

The Mighty Justice of God

Psalm 9

Main idea: The righteous justice of God should move His people to praise and prayer.

1

For the choir director; on Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.
I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart;
I will tell of all Your wonders.
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 You.
⁴ For You have maintained my just cause;
You have sat on the throne judging righteously.
⁵ You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked;
You have blotted out their name forever and ever.
⁶ The enemy has come to an end in perpetual ruins,
And You have uprooted the cities;
The very memory of them has perished.
⁷ But the LORD abides forever;
He has established His throne for judgment,
⁸ And He will judge the world in righteousness;
He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.
⁹ The LORD also will be a stronghold for the oppressed,
A stronghold in times of trouble;
¹⁰ And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,
For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.
¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion;
Declare among the peoples His deeds.
¹² For He who requires blood remembers 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,
You who lift me up from the gates of death,
¹⁴ That I may tell of all Your praises,
That in the gates of the daughter of Zion
I may rejoice in Your salvation.
¹⁵ The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made;
In the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught.
¹⁶ The LORD has made Himself known;
He has executed judgment.
In the work of his own hands the wicked is snared. Higgsaion Selah.
¹⁷ The wicked will return to Sheol,
Even all the nations who forget God.
¹⁸ For the needy will not always be forgotten,
Nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever.
¹⁹ Arise, O LORD, do not let 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. Selah.

Introduction:

Do you praise God? If so, what do you praise Him for? It sounds like a simple question, but think about it. When you pray, what do you praise Him for? When you talk, what do you praise Him for? When you sing, what do you praise Him for?

For many Christians, when you take a minute to think about it, you will probably say that you praise Him for redemption, forgiveness, love, mercy, grace. Just look at the repertoire of praise songs sung in churches or played on Christian radio—praise God because He loves me and forgives me and heals me and saves me. And those are all true and praiseworthy topics! We absolutely must praise God for those things.

But one of the great things about the psalms is that they often teach us that there is more to praise God for than those things. The psalms show us the breadth and depth of God's attributes and excellencies and perfections like no other book. They show us that He is not just a God of love, mercy, and forgiveness—He is a God of infinite wisdom, indescribable power, and who is jealous for His people; He is a Father who teaches and nurtures, a King who reigns forever, a warrior who fights for His own, and on, and on, and on.

And here in Psalm 9, while we are told to praise God for *all* the things He has done, we are particularly shown that we can, and we should praise God for His justice. The justice of God is, in fact, a major theme in the psalms—why? I think one big reason is that the world of men is so incredibly unjust. So often, our experience is that the wicked and selfish and destructive people of the world flourish, while the downtrodden, the poor, the needy are continually brought lower and lower and are oppressed. We cry with the psalmists, "Where is justice in the world?" because it can be so hard to see among us sinners. So, the psalmists turn their eyes upward to God, because with Him, and Him alone, there is perfect justice. He has acted in the world as a righteous Judge, and He will continue to do so until the day Christ returns as the final Judge of all mankind, and He will indeed right every wrong, and will rule the world in perfect justice.

How many songs these days focus on that? But it is to our detriment not to meditate on this aspect of God. His justice is inseparable from His other attributes, from who He is. He works in the world and for His people through His perfect and righteous justice. And for the wicked, the unbelieving, those who oppress and afflict, God's justice is a very scary thing—it is judgment and death; but for those who trust in Him, God's justice is hope—it is vindication, protection, and life.

Over the course of these twenty verses in Psalm 9, we learn that the righteous justice of God should move His people to praise and to prayer.

Outline:

- A. Praise the Lord for His justice. (vv.1-12)
- B. Praise to the Lord in light of His justice. (vv.13-20)

Context:

Psalm 9 is ascribed to David. However, we are not given any indication as to the occasion of the writing of this psalm—only that it is to be sung to a certain tune. Obviously, it was written in times of trouble, when either David or the nation, or both, was oppressed by their enemies, who were also God’s enemies. David looked at what was happening in the world—the personal struggles and geopolitical landscape—from a Godward perspective. He saw God’s justice at work.

If you examine Psalm 9 carefully, you will see that it consists of three basic elements: praise, proclamation, and prayer. The first section starts with praise (*vv.1-2*), then proclaims the justice of God in the world (*vv.3-10*), and goes back to praise (*vv.11-12*); the second section begins with prayer (*vv.13-14*), which is followed by more proclamation of God’s justice (*vv.15-18*), and finally ends with another round of prayer (*vv.19-20*). So, in both sections, the proclamation of God’s justice generates a response: praise and prayer. In other words, because God is a righteous Judge and sovereign King, praise Him and pray to Him.

Exposition:

A. Praise the LORD for His justice (*vv.1-12*)

1. Praise the LORD, God Most High (*vv.1-2*)

David opens the psalm with personal praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. More accurately, using the imperfect tense, he anticipates praising the Lord in the future with four parallel phrases, building praise upon praise. He says, “*I will*” do something in the future: “*I will give thanks,*” “*I will tell,*” “*I will be glad,*” “*I will exult in You,*” “*I will sing praise.*”

What is David doing here? He is exhorting himself to praise God in the midst of hardship—in the midst of persecution and affliction. The outlook is bleak from a human perspective. The fleshly reaction is to panic, or dive into depression and hopelessness, or even to doubt God’s ability or willingness to help. But David refuses to fall into that kind of response. Instead, he pre-decides to trust in God’s faithfulness and power; he pre-decides to praise the almighty God.

- a. I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart. (*v.1a*)

David is not going to be content with half-hearted praise. Remember, for the Hebrew, the heart refers to mind/intellect, emotions, and will. Our whole self is to be engaged in praise and worship in response to who God is and what He has done. God will have nothing to do with mere lip-service—He deserves and demands every part of us.

How do we do that? When enemies surround us, when affliction and hardship try to smother us, how do we pre-decide to trust God, to praise Him still, to give thanks to the Lord with all our heart? David tells us in the parallel line:

b. I will tell of all your wonders. (v.1b)

We can still be thankful and praise God by speaking truth to ourselves; by recounting to ourselves and others all the wonders of Yahweh. Look at creation—how wonderful (Cf. Ps.8)! Look at how he redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt and defeated the Canaanites from before them—how wonderful! David, personally, had experienced quite a few wonders from God in his life—in his youth, God helped him protect his sheep from bears and lions; God’s defeat of the giant, Goliath, by David’s hand; God’s supernatural protection of David when Saul was hunting him for all those months in the wilderness; while king, God’s defeat of so many of David’s and Israel’s enemies.

David’s confidence was not just ancient positive thinking—it was confidence in God’s character, God’s power, and God’s love for him. And because of his past experiences of God’s wonders, David expects Him to act again. For David, God does not sit on the sidelines and merely watch—God acts on behalf of His children.

Application

How can each of us praise God with all our hearts in the midst of hardship and affliction? Recount His wonders in your life. We live in an evil and dangerous world, and yet He has kept you. Are you a Christian? Why and how? By God’s grace and God’s power alone. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. Count your spiritual blessings: He has chosen you from before the foundation of the world; He has predestined you to adoption as His own child; He sent His own Son to redeem you through His blood shed on the cross and forgiven all your sins, past, present, and future; He has sealed you with the Holy Spirit and guaranteed your future and eternal inheritance with Him.

Has God done these wonderful things for you? Then why do you doubt what He can or might do in your present situation? Jesus told us not to worry about the day-to-day affairs of life because God our Father cares for us more than we understand. Anticipate God’s work in your life. He might not work according to your plan or your timing, but God works in the lives of His saints. Trust Him to do so.

And, furthermore, do what David says he will do in verse 2: be glad and exult in the Lord; tell it out in songs of praise to His name. He is the God of wonders; El-Elyon—God Most High.

Now David focuses in on specifics. He began with praising God for all His wonders, but moves on for his specific reasons for praise in this circumstance:

- Praise the LORD, the Judge of the wicked. (vv.3-6)
- Praise the LORD, the hope of His people. (vv.7-12)

2. Praise the LORD, the Judge of the wicked. (vv.3-6)

Evidently, God has delivered David and perhaps the nation. God has triumphed over His enemies. In verse 3, David tells us that he praises God because David’s enemies have turned back from their attack, from their oppression. What has caused them to turn back? *“They stumble and perish before You”*—that is, the only reason they have turned back is because of the presence of Yahweh. God showed up, and He brought justice with Him.

But David sees God's victory on his behalf not only as a judgment on the wicked, but as a vindication of himself. He says in verse 4 that God has "*maintained my just cause.*" God is a righteous Judge, and He has proved it by judging the right way—judging the wicked and vindicating the righteous. And then David does something interesting. He says that God has "*sat on the throne judging righteously.*" He combines the idea of God as Judge with the idea that God is a sovereign King.

This combination is a little difficult for us to understand because we don't combine these roles today in our nation. We have branches of government—the legislative branch (congress) makes laws, the executive branch (President and cabinet) leads and directs and carries out laws, and the judicial branch interprets laws and judges. The leader/President is not the judge.

But in the ancient Near Eastern world, this separation of roles didn't exist. In many cases, the authority to rule and to judge and to make laws and to carry out justice rested with the king. And that's what David is saying here about God. He has the supreme authority over all creation to rule as sovereign king and to judge righteously and perfectly over all His creatures. He is the Judge/King who sits on His throne judging and ruling righteously. And He has shown just a taste of that justice to David and Israel. But what He has shown has utterly devastated the wicked. Look how David searches for ways to describe God's justice:

- He has "*rebuked the nations.*" (v.5a)
- He has "*destroyed the wicked.*" (v.5b)
- He has "*blotted out their name forever and ever.*" (v.5c)
- He has made it so "*the enemy has come to an end in perpetual ruins.*" (v.6a)
- He has "*uprooted the cities.*" (v.6b)

The picture is of pulling out the roots of a plant. If you pull a weed, but don't get the roots, what happens? It grows back. To get rid of that weed forever, you have to uproot it. And that is how severe God deals with the wicked.
- He has caused "*the very memory of them to perish.*" (v.6c)

They who once thought themselves to be great and important have been judged—and they are remembered no more.

Take warning. God is a God of love and a God of justice. No one and nothing is hidden from His eyes. His retribution, His vengeance, His justice will come, and it will be devastating to those who are His enemies—those who despise Him, ignore Him and His laws, oppress and afflict others, seek only their own self-interest, and reject the offer of forgiveness in Jesus. Jesus Christ, Himself, will act as the sovereign King and Judge on the last day. In your case, what will be His verdict?

3. Praise the LORD, the hope of His people. (vv.7-12)

Verses 7-10 present now a contrast. David moves from thanking God for righteously judging his enemies, the wicked, to providing justice and hope for the afflicted believers.

a. He is the hope of His people because He is a righteous Judge and King. (vv.7-8)

In verse 7, the image of God as a Judge/King is again brought into focus: "*He has established His throne for judgment*"—He is a Judge who is able to bring about justice because He is also the King who rules sovereignly. And what does His sovereign rule and justice look like?

- It is **perpetual**—it does not come to an end—“*the LORD abides forever.*” (v.7a)
- It is **all-encompassing**—“*He will judge the world in righteousness.*” (v.8a)
His justice and rule include the whole world. He knows the words, actions, thoughts, and intentions of every heart on this planet. He sees you—whether you are an oppressor or the oppressed, the wicked or the believer.
- It is **impartial**—“*He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.*” (v.8b)
His justice and rule are no respecters of persons. He is not impressed with a person’s position, power, money, or status. Unlike many of the judges and rulers among men, God judges impartially. Rich and poor, high and low together will be judged by the same standard—God’s standard, His Word and will.

Therefore, because He is a righteous Judge and sovereign King, there is hope. However bleak things look right now with our limited vision and experience, there is hope. As a righteous Judge and sovereign King, God has the wisdom and power to one day right every wrong; He will not let the wicked prevail; He will vindicate the righteous. He is a sovereign King, and there is hope. He is hope.

b. He is the hope of His people because He is a stronghold for the oppressed. (v.9)

He is a tower, a fortress, a place of protection and provision. His walls are impenetrable, and His stores never run out. In Him, there is perpetual safety. But for whom? Verse 9 tells us that this protection and deliverance from God is for “*the oppressed.*” The word “**oppressed**” means “to be crushed,” beaten to pieces, or ground into a fine powder. There is hope for those who are crushed, oppressed.

c. He is the hope of His people because He is faithful to all who believe. (vv.10-12)

At this point, we need to ask a question, “Does God give His special protection to everyone who is oppressed? Is the only requirement for God’s deliverance to be needy and afflicted? Is this our pre-requisite for hope?” In the next verse, David answers that question. God is not hope to all who are oppressed; rather, He is hope to “*those who know*” His name and “*put their trust in*” Him. Or, to say it another way, “He is hope to those who know the Lord in a personal relationship through faith in His Son Jesus Christ.” For there is no relationship with God apart from a relationship with Jesus. There is no true knowledge of God without Jesus, the Son, revealing Himself to you.

God is hope to the believer because He keeps His Word. He has not, and never will, forsake those who seek Him (v.10). What is it to seek the Lord? It is simply to go after Him; to desire to do all He says; to set your heart to knowing Him and obeying Him—those who “seek the Lord” in this way experience His faithfulness.

And so, David now (vv.11-12) comes full circle from where he started—he comes back to praise. But whereas he began with personal praise to the Lord, he now calls upon the whole congregation of the people of God to praise Him.

Verse 11—Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion; declare among the peoples His deeds.

All those who have experienced the faithfulness and deliverance of God, praise Him who has chosen to dwell among His people! Tell out all that the Lord has done for you! Can you testify that *"He does not forget the cry of the afflicted"* (v.12)? You who were not only surrounded by the enemies of God, but were yourself an enemy of God. In His perfect justice, He had every right to judge you already, to blot out your name forever. But instead of pouring out His righteous justice on you, He poured it out on His own Son. The justice due for your sins, He placed on Jesus; and Jesus willingly took it. On the cross, Jesus was willingly crushed by the justice of God handed down by His Father.

Why did He do it? Why did the Father pour out the weight of His full justice on His only begotten Son? Romans 3:26 says that He did it so that He would be both just—right in punishing your sin—and the justifier—able to declare you righteous and clean from sin—of the one who has faith in Jesus. He crushed His Son so that He could both uphold His justice while at the same time vindicating the guilty—you and I and all who place faith in Christ.

Therefore, *"sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion; declare among the peoples His deeds."*

His justice should move His people to praise. But also, David shows us that God's justice should move His people to prayer.

B. Pray to the Lord in light of His justice. (vv.13-20)

This section begins (vv.13-14) and ends (vv.19-20) with prayer to God who is the righteous Judge—a fact that is again proclaimed between these prayers.

1. Pray to the Lord, the Hope of the afflicted.

David cries out to the Lord. And all the people of God are to join him in this cry and this prayer. And I think we can draw a few principles for how we are to pray to Him, the God of justice, in the midst of oppression and persecution and affliction.

a. Pray humbly. (vv.13a-b)

He asks God specifically to *"Be gracious to me"* and to *"see my affliction from those who hate me."* He is weighed down by his enemies; the people of God are oppressed and afflicted. He recognizes his need—that he has no recourse or ability in himself to deal with the situation. So, he turns to God in humility, asking for grace from the righteous Judge. And even though theologically, of course, David knew, and we know, that God already sees all and knows all. Yet, he still calls for God to act in light of what He sees—to act in compassion and mercy toward him by dealing with his affliction.

Have you been there? Perhaps you are there, in this kind of need. You need God to see you and your affliction and to help. The enemy surrounds you; those opposed to God bear down on you—at work, at school, or even in your own family. Where can you turn? You can turn to God. Then cry out like David. Cry out as a child of the living and righteous God.

b. Pray confidently. (vv.13c-16)

Even as David and the nation are in a desperate situation, he prays with confidence. He reminds himself that the One he is praying to is the One *“who lifts me up from the gates of death.”* Though he feels he is right at the brink of death, he turns his eyes to the Lord his God for salvation.

And why does he want to be saved from the gates of death? Your first thought is probably, “duh.” But this is not a plea merely for preservation (a plea to not die). David gives the reason in verse 14,

- That I may tell of all Your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in Your salvation.

David prays that God would save him from the wicked and from death so that he can praise God.

And notice where he asks God to take him—from the gates of death (v.13c) to the *“gates of the daughter of Zion,”* that is to Jerusalem, where God causes His name to dwell, with the people of God.

That should be our purpose in prayer, as well. It is perfectly appropriate to ask God to deliver you, to save you, to rescue you from people and situations—and He may do it quickly and He may not—but the purpose of that prayer should go beyond merely seeking self-preservation or being self-centered; the purpose of that kind of prayer should be God-centered. “Deliver me, oh Lord, from the wicked so that I can give you praise among your people and in this world.”

2. **Pray to the Lord, the Judge of all nations.** (vv.15-20)

And how does God deliver us from the wicked? He does so in many ways, but one of the primary ways is by turning the plots and schemes of the wicked on their own heads (vv.15-16). Like Haman in the book of Esther, God often deals with the enemies of His people by snaring them with the work of their own hands. This is the justice of God.

We are to pray remembering the results of God’s justice—and we should be sobered by it. We must pray soberly. What becomes of the enemies of God and His people? The wicked nations that forget God have only Sheol to look forward to—the realm of the dead. Though they may have an abundance in the here and now and may live at ease, their eternal future is death. And so, even while we can cry out to God to “Arise” and deal with wickedness in the world, as David does in verses 19-20, we must do so soberly, knowing that but for the grace of God, so go I. And so, there is a tension. We pray that God would execute justice upon the wicked and wickedness in the world, and yet we still must love and pray for our enemies, as Jesus commanded. Can we do both? The Bible says we must do both.

Jesus does both. On the cross, where the greatest injustice of man was displayed by the enemies of God in the murder of the Messiah of God, Jesus prayed, *“Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). What greater love for enemies was ever shown? And yet, Jesus, Himself, has promised to come again as the final Judge of all men. And His judgment will be swift, complete, perfect, and final.

Where will you be found in that judgment? Will you be found safe in God's stronghold, justified by His grace, protected by His power, kept by His love in Christ? Or will you be found outside, content to ignore Him and His commands to repent and believe the Gospel? Do you not know that you are but men? And men, apart from Christ, cannot stand in the judgment.

What can you do? You must do what He says:

- **Isaiah 55:6-7**—Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

Amen.

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