

Psalm 9:9-20

August 25, 2019

Matt. 25:32; Phil. 4:4

God Doesn't Forget Us

Psalms for Living

Three weeks ago, as part of this series on the Psalms, we reflected on Psalm 138 and its message of thankfulness. We saw how important it is to develop an "attitude of gratitude." Thankfulness is rooted in God's generosity. [As King David said to the Lord, *"Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand,"* 1 Chron. 29:14.] **God is a great giver and we can be great givers too.**

The week prior we read Psalm 137 and saw how God can make us better, not bitter. When we are wronged our faith in God empowers us to show that love is stronger than hatred; forgiveness is more powerful than revenge; and healing is more precious than condemnation and anger.

I've been calling this series of messages "Psalms for Living" because **the Psalms give us direction and hope for living a healthy and fulfilling life.** Jesus himself embodied the message of the Psalms: God's will for justice, righteousness, and peace among all peoples and all nations.

This week we read a portion of Psalm 9 where we find that God desires justice for people, that we need God, and that He rules the whole earth and all the nations. He's in charge after all.

The ascription for Psalm 9 says this: "To the chief musician according to "Muthlabban." A Psalm of David." So, King David wrote this song and instructed the worship director to put it to the tune of "Muthlabben." (Look at the back of our hymnal and you will find an index of tune names). Muthlabben has been translated "Death of the Son." There are various theories as to what that means. [The Chaldean translation (language of Babylon where Israelites were held captive for two generations) adds "concerning the death of the champion who went out between the camps," which makes us think this Psalm concerned the death of Goliath of Gath. Some have identified this psalm with the death of Bathsheba's son. Some believe it refers to what happened in the land of Egypt when Israel was delivered from slavery by the death of Egypt's firstborn. The Septuagint (Greek translation) version of the psalm refers to the death of the Divine Son, and recites his victory over death, and the grave, and all our foes.]

Psalm 9 is a triumphant song of thanksgiving as King David recalls many victories over his enemies. He also acknowledges that he couldn't have done it without God's help. (If you think the Bible only records the successes, just keep reading into Psalm 10. It is a complaint about the godless men in the nation. Like Psalm 73, it too asks why God doesn't see and do something about the wicked who seem to get away with evil deeds.)

God Remembers

David writes: ***"The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble," Psalm 9:9.*** Where do you run to, or whom do you lean on in times of trouble? Many addictions – drugs, alcohol, sex – arise because under stress people lean on these things. Yet God is stronger and more reliable than those things. ***"Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you," Psalm 9:10.*** Ironically, ***the more you depend on God the stronger and more free you become.*** Conversely, the more you depend on other means – like drugs, alcohol, sex, human power – the weaker and more enslaved you become. Wouldn't you rather be strong and free?

God is committed to justice – making things right; so there is always hope for those who are afflicted and downtrodden. ***The LORD is known by his acts of justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands, Psalm 9:16.*** Too often when "justice" or "social justice" or "fairness" is spoken of in the political arena, it means privileging some at the expense of others, and using government power to do so. ***The justice spoken of in the Bible is solidly rooted in the morality of the Holy One.*** Though moving slowly, God's justice always works to promote, strengthen, and extend God's purposes, while growing in people the virtues of honesty, patience, compassion, peace, joy, self-control, through relationships and personal character building. "God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work."¹

Only God can truly bring us justice for God sees the big picture. Human efforts at justice usually just create another set of injustices. Every time there is some horrific event, tragedy, or injustice that splashes across the news we have politicians and media pundits clamoring for some legislative response that will prevent the next terrible event from happening. Their efforts are often short-sighted ... the new laws never bring a utopian peace ... that's because the problems are in the human soul. If we really want the best for all, we will seek God everyday.

Throughout this Psalm the words (all deriving from a Hebrew root) "afflicted" (9:12), "poor" (9:18), "oppressed" (9:9), "needy" (9:18), refer to those who know they are not self-sufficient. They know they need help and so entrust their lives and future to God. [Quite different from "needy" and "poor" who entrust their lives and futures to charities or government.] God "remembers" those who entrust themselves to Him and who cry to Him for help. He is the One ***"who avenges blood"*** - meaning He who values human life. Those who trust in God, day by day, will not be disappointed: ***"...for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you" Psalm 9:10.***

¹John Nelson Darby

Reason for Praise

A couple of weeks ago I said that one of the hardest things for humans to do is to say, "Thank you," and really mean it, - including saying thank you to God. The psalm begins: *"I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High,"* Psalm 9:2. But when we get to verse 13 it becomes a petition and a complaint: *"Be gracious to me, O Lord. See what I suffer from those who hate me..."* Psalm 9:13. Haven't you felt that way sometimes? Isn't that the way it is, though? Oh sure we can sing God's praises in church on Sunday, or when things are going smoothly for us (though that's when we often forget to thank God); but when the going gets tough we complain. God why don't you fix this for me, right now? That's what we ask when we have problems in our personal lives and in the social and political arenas, as well. Yet did not our Savior, Jesus, identify with us in every way? Even as he hung on the cross he cried, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."* Yes, at times it seems as though God has forgotten us.

It's hard to thank God and truly mean it when you feel forgotten. It's very difficult to trust God in all circumstances, yet the psalm continues to declare God's praise, for God will come through. The wicked and the nations will be *victims of their own designs* and death is their end. This is God's justice. God will not forget the faithful; those who call on His name will not be entrapped in the designs of wickedness forever. The "hope of the poor" will not perish. Therefore *"Sing praises to the Lord...Declare his deeds among the peoples,"* Psalm 9:11.

Chums With the World

We are living in a time and place where voices in media, academia, and politics are saying that faith in God is okay if we keep it inside the sanctuary; that is, a private thing, for Sundays only, but not to be lived out in daily life. If you have faith in Jesus, okay, just don't tell anyone. Contrast that with Psalm 9: *"Rise up, O Lord! Do not let mortals prevail; let the nations be judged before you..."* Psalm 9:20.

Some years ago (March 2012) Roman Catholic Cardinal Timothy Dolan gave an extensive interview to the *Wall Street Journal*. He discussed at length his concerns about the government's encroachment on religious freedom. He also expressed a criticism of church leadership. He said, "We have gotten gun-shy...in speaking with any amount of urgency on ... morality." He says Christians have "got the impression ... that we should be chums with the world, and that the best thing the church can do is become more and more like everybody else." [see Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*; "God is dead" theology]. Chums with the world! What an apt way to express the failings of the American church! Again Psalm 9, *"Put them in fear, O Lord; let the nations know that they are only human,"* Psalm 9:19-20. Only human, indeed!

I guess we want to ignore the Scriptures that remind us of our true state: James says, *"Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God,"* James 4:4. Strong words, but true. **When we slide into the world's way of thinking and doing, we are really sliding away from God himself.**

Peter Hitchens, author of *The Rage Against God*, is famously known as the brother of the infamously outspoken atheist Christopher Hitchens. Peter observes that the world is messed up, not because of Christianity, but without it. He sees with frightening clarity the ills that have been loosed on society as a result of ever-increasing secularization.

Hitchens lived in the former Soviet Union for several years, and spent time as a journalist in other places devoid of religion. He saw the direct correlation between the absence of faith and the absence of basic human civility. He also saw clear evidence of what he calls "the fallen nature of man, and his inability to achieve perfection," in places where "man set himself up to replace God with the state." When the "iron curtain" came down across Europe and the Soviet Union collapsed, intellectuals and leaders realized how **communism "de-moralized" people who lived under it.** Not only did it purge from them a desire to improve and achieve, it deprived them of a moral compass.

Having experienced it himself, Hitchens is perhaps especially apprehensive about Western civilization's drift toward enforced secularization. He fears that an "intolerant utopianism" will drive out the remaining traces of Christianity from the public squares of Europe and North America. And he worries about "an ever more powerful state" raging against God.²

Maybe we are afraid to speak of the hope we have in Christ Jesus because we don't want to appear out of step with others, or we don't want to "offend" someone who might disagree, or we're afraid we can't defend our own faith. Jesus said, ***"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you"*** **John 15:18-19.** Martin Luther put it like this: "One with God is a majority." He was not so much concerned about having God on his side, as he was of making sure he was on God's side.

The Nations Cannot Match God

History is littered with the ruins of once powerful nations and empires. **Unlike the power of the nations, the power of God is always exercised in justice.** ***"O Lord; let the nations know that they are only human"*** Psalm 9:20. To be only human is to be fallen from God's glory, to be sinful and incapable of pure justice, compassion, and love. I was asked the other day if I thought there were more

²Marcia Segelstein, "Rage Against God," OneNewsNow Columnist - 7/13/2010

bad people in the world today than when the questioner was a child. My answer: Yes, because there are simply more people in the world – so it stands to reason that there will be more evil ... as well as more good people. Yet, said I, it seems to me that there is more evil arising these days because God is ignored or banned from public places and private lives.

Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men,

Psalm 9:20. God rules the world: a message of truth to hold on to and to proclaim. In that message is the healing of the nations, including our own. Nations tend to seek their own interests above all else; most individuals do as well. But that shouldn't surprise us. That's what fallen, sinful humanity does.

Yet, **God wants us to be the ones who remember always in whom we place our ultimate trust:** it is not the nation, or the government, or a party, or a lifestyle. Only in God can we have ultimate trust. Despite the wickedness in ourselves, in others, in society, we dare to trust – as the psalm says – that ***“The Lord is king forever and ever,”*** Psalm 9:7.

God does not forget the faithful. Though times get tough, though our enemies may grieve us, the promises of God endure; the word of the Lord stands forever.

Arise, LORD, do not let mortals triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence, Psalm 9:20.