalm 9

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO MUTH-LABBEN. A PSALM OF DAVID.

I. Psalm 9:1–2 — I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

Those are wonderful words, aren't they? Just reading them, we're encouraged and exhorted to be able to say the same things ourselves.

"I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart." Remember that "The LORD" isn't just a generic title for God. It's His covenant name – Yahweh, or Jehovah. It's the name by which He *revealed* Himself to His people and entered into *relationship* with them as their savior, and their sustainer and their healer and their provider and their protector. "The LORD" isn't just an empty title, it's a name that's full of meaning – full of encouragement and hope and joy for God's chosen people. Coming right after Psalm chapter eight, we're reminded right away of how that Psalm began and ended:

- Psalm 8:1 — O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your **name** in all the earth!
- Psalm 8:9 — O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your **name** in all the earth!

And so the psalmist begins here in chapter nine and verse one, "I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart," and he concludes at the end of verse two: "I will sing praise to your **name**, O Most High" (cf. 7:17). When we come to give God thanks and praise we come to Him as those who are in covenant with Him – who know Him not just generically as God, but who know Him as the one who has given Himself to us in a relationship of committed and everlasting love. The word in the Hebrew for this covenant love is *hesed* – in the NASB, "lovingkindness"; in the ESV, "steadfast love." Maybe now we can better understand why the psalmist says, "I will give thanks to the LORD *with my whole heart*." This is the wholehearted response of someone who knows himself to be related by covenant with none other than the "Most High" God. And that's why the Psalmist can say next:

"I will recount all of your wonderful deeds." These "wonderful deeds" are simply the visible expressions of God's covenant commitment to his people. That's what makes these deeds of the LORD so wonderful! They're not just isolated or random surprises. They're part of a pattern—a certain and unchanging pattern—of divine faithfulness and love. And so we should already be able to see that in recounting these wonderful deeds *of the LORD*, the psalmist is seeking ultimately to be glad and exult in the LORD Himself:

"I will be glad and exult *in You*." Can we own these words for ourselves? Can we say with sincerity, "I will be glad and exult in You"? If David could say this, who knew God as Yahweh, how much more should we be able to say this who have seen Yahweh revealed to us in Jesus? Calvin writes:

We ought to consider how great is the difference and opposition between the character of the joy which men endeavor to find in themselves, and the character of the joy which they seek

in God. David, the more forcibly to express how he renounces every thing which may keep hold of or occupy him with vain delight, adds the word exult, by which he means that he finds in God a full and an overflowing abundance of joy, so that he is not under the necessity of seeking even the smallest drop in any other quarter.

Remember, this is no artificial, hyped up emotional high. This is the deep down, abiding joy of understanding God's covenant commitment and faithfulness even to me. Far from being an emotional, mountain top experience, we'll see later that the occasion for this Psalm is actually the psalmist's present troubles and experiences of affliction from those who hate him (v. 13). We see a hint of this when David says four times: "*I will* give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; *I will* recount all of your wonderful deeds. *I will* be glad and exult in you; *I will* sing praise to your name, O Most High." David's not saying that he'll do these things sometime in the future after God has already rescued and delivered him. Instead, David is determining to do these things now. As one commentator writes: "He exhorts himself to praise the Lord [in order] to deepen his trust in the Lord" (VanGermeren).

When we find ourselves in the midst of trials and difficulties and hardships, these opening words of Psalm 9 might seem artificial and out of place. But for those who are in covenant with God, there are always reasons to be found for thanksgiving and praise – even wholehearted thanksgiving and praise. There are always His wonderful deeds that bear repeating and that are constantly calling us to be glad and to exult *in Him* – the one who is always the same, yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). This "being glad" and "exulting in Him" is not a means of forgetting our troubles or pretending they don't exist. Instead, it's the means of strengthening our faith and our trust in Him so that *in* our affliction and *in* our distress we might cry out to Him all the more earnestly. Calvin again says it well:

David sets before himself the testimonies of the divine goodness which he had formerly experienced, in order to encourage himself with the more alacrity to lay open his heart to God, and to present his prayers before him. He who begins his prayer by affirming that God is the great source and object of his joy, fortifies himself before-hand with the strongest confidence, in presenting his supplications to the hearer of prayer.

It's only those who have learned what it is to be glad and to exult in the Lord who, in times of trouble and the deepest distress, are truly enabled to cry out to Him with all their hearts. So may we, too, always be exhorting ourselves as David did – especially in times of trouble and as the best preparation for times of trouble: "I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High."

II. Psalm 9:3–6 — When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence. For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous 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.

We have to remember first of all who it is that's praying, here. In one sense, this is intended to be the prayer of all God's people – a prayer that we all make our own. But the only way to really do that is to remember that this is first of all a song or a prayer of the *king*. It's through David, as the Lord's anointed king (cf. Ps. 2), that God has chosen to bring to His people all the blessings of the covenant – the blessings of rescue and deliverance, and peace and security, and abundance and joy. And so when the king prays these words, he's not praying as an isolated individual, but as the one in whom all the people are represented before their covenant God. Therefore, when the king prays these words, the people can all pray these words along with him – no longer just as his words, but also as their very own. The king's enemies are also their enemies, the king's victories and triumphs are also their victories and triumphs, and the king's joy is also their joy.

David was a valiant warrior. David was supported and helped by other mighty and valiant men as well as by the armies of Israel. David used military planning and all the usual weapons and methods and stratagems of war. But in the end, David always saw his enemies stumbling and perishing not “before him,” but as he says, “before [the Lord's] presence.” He saw them fleeing and falling not as the result of his own military abilities, but only as the result of God maintaining his just cause; of the Lord sitting on His throne above and giving righteous judgment. Calvin describes this as seeing what only faith can enable you to see:

David therefore acted wisely, when, upon seeing his enemies turn their backs, he lifted up the eyes of his mind to God, in order to perceive that victory flowed to him from no other source than from the secret and incomprehensible aid of God.”

How much more often should *we* be lifting up our eyes to God in order to perceive, by faith, His hand of providence in blessing us, and keeping us, and protecting us, and guiding us? David sings: “*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.”

Who is the “enemy” and who are these “nations”? They're all the wicked and the ungodly who have declared themselves to be the enemies of God. They're all the wicked and the ungodly who cruelly oppress God's people. Shouldn't we, then, rejoice and be glad in God's righteous judgments? Shouldn't we be able to sing with David, knowing that these are the things God has done in history: “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.”

III. Psalm 9:7–10 — 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. The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

Even as David confesses these things with joy (cf. 9:1-2), can you see that he's also preaching to himself? He's reminding himself that the LORD who sat on the throne in the *past* giving righteous judgment is the LORD who still sits on the throne *today* because He “sits enthroned *forever*.” And

why is that such good news? What does it mean for us as God's people that the Lord is sitting on His throne? Well, He's not just sitting there for the sake of sitting there and being idle. In the past the LORD sat on His throne doing what?—Giving righteous judgment. Therefore, when we confess that the LORD sits on His throne *forever*, what does that mean? It means that even now the LORD is the one who sits on the throne “judg[ing] the world with righteousness” and “judg[ing] the peoples with uprightness.” Who is the righteous judge of all the earth? He is our own covenant Lord. And who are we? We are the Lord's righteous, covenant people. Can you see what this means for us? Do you know the wonderful comfort that this is?

When we think about the Lord's “judgments,” we shouldn't just think about formal verdicts and decisions being handed down. Instead, the Lord's judgments always refer to the things that He *does*. The Lord's judgments are His “wonderful deeds” (cf. v. 1) on behalf of His covenant people to defend them and to rescue them and to deliver them when they're oppressed and mistreated by wicked people who are more powerful than they are. In the Ancient Near East, that was the role of the king – it was to defend the rights of the oppressed and the helpless and to take up their cause and to fight for them against the powerful oppressor. So what does it mean to acknowledge that the Lord is King and that He sits on His throne forever, having established His throne for justice? It means that we, too, can confess wholeheartedly and joyfully with the psalmist: “The LORD is a *stronghold* for the oppressed, a *stronghold* in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.” How wonderful this is to know! How good it is to confess these things by faith!

The Lord, here, is a stronghold not for everyone who's oppressed anywhere in the world (though God certainly hates oppression wherever He sees it). The Lord is a stronghold here specifically for those who “know His name” and who are therefore putting their “trust” in Him, and depending and relying upon Him, and “seeking” after Him alone. Do you know God's name? Do you know God personally as one who is in covenant with you through the blood of Jesus Christ? If so, can you see what this means? It means that we know Him—and we can always trust Him—as the one who is *our* stronghold in times of trouble. It means especially that God's people who are cruelly oppressed can know Him and always trust Him as their stronghold in times of trouble. It means that I can know that I will never, ever be forsaken by the Lord.

In verse one David wrote, “*I will recount all of Your wonderful deeds,*” and then in verse two, “*I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.*” Now David exhorts *us* in verses 11-12:

IV. Psalm 9:11–12 — Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

For the third time David sings of the Lord sitting enthroned, but now we actually see Him sitting enthroned *in Zion*. God is not far off from His people, but near to them. The “Most High” God doesn't simply sit enthroned in heaven, He sits enthroned in some sense even among His people in the city and the temple that's called by His name (Dan. 9:18-19; 1 Kings 8:43). How much more, then, should we see this today, when the God who “tabernacled” among us in Christ (cf. Jn. 1:14) says to us, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age?” (Mat. 28:20)

We see again that the Lord doesn't sit enthroned simply for the sake of sitting there. Always connected to the Lord's enthronement are the Lord's "wonderful deeds," and especially the Lord's "righteous judgments" on behalf of all the afflicted who cry to Him. In verse ten the psalmist spoke of the afflicted who "seek" (*darash*) the Lord. Now in verse twelve he speaks of the Lord who "seeks" (*darash*) after blood. The Lord requires a reckoning for the lifeblood of His people (cf. *darash* in Gen. 9:5). He never forgets the cry of His afflicted – not even after they've died. He never forgets. He will always act. He has established His throne for justice. And so now David goes on to pray:

V. Psalm 9:13–14 — 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.

All of a sudden, we see David counting *himself* among the afflicted of God's people. He describes *himself* as someone who is actually standing, right now, at the very gates of death. We might not have expected this given the first twelve verses, but now we can see that those verses were really, all along, a *preparation* for this. Remember what we said earlier: It's only those who have learned what it is to be glad and to exult in the Lord who, in times of trouble and deep distress, are truly enabled to cry out to Him with all their hearts. And now we see that those who are truly crying out to the Lord in deep distress are also those whose true longing is to still "recount God's praises" and "in the gates of the daughter of Zion" to "rejoice in God's salvation." Would this describe you and me? Would this describe us? In the Bible, the desperate cries of the afflicted are bound up together with the rejoicing of those who know that their own covenant Lord sits enthroned forever and that He has established His throne *for* justice. Calvin says that here it's as though David was saying, "I desire to live in this world for no other purpose than to rejoice in having been preserved by the grace of God."

We don't know the exact circumstances, but we do know that David was only a hairsbreadth away from death itself. The "gates of death" were there in front of him, wide open, and waiting to swallow him up. That's why David cries out: "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." We have to remember, now, that David is the king. On the one hand, David counts himself *with* and *among* all the afflicted of God's people because he *is* afflicted and he *is* one of God's people. But on the other hand, because David is the Lord's anointed king, he also sees *all* of the "afflicted" as those that are his charge and his responsibility. David cries out to the Lord as the one who sits enthroned in Zion, and yet in chapter two it was the Lord Himself who said of David: "I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill" (2:6). Are you seeing what these things mean? The Lord's answer to David in *his* affliction must, in the end, be His answer to the desperate cries of *all* His afflicted people. David knows that; and that's why even as he speaks of his own affliction, he has always in his mind the afflictions of all God's people. That's why even when things appear to be so utterly hopeless, David still has hope. Even when death appears poised and ready to swallow him up and there seems to be no way of escape, David still trusts that the Lord who sits enthroned in Zion *will* hear his desperate plea and *will* lift him up from the gates of death – not only for his own

sake, but for the sake of all His afflicted people. David is so sure of God's answer that he describes it as having already happened (prophetic perfect).

VI. Psalm 9:15–18 — The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught. The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Higgsion. Selah
The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

Did you see what just happened? Did you see how all of a sudden David leaves off the 1st person "I's" and "me's" and "my's" in verses 13-14, and now he speaks instead of *all* "the needy" and *all* "the poor." That's the prayer of the king, who as he cries out for his own deliverance from death is always, at the same time (as it were, by default), seeking the deliverance and the vindication of all God's "oppressed" and "poor" and "needy" people." In fact, it's in the cries of the king that we can actually hear all the desperate cries of all God's afflicted people throughout all the ages of the world who are all praying together: "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."

There are four different Hebrew words that appear for the first time in the Psalms right here in chapter nine. In verse nine, we first hear of the "oppressed" (*dak*):

□ Psalm 9:9 — The LORD is a stronghold for the **oppressed** [*dak*], a stronghold in times of trouble.

In verses twelve and thirteen we first hear of the "afflicted" (*ani*):

□ Psalm 9:12 — He who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the **afflicted** [*ani*].

□ Psalm 9:13 — Be gracious to me, O LORD! See my **affliction** from those who hate me.

And finally, in verse eighteen we hear not only of the "afflicted" or the "poor" (*ani*), but also, for the first time, of the "needy" (*evyon*):

□ Psalm 9:18 — The **needy** shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the **poor [afflicted]** shall not perish forever.

The "oppressed" and the "afflicted" and the "needy" are a main theme in chapter nine. But what is the fourth word that shows up here for the first time in the Psalms? It's the word for God's "throne" (*kisse*). It's the word for the "throne" of the one who is to these oppressed and afflicted and needy people their covenant King. In chapter two, we saw the Lord "sitting" (*yashav*) in the heavens (2:4). And it just "happens" to be here in chapter nine that this theme is introduced again for the first time since chapter two:

- Psalm 9:4 — You have maintained my just cause; you have **sat** on the **throne**, giving righteous judgment.
- Psalm 9:7 — 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.
- Psalm 9:11 — Sing praises to the LORD, who **sits** [enthroned] in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

If, in this chapter we see on the one hand the “oppressed” and the “afflicted” and the “needy” and we identify ourselves with them, and if, on the other hand, we see our covenant King who sits enthroned forever and who has established His throne for justice, then we must not fail to see, as well, the one who first prayed these words – and who has now given these words to us to sing and to pray with Him. It’s only on the lips of Jesus, who, “in the days of his flesh... offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death” and who was “heard because of his reverence” (Heb. 5:7) that we can fully understand the power and the meaning of what we sing:

“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.”

It’s only as Jesus *leads us* in praying these closing words of Psalm 9 that we can learn to pray them rightly – crying out in humility and in faith:

VII. Psalm 9:19–20 — 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! Selah