

Psalms 9

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you looked at the news this morning, the BBC website informed us of four people being killed in a synagogue in Jerusalem. Of course you've got the ongoing Ebola crisis. There's an article on there about orphans left through the crisis, through the many deaths in West Africa.

You've got the ongoing problems in Syria, in Nigeria. Civil war continuing in southern Sudan. Poor old Libya, after all the troubles in that nation over the years, so much hope when Colonel Gaddafi fell from power, and yet now no stable government in the land.

In fact, one of Gaddafi's relatives is hoping to come back to try and do his place to restore order.

The world seems to be in a mess, doesn't it? And of course, that is a fact that leaves many people to say, how can you possibly believe in a good God, in a world where so many bad things happen? It's one of people's big questions, isn't it? And of course, it's not just bad stuff out there. Many of us in our own lives face our own difficulties and challenges. Be it job insecurity. I know for many of you that's a real reality at the moment.

Or anxiety about family or health or whatever it is. And for those of us who are Christians, for those of us who want to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, these difficulties in our lives can make us ask questions, can't they? Can even lead us to doubt.

[1 : 27] If I'm apparently the child of a king, why do I feel like I'm a beggar out in the streets? If God is so good, why is my life so hard? Well, this psalm doesn't pretend to answer those questions, at least not in a philosophical sense.

The psalms are not philosophy texts. They're prayers. So it gives us an experiential answer, if you like. It shows us how one particular person, a very important person, as we'll see it in a minute, engaged in prayer, engaged in talking to the God who he believed in, in the midst of affliction and trouble.

How he sought to connect with God in the midst of these problems. If you've got the psalm open there, you'll see the person who's writing this is David. It says in the little superscription at the top, which is there in the original language, this is a psalm of David.

Now David was God's chosen king. He was the leader of God's people. God had appointed him as king. So he wasn't just any old person. He represented the nation, just as our Prime Minister represented us at the G20 Summit in Brisbane last week.

Or as the president represents the nation. So as David writes this, he's not just speaking on his own behalf. He's writing it for all God's people. For all the people he represents.

[2 : 44] And he wrote it to be sung. He wrote it for all God's people. Do you notice it's to the choir master. This was a song for God's people to sing as they faced affliction. A song for those who believe in the Lord Jesus to sing today, to pray today in the midst of troubles.

And you can see David was in trouble if you look at verse 13. Be gracious to me, O Lord. See my affliction from those who hate me. Now when he talks about those who hate him, it's not just people he doesn't happen to get on well with.

These are people who hate him because of who he is. Because he is God's chosen king. These are people who seek to thwart God's work in the world. So it's not just personal enemies. It's those who are set against God's plans.

Set against God's purposes. And so how does David pray in this situation? How does he teach us to pray? Well let's look back at verse 1 and see where he starts. It's quite surprising perhaps.

It says, I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. I will recount all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you. I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

[3 : 53] See David isn't looking at his immediate situation. He isn't looking at those who hate him. Instead he's looking up to the God who he knows. The God who he trusts in. He delights in God's wonderful deeds.

What God had already done in history to rescue his people. Not only that, he delights in who God is. I will be glad and exult in you. If his contentment was just found in this situation, he wouldn't be singing.

But if not, it's found in this God. See David firmly fixed his mind on God. On God's character, God's actions. God's future glories as we'll see.

And not in his present situations. Now how can he do that? How can we do that? In the midst of a messy world? Well he looks back first, verses 3 to 6.

At past experiences of the Lord's rule and rescue. You see that past experiences. Verse 3. When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence.

[4 : 52] For you have maintained my just cause. You have sat on the throne giving righteous judgement. See David knows that in the past when people have just melted away. It's not because of his prowess as a king or as a military leader.

It's not because he's a good person. Rather it's because it's the Lord who reigns and rules. And has been at work in that situation. Now if you know anything about David, you'll know he was not a great guy in many ways.

Committed adultery, committed murder to cover over that adultery. He was a flawed man, as you and I are flawed people. So the Lord didn't rescue him because he was nice or good.

But because David's job as the king of Israel was to further God's purposes in the world. God had promised a long time before this that through those people he would bring his blessing to all the nations of the earth.

And so God maintained David's cause. So that God's purpose of bringing his blessing could continue in the world. Now it's a tragedy isn't it? When people who are seeking to do good get opposed.

[5 : 58] We've seen that recently haven't we? Alan Henning, the taxi driver from Salford in Manchester. Being beheaded by the Islamic State. What was he doing there anyway?

He'd given up his job for a while to drive aid and supplies to those in need. And yet was opposed to doing that and killed. Now that's a tragedy.

How much more tragic if God's great purpose to bring his blessing to all the peoples of the world was derailed, cut off by his opponents.

Now that's why David can look back at God's past rescue and rule. Look at verse 5. You have rebuked the nations. You've made the wicked perish.

You've blotted out their name forever and ever. Those nations who opposed God's great rescue plan. The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins. Their cities you rooted out. The very memory of them has perished.

[6 : 57] And I doubt there's some poetic language going on there. We all know what it's like, don't we? When a problem is overcome. Something that seems so big and difficult has finally gone away. And we can even forget about it.

Perhaps the people of Germany have almost, not quite, but almost forgotten what it was like to live in a divided city in Berlin. The wall seems like a distant memory 25 years since it fell.

See, David looks back to the past. To the laws rule in the past. And so that's why he's thankful. It's not only the past experience of God's rule that causes him to be thankful.

It's also the present reality of the Lord's rule that he reminds himself of as we look on. See, it's as if he looks up from his own situation for a moment. And starts to see what's going on around.

That actually the Lord is still in control. Look at verse 7. The Lord's present. The present experience. The present reality of the Lord's rule. The Lord sits enthroned forever.

[7 : 57] He has established his throne for justice. And he judges the world with righteousness. He judges the peoples with uprightness. It's in the ancient world of David's day. Kings were the ultimate judges in their nations.

Now, of course, you've got some good kings who are judged fairly. You've got some corrupt kings who would use their throne to enhance their own reputation, their own power, their own wealth. We see that today with powerful people as well, don't we?

But what is the reason the Lord has established his throne? What does David tell us in verse 7? It is for justice. It is for justice.

To do what is right. That's why the Lord rules. David looks beyond his personal experience to the present reality of the Lord sitting on his throne to do justice. Now, of course, these days, people don't like the idea of God who judges, do they?

To post-modern years, that sounds very intolerant, very authoritarian, very restrictive. But if we think for a moment, don't we long for justice?

[9 : 03] Don't we long for wrongs to be put right? Think for a minute about the families of Helen Scott and Christine Eadie. Two girls who are aged 17 were murdered having met in a pub in Edinburgh.

The mother of one of those girls died about 15 years ago. Before she died, she described her experience of living with grief but no justice.

She said, this is a living sorry to my whole family really. Every day or during the night especially, I sometimes sit quiet a long time just thinking about it.

When is this going to be solved? When is justice going to be done for my daughter? That's what she's saying. Well, finally, it was last Friday that the man who was found guilty of those murders was imprisoned or sentenced.

And we long for justice to be done, don't we? We long to see the guilty brought to punishment, brought to task.

[10 : 10] But if the Lord were just a just judge, if he only ever judged with uprightness every individual, what hope would we have?

David has hope because he knows the Lord is not only just but within his justice, he is also compassionate. Look at verse 9. The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

I grew up near Edinburgh, I don't know if you've ever been there, I'm sure you've probably seen pictures. The city is dominated by the castle up on the rock, towering above the main shopping streets.

These great vertical cliffs going up the big solid castle walls. It's a stronghold. Imagine how safe people must have felt in there in times gone by, from the armies that might be attacking. That's the picture David is using of the Lord. He's a stronghold.

He's a castle, a fortress for those who take refuge in him. And who are those people? Verse 10. And those who know your name, those who know your character, those who know that you are a righteous judge, but also compassionate, put their trust in you.

[11 : 14] For you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you. See troubled times, we all look for security somewhere, don't we? I know some people who, when work looks hard, they'll just work longer and longer hours, trying to make themselves secure.

I know others who, when life is tough, will just head out to the pub, or head out to the cinema, and just try and lose themselves, escape for a while, in some kind of fantasy. But we can instead look to the Lord who is a stronghold, who will never let us down.

Who will not make us redundant. Who will not just evaporate. See, David is remembering those things. He's looking back to the Lord as his stronghold.

And knowing that the Lord is a stronghold, knowing that the Lord, the present reality of the Lord's ruling and reigning, leads him to sing again. Look at verse 11. Sing praises to the Lord who sits enthroned in Zion.

Tell among the peoples his deed. For he who avenges blood is mindful of them. He does not forget the cry of the afflicted. Now, our culture, we still love people who rescue the afflicted, don't we?

[12 : 21] We love those who look out for the weak. It was just a couple of weeks ago, wasn't it? The Czech government bestowed a great honour on Sir Nicholas Winston. A young man who'd been a stockbreaker back in 1938.

He visited relatives in Prague as the Nazis had just taken over Sudetenland, part of what is now the Czech Republic. And seeing the danger, he'd arranged for 669, actually more than that, 669 Jewish children to be taken on trains across Europe.

He found homes for them in England. He took pity on the afflicted and rescued them. No wonder the Czech government gave him the highest state award, the Order of the White Lion.

He's an old man, now over 100 years old. But he was awarded and honoured and praised for that, and rightly so. Yet here we have a God who does just that. Who will bring justice to the afflicted of the earth.

He will bring justice for those being shamefully treated in southern Sudan, in Syria, in all the other trouble spots of the world. Why?

[13:27] Verse 12. He who avenges blood is mindful of them. He does not forget the cry of the afflicted. Every injustice will be punished and will be put right. And David can sing, knowing that that will happen, knowing that God will not forget anyone.

And knowing the reality of the Lord's present reign, leads David also to pray for his own situation. You see that in verse 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. Do you notice what he bases his plea on? It's not on his good record. Help me Lord, I've been nice. It's not on his status.

I'm the king, come and help me. It's not a bargain. Not rescue me. Because if you do that, then I will praise you. Then I will tell the nations of you.

It's not, I'm regular at worship. It's not I pray occasionally. What's his plea? Be gracious to me, O Lord. He doesn't pray to God on the basis of anything about himself.

[14:34] He prays to God on the basis of his character. You're a righteous judge, Lord. So I trust you. And I need you to be gracious to me. Be gracious to me. Now at this point, it's important we ask an important question.

Because some people will say, this is just wishful thinking. This is classic religion being the opium of the masses. It's just all pie in the sky when you die. Just making us think that there will be justice one day.

How can you believe in this? We know the reality of this. I want to remind us, this is real. We have evidence. We have evidence from the past experience of the Lord's rule.

We have evidence of the present reality of the Lord's rule too. We have that evidence, not just through King David, but through King David's greatest descendant. The Lord Jesus Christ was in David's line.

He was the ultimate king whom God had promised to one day come from David's family. As you look at verse 13, if you know anything about Jesus' life, does this remind you of him?

[15:38] 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. Jesus, throughout his earthly life, faced affliction.

Religious leaders and political leaders plotted together to kill him, to get rid of him. He had people who hated him. People who opposed God's purposes in the world, as Jesus was working them out. He died. Deserted by his friends. Condemned by a sham court. Afflicted. And he knew what it was, as David did here, to call out to God, for help and justice.

In Hebrews chapter 5, we read that, In the days of his flesh, in the days of his earthly life, Jesus offered up prayers and supplication with loud cries and tears. To him he was able to save him from death.

And he was heard, because of his reverence. What happened to Jesus? Oh, he died, yes. He went down to the gates of death. But what happened then? He was raised to life again.

[16:41] God, in his righteousness, raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus from the dead. Jesus died to pay for all the unrighteousness, all the wickedness, all the affliction of the earth.

So that anyone who trusts in him can be raised to a new life with him. That's the deal. Jesus suffered and rejected, but was raised up. So in the face of injustices and struggles, we can pray with confidence to sing praises, because of the past experience of God's reign and rule.

And that can lead us to hope in the present reality of God's reign and rule. And thirdly, looking forward, it takes us on verses 14 onwards. We can give thanks because of the future certainty of the Lord's reign and judgment.

Look at verse 15. The nations have sunk in the pit they have made. In the net that they hid their own foot has been caught. For the Lord has made himself known.

He has executed judgment. The wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. So the Lord has made himself known to us through the scriptures and ultimately through Jesus. He has shown himself to be the righteous judge who will not let sin go unpunished.

[17:53] But he has shown himself to be the compassionate God who provides for forgiveness. That Jesus' death has paid for all those who put their trust in him. So now as verse 9 tells us, we

can see that the Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed.

Or who else is he a stronghold for? Verse 10. Those who know your name, who know what you're like, put their trust in you. For you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

No one who comes to Jesus will ever be turned away. No one who has trusted in Jesus will ever be let down. That's God's great promise to us.

And the fact that Jesus is alive again, gives us the certainty that one day final judgment will come. The Apostle Paul was preaching once to a crowd in Athens, the great intellectual capital of the day. And he concluded his speech by saying to them, That God has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

[18:58] The fact that Jesus is raised to the dead shows that he is the king, seated on the throne. He will judge. He will come to judge. And he will be a great and just judge. Because he is a man who has lived the life we have lived. Or the life we should have lived.

Who has experienced crying out to God in prayer over the agonies of this world. This judgment is a future certainty. But did you notice the two sides of the judgment?

Verses 17 and 18? Verse 17 first. The wicked shall return to Sheol. That is the place of the dead. All the nations that forget God.

So on one side of the coin there are the people who forget God. One day they get the reminder that God is there and God is real and God is judge. On the other side of the coin there are those who will not be forgotten.

Verse 18. The needy shall not always be forgotten. And the hope of the poor shall not perish forever. As we look at the world now it can appear that the needy are forgotten.

[19:57] The AIDS orphans of Africa. The persecuted people in the Middle East. Maybe you feel forgotten right now. Maybe with the troubles in your life you wonder what hope there is.

Or take confidence. The hope of the poor shall not perish forever. And who are these poor? If you look through the psalm it is not just the financially disadvantaged. It is verse 10.

It is those who know your name and put their trust in you. Those who will not be forsaken. Or verse 13. It is those who cry out to the Lord be gracious to me. See the needy are those who put their trust in the Lord.

Who know what he is like. Who know that he is a stronghold for them. Who know that we have no claim on God from our own goodness or our own performance. But only on his character and his goodness.

See the big question for us is not where is God in a messed up world. But where are we with God? Where are we with God? How do you see yourself?

[20:59] Are you one who is confident that God should be on your side? Is your prayer? I deserve this. I am doing my best. I have been to church. I come to lunchtime talks.

Or are you like one of the nations who has forgotten God? Verse 17. Or at least ignored him. Or do you know your need of him? As David did. And call out to him.

See how we relate to God now. Will determine how he relates to us on this great final day. When judgment comes. Let's look at verses 19 and 20 to close. David's prayer.

Arise O Lord. Let not man prevail. Let the nations be judged before you. Sometimes it looks like man will prevail. Doesn't it? If we could turn back the clock 26 years to life in East Germany.

But then East German Chancellor Herr Koniker. Early in 1998. 1989 rather. Had said that the Berlin Wall would stand for 50 or 100 years.

[22:00] It will not go anywhere. November the 11th that year the wall came down. Arise O Lord. Let not man prevail. Let the nations be judged before you.

It will happen. Put them in fear O Lord. Let the nations know that they are but men. See all those who question where is this God of justice. We'll see him.

And we'll see his justice. So the question is not where is God. The question is where are we with God? Have we forgotten him? Or are we one of those the Lord will not forget? Let's pray.