

*Psalms 2019: Thankful Through Tears*  
**Perspective (Faith in our Fortress)**  
Psalm 9 | Pastor Jason Van Bommel

**To the choirmaster: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.**

<sup>1</sup> I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart;

I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.

<sup>2</sup> I will be glad and exult in you;

I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

<sup>3</sup> When my enemies turn back,

they stumble and perish before your presence.

<sup>4</sup> For you have maintained my just cause;

you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.

<sup>5</sup> You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish;

you have blotted out their name forever and ever.

<sup>6</sup> The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins;

their cities you rooted out;

the very memory of them has perished.

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD sits enthroned forever;

he has established his throne for justice,

<sup>8</sup> and he judges the world with righteousness;

he judges the peoples with uprightness.

<sup>9</sup> The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,

a stronghold in times of trouble.

<sup>10</sup> And those who know your name put their trust in you,

for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

<sup>11</sup> Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion!

Tell among the peoples his deeds!

<sup>12</sup> For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;

he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

<sup>13</sup> 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,

- 14 that I may recount all your praises,  
that in the gates of the daughter of Zion  
I may rejoice in your salvation.
- 15 The nations have sunk in the pit that they made;  
in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught.
- 16 The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment;  
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. *Higgaion. Selah*
- 17 The wicked shall return to Sheol,  
all the nations that forget God.
- 18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten,  
and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.
- 19 Arise, O LORD! Let not 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: Perspective**

Of mice and *Ratatouille* . . .

### **A. Giving Thanks in Faith**

Psalm 9 is an unusual psalm, in that it richly combines thanksgiving with lament. In many ways, it is the very definition of “thankful through tears.” The psalm opens with rich, heartfelt, enthusiastic thanksgiving and praise. In fact, it’s not until we come to verse 13 that we hear David’s plea for deliverance and realize that he is in distress and danger when he writes this psalm. His life is in danger, as he cries out to the One who delivers him from the gates of death, and yet the first and dominant theme of this psalm is thanksgiving and thankful praise.

David begins with a firm resolve:

*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. – vv. 1-2, ESV*

He declares his determination to give thanks to the Lord wholeheartedly, even in his distress. God commands us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to “give thanks in all circumstances.” Many times Christians will

wonder and ask, “What is God’s will for my life?” God tells us in that passage in I Thessalonians 5: “*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”

Of course, when Christians are asking this question about God’s will for their lives, this is not the answer they’re looking for. They want to know what God has planned for their future – the same kind of motivation that leads people to psychics and fortune-tellers. Of course, God gives us the most relevant data for that kind of question, too: If we belong to God through faith in Christ Jesus, our future in glory with the Lord has been secured through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s will is to bring us home to be with Himself and to then give us a resurrection body, perfect and glorious, for eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. Even that’s not good enough for these inquiring Christians, though. They don’t want to just know what God wants them to do today and where they will be forever, they want to know the roadmap of their lives, what their immediate future here on earth holds for them. That is not something God tells any of us. We live by faith.

David gives thanks in all circumstances, and he resolves that he will praise God in his thanksgiving. Specifically, David says he will praise God for His wonderful deeds and that he will sing praise to God’s name. This is true worship – focused on who God is and on what He has done. And when David mentions God’s name, he addresses God as “O Most High,” which is a reference to God’s supreme power, an aspect of God’s character that is very relevant to the distress David is experiencing.

When we are in distress, we need to stop and give thanks and praise God. This is what turns our perspective from being self-centered to being God-centered. The only way to live a life of faith is to do so in a God-centered way. A self-centered life of faith is a contradiction; focusing exclusively on ourselves and our circumstances in either self-pitying despair or self-loathing hatred short-circuits our life of faith. Giving thanks and praising God for who He is and what He has done lifts our eyes from our circumstances to the One who is the Most High, seated on His throne far above our circumstances.

## **B. Proclaiming the Truth in Faith**

Not only does David give thanks and praise God in faith, but he also proclaims the truth in faith. Much of this psalm is a proclamation of who God is and of what God has done and will do. David proclaims – to the people of God, to his enemies, and to God Himself – the greatness of God, what God has done for him in the past, and, by faith, what God will do in the future.

Listen to how David mixes proclamation of the truth with praise to God and a call to others to praise the LORD with him –

- <sup>7</sup> But the LORD sits enthroned forever;  
he has established his throne for justice,  
<sup>8</sup> and he judges the world with righteousness;  
he judges the peoples with uprightness.*
- <sup>9</sup> The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.*

*<sup>10</sup> And those who know your name put their trust in you,  
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.*

*<sup>11</sup> Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion!  
Tell among the peoples his deeds!*

*<sup>12</sup> For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.*

This is a potent combination, and it spells out for us what should be the pattern of our lives as well – a combination of proclamation, praise, and exhortation to others to praise and proclamation. David tells who God is and what God does, praises God for never forsaking those who seek Him, and then calls on others to join him both in praising God and in proclaiming His wonderful deeds to others.

This is what we should be doing in our lives. Whether we're stressed out and overwhelmed, under pressure, being tempted, or feeling wonderful, we should always give thanks and praise to God, tell others about God's greatness and goodness, and call others to join us in praising and proclaiming Him.

Specifically, in his proclamation of who God is and what he has done, David proclaims the sovereign justice of God, not something which is always easy to talk to others about. But David was able to proclaim it so boldly and clearly for two reasons:

1. He believed it to be true.
2. He found all of his hope in the truth of it.

Where the rubber meets the road with our profession of faith, I wonder if we can say the same things about our theology: Do we really believe what we say we believe about God? Have we staked all of our hopes on God being who we believe He is? Or is our theology just something we talk about on Sunday mornings and then sort-of plan around Monday through Saturday. In other words, do we sing about, read about, and pray about a sovereign God and then live as if we had to be our own Savior, Provider and Protector.

I'm not advocating living irresponsibly, of course, David had his army and his mighty men, and David trained for war against his enemies. But David staked his life, his future, his hope firmly on the truth that God is sovereign, just, and a refuge for the oppressed.

John Piper famously said that we cannot commend what we do not cherish. Another way to say that is that we will not boldly proclaim a theology we merely profess and do not deeply possess.

### **C. Crying Out in Faith**

In the midst of giving thanks to God, praising God, and proclaiming God to others, David is in deep distress, and so he does cry out to God in his distress. The clearest way to see this is to look at the petitions of David in Psalm 9; in other words, what does David ask God to do?

*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. – vv. 13-14, ESV*

*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! – vv. 19-20, ESV*

So, we have four petitions:

1. “Be gracious to me”
2. “See me”
3. “Arise”
4. “Let the nations be judged” (further defined as “Put them in fear” and “Let the nations know that they are but men.”)

First, notice that David’s petitions begin with “be gracious to me.” David acknowledges by this plea that he does not deserve to have God act on his behalf. He doesn’t approach God on the basis of what he deserves. He doesn’t try to boast in his accomplishments or merits; his attention is all focused on God’s accomplishments and merits, not his own. He doesn’t come to God and say, “You need to act on my behalf because I’m the king of Israel” or “because I am the champion who slew Goliath” or “Don’t you know I’m the man after God’s own heart?”

We have a fixation in our culture on what we deserve or what we think other people deserve. We can even be tempted to pray this way, to try to bargain with God about what someone deserves – whether healing or a restful vacation or a promotion or pay raise. But this is nonsense! Don’t ever approach God on the basis of what you deserve or what someone else deserves. Yes, you can plead for justice for the oppressed, but the basis for your plea should be the gracious and just character of God.

So, David begins by asking God to “be gracious” and then asks God to see him, specifically to see his affliction from those who hate him. He has already proclaimed God’s sovereign justice – that God rules, and that He rules as one who is just. So, he trusts that if God will take special notice, or pay regard, to the afflictions he is suffering at the hands of those who hate him, God will do right for him. Even though he is not approaching God on the basis of his merits, he is still trusting God to do the right thing, to be just.

How does he express what he wants God to do: “*Arise, O Lord!*” This request is repeated several times in the psalms, and it is a call for God to act in a sovereign and just way on behalf of His own people who are oppressed and needy. When God arises, He acts as the defender of the powerless, the warrior who fights on behalf of the needy and oppressed.

And so, what exactly does David ask God to do when He arises? Well, he doesn’t really tell God exactly what to do. Instead, he asks God to essentially put the pagan nations that surround God’s people in their place:

- *Let the nations be judged*
- *Put them in fear*
- *Let them know that they are but men*

If you take this three-fold petition together as a whole, David is asking God to manifest His glorious sovereign justice in the eyes of the nations, to show the nations clearly who He is as the sovereign, just, holy judge and ruler of the nations.

What's fascinating is how Jesus said He would answer this petition to "Let God arise" or "Arise, O Lord" or even "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered." How does Jesus come and answer this plea from God's people in the Psalms?

*Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. – John 12:31-33, ESV*

So, Jesus will arise and judge the world and cast out the supreme oppressor of God's people by being lifted up on a cross to die. God will display His character, His mercy and His glorious sovereign justice by the death of the Son of God on the cross.

This is the scandalous wisdom and power of God, the message of the cross, which Paul in I Corinthians says is foolishness to the world but, to those who are being saved, is the power and wisdom of God. God displays His love and saving power on the cross. God humbles and silences sinners through the cross, as we see our sin and its cost and our utter helplessness to save ourselves.

When we come to the cross, we also see the gracious deliverance of God and have the deepest reason to thank God and praise Him and to proclaim Him to the world.

#### **D. Seeing Accomplished Deliverance by Faith**

The last thing we're going to examine in Psalm 9 is a unique feature that we might easily miss in a quick, superficial reading: In Psalm 9, David speaks of the yet-future judgment of the nations and deliverance of God's people as though it were already an accomplished reality:

*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. – vv. 5-6, ESV*

*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.*

*The wicked shall return to Sheol,  
all the nations that forget God. – v. 15-17, ESV*

Again, these things were not yet accomplished realities: Certainly all the nations that forget God were not yet cast down to the grave. The nations had not yet all been rebuked; the LORD had not yet blotted out their name forever. David knows these realities are yet future, as can be seen in verse 18, which says,

*“For the needy shall not always be forgotten,  
and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.”*

So, what’s going on here? Why is David speaking of God’s judgment of the nations and His full and final deliverance of His people in the past tense, as though it were already an accomplished reality? These verses are what Bible scholars call “prophetic perfects.” The perfect tense indicates an accomplished reality, or a completed past action that has ongoing effects for the present. Here, David is speaking prophetically of what God will accomplish and yet he does so using language that indicates that God has already accomplished it. This is frequently done in Old Testament prophecy:

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins. – Isaiah 40:1-2, ESV*

*He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.  
Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions;*

*he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all. – Isaiah 53:3-6, ESV*

Yet this type of language is not just a feature of the Old Testament. We also find it most gloriously in Romans 8:

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. – vv. 29-30, ESV*

What's the significance of the prophetic perfect? If God has decreed something and promised it in His word, it is as good as accomplished. We do not have to worry about whether or not Jesus will really come back again, judge the nations, vanquish all evil, and bring us into glory. In the decrees of God, these events are a settled and accomplished reality. They are more certain than this morning's sunrise. If we align our faith with God's decrees, we will see our future final redemption finished and secure in Christ, and we will have reason to give thanks and rejoice, in the midst of the turmoil of the journey toward the glorious consummation.

This seems to me to be the key to being able to authentically be "thankful through tears" – seeing our future glorious redemption through eyes of faith as an accomplished reality. This is true faith in our fortress, that He will never fail to be a stronghold for the oppressed and that the cry of the afflicted and the hope of the poor will be vindicated by Him in His sovereign justice and full and final redemption of His own!