



Valley Life Community Church

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Psalms 2023: Jesus' Songbook

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### Psalm 9

All right! In this series there are five things that we want to highlight.

1. **The Psalms are worship songs.** The Psalms model praise and devotion as they flow from the hearts of the people who know the living God.
2. **God reveals himself in the Psalms.** God reveals his character; his steadfast, faithful love; his righteous judgment; and his glorious creativity.
3. **The Psalms are evangelical and gospel centered.** The Psalms also have a prophetic dimension that points to the coming Messiah King.
4. **The Psalms are full of hope.** The Psalms offer a realistic response to the suffering in this world.



5. **The Psalms help build community.** The Psalms are a reflection of the community of God's people worshiping the Lord, witnessing to his mighty deeds and working together.

Today, if you'll turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 9. We'll be working through Psalm 9. We've been working through all the odd psalms. I don't think we'll make it through this summer, but we'll keep plugging away. So, Psalm 9.

Does Psalm 9 bring anything to someone's memory? Something to their recollection from the 80s? Anybody into metal in the 80s? No? Where's David Whitehead? David Whitehead would know this. Ok, Psalm 9 was the title track to a Christian metal band called Trouble. I don't commend any of you to listen to it because I went back, and it was not good. But Psalm 9 does come to mind as the metal band Trouble. I don't know if that's a good thing.

Let's go ahead and read Psalm 9. If you'll stand with me for the reading of God's Word. Psalm 9, starting with verse 1:

***I will thank the LORD with all my heart;  
I will declare all your wondrous works.  
I will rejoice and boast about you;***



***I will sing about your name, Most High.  
When my enemies retreat,  
they stumble and perish before you.  
For you have upheld my just cause;  
you are seated on your throne as a righteous judge.  
You have rebuked the nations:  
You have destroyed the wicked;  
you have erased their name forever and ever.  
The enemy has come to eternal ruin;  
you have uprooted the cities,  
and the very memory of them has perished.***

***But the LORD sits enthroned forever;  
he has established his throne for judgment.  
And he judges the world with righteousness;  
he executes judgment on the nations with fairness.  
The LORD is a refuge for the persecuted,  
a refuge in times of trouble.  
Those who know your name trust in you  
because you have not abandoned  
those who seek you, LORD.***

***Sing to the LORD, who dwells in Zion;  
proclaim his deeds among the nations.  
For the one who seeks an accounting  
for bloodshed remembers them;  
he does not forget the cry of the oppressed.***

***Be gracious to me, LORD;  
consider my affliction at the hands of those who hate me.  
Lift me up from the gates of death,  
so that I may declare all your praises.  
I will rejoice in your salvation  
within the gates of Daughter Zion.***

***The nations have fallen into the pit they made;***



***their foot is caught in the net they have concealed.  
The LORD has made himself known;  
he has executed justice,  
snaring the wicked by the work of their hands.***

***Higgaion. Selah***

***The wicked will return to Sheol—  
all the nations that forget God.  
For the needy will not always be forgotten;  
the hope of the oppressed will not perish forever.***

***Rise up, LORD! Do not let mere humans prevail;  
let the nations be judged in your presence.  
Put terror in them, LORD;  
let the nations know they are only humans.***

***Selah***

Let's pray.

Dear heavenly Father, we're so thankful to be here this morning. Grateful for everyone who showed up, Lord. We pray that as I deliver this message, Lord, it's your words that stick in our heart. Open our eyes, Lord, to what you would have us to hear. We pray this in your mighty name, amen.



I do have a main idea for note takers and community groups. **Though God may be silent now, there's not a moment in which he ceases to take a deep interest in the plight of the righteous and the oppressed.**

If you've been a Christian for any number of years and you've had conversation with non-believer about your faith, you've likely encountered the question, "If God is good, then why do bad things happen?" Perhaps, you yourself have posed this very question. There are countless variations of this question, and whenever there's a tragic event that happens it's added to the list of, "If God is truly good, then why did this happen?"

The argument all comes down to whether or not an all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing God can coexist with evil. I think today's psalm has some answers that can aid us in understanding this issue, although, admittedly, I'm no apologist and it's likely I will not give you an answer that will satisfy anyone. However, I think that David is able to peel back some of the layers of confusion to how God's justice works in the Psalms and his celebration of God's justice.

My hope is that as we read through Psalm 9 we can gain some insight into God's role as the righteous Judge and how we can better understand the role of suffering in our lives. Let's begin with the first two verses. ***"I will thank the LORD with all my heart; I will declare all your wondrous works. I will rejoice***



***and boast about you; I will sing about your name, Most High.***” There’s something common in each one of those. What did it all begin with? “I will...” David makes five “I will” statements and he lists them out. These are all directed from David to God: I will thank, I will declare, I will rejoice, I will boast, and I will sing.

What we see here is David's commitment to proper praise and worship. He begins by saying that he will thank the Lord with his whole heart. Charles Spurgeon says, “A half heart is no heart at all,” and I think that he’s on to something here. David starts off by specifically stating he is going to praise God with his whole heart. His loves are rightly ordered. David will go on to acknowledge how God is worthy of our praise and worship and how we ought to praise him with our whole heart.

Before David petitions God, he praises him. We see this same form given to us by Christ in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6. ***“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”*** Good! King James Version. You can’t memorize this in any other version. ***“...Hallowed be thy name.”*** The CSB states, ***“Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy.”*** He is holy, and he is always deserving of our praise. Before making petitions, we acknowledge our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, for without his divine providence we would not survive. We acknowledge him and we praise him with our whole heart.



He goes on. Verses 3 through 6: ***“When my enemies retreat, they stumble and perish before you. For you have upheld my just cause; you are seated on your throne as a righteous judge. You have rebuked the nations: You have destroyed the wicked; you have erased their name forever and ever. The enemy has come to eternal ruin; you have uprooted the cities, and the very memory of them has perished.”***

Let’s go back to that question I posed earlier: “If God is good then why do bad things happen?” Perhaps, *bad* is not a great term to use here. What’s bad for one person might not be bad for another. Or what may appear to be bad in the moment may in fact not be bad in the grand scheme of things.

I was reading a biography on J.I. Packer this week, the great preacher and theologian who played a pivotal role in helping to bring about the English Standard Version translation of the Bible. In this biography it said at the age of 7 Packer was being chased by a school bully, and while he was being chased he ran out into the street, and he was struck by a bread van. This tragic event nearly killed him and left a massive dent in his skull that kind of became his trademark for the rest of his life and caused his parents to severely restrict his physical activity as a boy.

This restricted lifestyle led him to become a voracious reader, and for one of his birthdays (I think it was his 10th birthday) rather than getting a bike, which is what every boy actually wants, he got a



typewriter...which, maybe typewriters are cool again. Caleb Torres had a cassette player the other day, so I think a typewriter could possibly be cool again.

So he got a typewriter. Instead of getting a bike and going out on all these adventures, he stayed at home, he read books, and he practiced his writing on his typewriter. Had this event not happened where this bully was chasing him, he runs out into the street and gets hit by a bread van (and this is the question that the author of this biography poses), perhaps Packer does not become the theologian we know. How different might his life have been had he been given a bike because this tragic incident hadn't happened?

Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, ***"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."*** God took that incident and used Packer to advance the gospel message to so many people. So perhaps instead of using the term *bad*, let's use *evil*. Perhaps, maybe even the term *evil* could apply, as Packard was being chased by a bully. But maybe the better question is, "If God is good, then why do evil things happen?" The question is founded on the presupposition that there is, in fact, an objective standard for which we can measure what is good and what is evil.





If there's an objective standard, then there must exist an objective party to establish that standard. Also, there must be an objective party to judge what would be classified as good and evil and deal out punishments accordingly. I'm not saying that this will convince anyone who is a non-believer, but if there is an objective standard of judgment, which societies throughout history have agreed...murder is wrong, theft is wrong, honor your father and mother...the premises would lead us to the logical conclusion that there must be one who establishes and maintains a system of justice.

It is here that David helps us to understand God's sense of justice a bit better. David tells us of God's faithfulness in the past. When his enemies stumbled and perished it was before the righteous Judge who is God. We see the righteous Judge sits on the throne and judges the enemies of David and that their cities, even the very memory of them, will come to ruin eternally.

Does God have a system of justice? Yes. Does God punish evil? Yes. David tells us right there that he does. Let's read on. Verses 7 through 10: ***"But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for judgment. And he judges the world with righteousness; he executes judgment on the nations with fairness. The LORD is a refuge for the persecuted, a refuge in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you because you have not abandoned those who seek you, LORD."***



Here David shows us that God is the eternal Judge who established a system of judgment, and he is the refuge for his people. We learn that God executes his judgment with fairness to all nations. There will be none that is not given their due time in heaven's court. The all-knowing God will preside over his court, and he will issue his judgments with fairness.

The apostle Paul actually quotes from this passage in Acts 17 at the sermon in Athens at the Areopagus. Paul tells the men of Athens, many of whom are Epicureans who are striving to live a life that's free of pain and are into indulging as much pleasure as possible, doing the things that bring them joy. Paul here says that God judges the world with righteousness and executes judgment to all with fairness.

Reading into the next verse, it might be worth noting that God is not trying to lead us into a life that's devoid of pain and suffering. We're not meant to live our lives like the Epicureans in Paul's day or the prosperity gospel preachers in our own. God doesn't necessarily want us to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous.

But back to the problem of evil. Many who pose this question suggest that if God were truly good then he would not want us, or people, to suffer. Michael Kruger addresses this in his book *Surviving Religion 101*, which if you have a kid going to college it's a great book to hand them. In it he's addressing it to his daughter who's going off to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and he says these are the



things that you are going to face from professors. These are the questions you're going to be facing from others. But in this book, he takes one chapter out and he deals with this problem of evil.

Kruger says the essential thing to remember when addressing the issue is to remember that we are not God. We do not have the knowledge and understanding that he has; thus, we can't know all things about his ways. When we try to explain everything about God, we find ourselves falling into error. Either we will find ourselves deconstructing our faith until there is no belief in God left or we create a God that we can fully understand, who often looks like us. Just look to the Greeks. Look to gods like Zeus. Zeus is a philanderer. He's jealous. He looks like an idealized version of a person.

We do this in our own culture with guys like Superman, right? Superman looks like us. He puts on the glasses, and nobody can tell the difference between him and the guy who's going around in the red cape shooting lasers out of his eyes. So we find ourselves either deconstructing or building a god who looks like an idealized version of us. Kruger concludes, "In the end, we may not have all the answers we wish for. But we can still trust in the Lord and trust that he knows best."

What David tells us here is that we can, in fact, trust in God. The Lord is a refuge for the persecuted and you can put your trust in him that he will not abandon you. If you are persecuted, you may suffer for a



season but know that the righteous Judge sees you and your oppressor, and he will not allow you to suffer in vain, and he will not allow the oppressor to escape his due punishment.

***David saw this time and time again throughout his life, whether it was with Saul or with his own son Absalom. It picks up in verse 11: "Sing to the LORD, who dwells in Zion; proclaim his deeds among the nations. For the one who seeks an accounting for bloodshed remembers them; he does not forget the cry of the oppressed. Be gracious to me, LORD; consider my affliction at the hands of those who hate me. Lift me up from the gates of death, so that I may declare all your praises. I will rejoice in your salvation within the gates of Daughter Zion."***

David draws our attention here to a certain location in Jerusalem. Did anybody pick up on it? It's also a national park in case you need a little hint. Zion! So more than just a great national park, Zion was a very important term used in a couple different ways. I think it's like 127 uses in the Scriptures, and 38 of them show up in the Psalms. David is going to use it time and time again.

Often time it refers to God's city. They can use Zion in replacement of Jerusalem. Or it's Mount Zion, which is there, which will be the place they'll build the temple. But that won't come until Solomon builds it. Commentators Josh Smith and Daniel Akins state about Zion that, "God chose to actualize his



omnipresence specifically in that place.” They go on to note that it’s now every believer in Jesus Christ who is now his temple.

David is talking about the place, and what happens with Christ is we now become the place of the temple. First Corinthians 6:19 says, **“Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...”** David proclaims to the nation that the one true God dwells in that place and now how much more are we to proclaim this, that he now dwells in us.

The Judge who rules over all creation does not forget the cry of the oppressed. Back in verse 9 we read that the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, the place where they run in times of trouble, and now we read that those who are persecuted, in whose blood was shed, are not forgotten. It might be important to note that as we’re talking about the oppressed, we’re not talking about you after church going to Chick-fil-A and finding out that it’s closed on Sunday. Chick-fil-A is not your oppressor.

Some of you this is the first you’ve heard of it, and you were planning on going to Chick-fil-A. I apologize for being the bearer of bad news. But when we talk about oppression, we’re talking about real oppression. David is facing real oppression. Multiple times throughout his life he faces real oppression, and he says that the God of the universe, the just Judge, does not forget the cries of the oppressed. Their sacrifice was not in vain. Nor will their persecutors get away with their misdeeds.



Do evil things happen? Yes. Are we guaranteed a life free from suffering as believers? No. You might ask the question, “Why does God allow evil to happen in the first place?” Well, what I think it comes down to is that God may have a reason for allowing evil. This sounds problematic, and we think certainly there’s no good reason, but Michael Kruger in his book offers us three reasons, and I think that they’re compelling. Michael Kruger says,

1. **God uses suffering to make us more Christlike.** In Hebrews 2:10 it tells us that Christ was perfect through his suffering. Perfect through his suffering. In Luke 9:23, Jesus says, *“If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.”* It doesn’t sound like a life devoid of suffering.
2. **God often uses suffering as a form of divine judgment.** We could think back to Sunday school and Noah’s ark, right? We used to use flannelgraph when I was a kid. Did anybody flannelgraph? Yeah. I think the flannelgraphs were too friendly to drive home the points. I wish that the David and Goliath story would have had David holding up the severed head, but unfortunately... So I remember the flannelgraph with all the animals going in the ark. It’s this beautiful little image of all the animals, and we’ve seen countless pictures, but what we don’t see is God’s judgment on



everyone else at that point in time. God often uses suffering as a form of divine judgment. You could also think of Israel wandering in the desert for forty years.

3. **God uses suffering as an opportunity to display his glory in redemption.** Without suffering we would not experience salvation, mercy, and grace. David's call is not to live a life free from suffering. Instead, he praises God for his faithfulness through his suffering. It's through that suffering that God makes his loving-kindness known to us.

But much like the Lord's Prayer, David makes petitions after worship. David does say, "Hey, be gracious to me Lord, consider my afflictions." David suffered much in his life. As Pastor Vinnie noted last week, David was not a faultless individual; however, at this time he does seem to be facing things that he did not deserve. Thus, he cries out to God in his time of trouble.

In his book, *Praying the Psalms*, Walter Brueggemann makes an interesting observation about the Psalms that I think can help us understand how God uses suffering. He says our life of faith consists in moving with God in three stages:

1. **We are securely oriented.** This is the one that we're all striving for, the one that we all want to be in. We're happy, we're doing well, everybody is healthy, and things are good. Unfortunately,



what we don't see is a lot of psalms coming out of this period. It doesn't necessarily drive us to our knees to prayer, and oftentimes we grow stagnant and stale.

2. **We are painfully disoriented.** This is the stuff of great psalms. Being painfully disoriented. David cries out, "*Be gracious to me, LORD; consider my affliction...*" Brueggemann writes, "It is experiences of being overwhelmed, nearly destroyed, and surprisingly given life that empower us to pray..." Those moments that shock us to our core and drive us to our knees.

We can think of David as having been driven from his kingdom by his son Absalom. In your own life, this may be the loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, a bad diagnosis...those moments that leave us supremely disoriented and grasping for anything stable to grab on to. These are the moments where God's faithfulness shines through. He does not forget us.

This is kind of a long quote, but I think Walter Brueggemann, quoting Karl Barth, makes a great point of the power of the Psalms in this, and I'd like to read it. "It is no accident that of all of the books of the Old Testament the Psalter has always been found the most relevant. This is not in spite of the fact, but just because of it, that in so many passages it echoes the people of the covenant trembling for its preservation in final extremity before its all-powerful enemies. The Christian community always has good reason to see itself in this people, and to take on its own





lips the words of its helpless sighing, the cries which it utters from the depths of its need. It turns to the Psalter..."

3. **We are surprisedly reoriented.** This is a celebration of some experience that has brought us a joyous reorientation. You cannot get to that reorientation without first being disoriented. The cries of David during his affliction come from being disoriented. David does something interesting with the contrast here. He says, "Lift me up from the gates of death to the gates of Zion." We see a supreme disorientation at the gates of death and an ultimate reorientation at the gates of Zion, which is God's Holy City. You can't help but see the gospel message show up here.

Think of Colossians 2:13, which tells us, "***And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses.***"

So does suffering serve a purpose? Yes, yes it does. David picks up with verse 15. "***The nations have fallen into the pit they made; their foot is caught in the net they have concealed. The LORD has made himself known; he has executed justice, snaring the wicked by the work of their hands. Higgaiion. Selah.***"



The story of Esther comes to mind as we're reading this. Does anybody remember the story of Esther?

The king ends up marrying Esther. He doesn't know that she's Jewish, and this guy named Haman is plotting to kill all of the Jews. He especially dislikes a Jewish man named Mordecai, who is in fact Esther's cousin and guardian.

Esther was hiding the fact that she was Jewish from her husband, and the king was considering Haman's appeals. Haman ends up building these massive gallows that are 75 feet tall, and he plans to kill Mordecai at these gallows. God intervenes through Esther, and Haman, the man who had these gallows built, is hung on those very gallows.

This is a great example of, ***"...their foot being caught in the net they have concealed."*** God snared the wicked Haman by the work of his own hands. God does not forget about his people even in times where it seems like his people are going to be annihilated.

Verse 17: ***"The wicked will return to Sheol—all the nations that forget God. For the needy will not always be forgotten; the hope of the oppressed will not perish forever."*** We can rejoice in God's righteous judgment that will give the wicked what they deserve, and he will remember the oppressed.



The wicked forgot about God, and they will in turn be remembered no more. This is also the point where we can think about the role of Christ acting as our mediator and taking the punishment that we deserve.

We, like Spurgeon, can rejoice that we know a God that can shake the world, and we can also delight in the fact that we have Jesus Christ who died and rose again to act as the propitiation for our sins and appease the just wrath of God. Romans 5:9 states, ***“How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath.”*** We are made righteous not by anything we are able to do but by what has been done by Christ.

Verses 19 and 20: ***“Rise up, LORD! Do not let mere humans prevail; let the nations be judged in your presence. Put terror in them, LORD; let the nations know they are only humans. Selah.”*** David closes with an appeal to God to do the things that he’s already going to do. But yet, David petitions God for justice anyway. John Calvin in his commentary on Psalm 9 states that the wicked “...can do no more than what he permits them; and farther, that God can doubtless, whenever he pleases, render all their endeavors vain and ineffectual.”

God is always in control, and yet that does not mean that David does not reach out to God anyway. Put the terror in them, David cries. Calvin suggests that God uses terror indiscriminately and he uses it for two reasons, that on the one hand His own people may learn to be humble. In fact, it comes back to this



idea that we're only humans. Then on the other hand the wicked, although they cease not to elevate themselves above the condition of man, may be put back with shame and confusion.

Let us realize that we serve a God of justice and a God of love. He will not let evil persist. In the end God wins. God will deal out his righteous judgment, and we can rest in the fact that he sent his only Son to die for our sins. This celebration of God's judgment that is Psalm 9 does not necessarily answer all the questions as to why evil exists, but it does tell us that evil will not be allowed to win and the oppressed will not be forgot.

I think of the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brother. He was later falsely accused and imprisoned. He was forgotten by those whom he helped, and when he faces his brother, he states this. Genesis 50:20: ***"You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people."*** God used all these terrible events to save his people and to accomplish his will.

You may be going through a hard time right now. It may seem like God is silent, but I promise you he has not forgotten about you. Read the Psalms, sing the Psalms, pray the Psalms, let the words of the psalmist be your cry to God and petition to him to comfort you and to use your current circumstances to accomplish his will for your life.



If you have Spotify or Apple Music, there's a group called The Psalms Project, and they're working through trying to put to music all of the Psalms. I think they're through like 75 right now. But I commend you just turn it on, let the music and the beauty of the Psalms speak into your life because it's during this time that David is at his lowest that God is the biggest. We see that time and time again. If you've been a Christian for a number of years, you know this to be true. God is faithful, and he will remain faithful. Even in the moments where it seems like he's quiet, he's still there, and he still sees you.

If you have not yet put your faith in Christ, there are two things you must believe and one thing you must do.

1. **You must believe God's Word when it says that you cannot help yourself spiritually.** That you are a sinner in need of a Savior to run to for refuge.
2. **You must believe that Jesus is able to do what you cannot do.** You cannot save yourself, but he can save you. Jesus died for your sins and suffered the ultimate death to atone for your sins. That through his suffering we may have life everlasting.
3. **You must commit yourself to him.** The Bible speaks of this in different ways, but in each case, it is clear that it involves an act of the will. It says that we are to believe in Jesus, which means we



go, like David said, from the gates of death to the gates of Zion. Romans 10:10 and 13 put it this way: ***“One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. [...] For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”***

Let’s pray.

Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to read your Word, Lord. We’re so grateful that you’ve given us this Word to comfort us in our times of suffering. We pray that it is you that we run to when we’re suffering. We remember that you do not forget us, Lord. That you are there for us, Lord, and we seek refuge in you. It’s in your name we pray, amen.