

# The Stronghold of the Oppressed

By Don Green

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## **Truth Community Church**

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road

Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

Let's look at Psalm 9 together. The theme of Psalm nine is the universal reign of God and his kindness toward those who cry out to him from the troubles of this world. I want you as you're listening to the message tonight, if I could just give you something to focus your thoughts on, it's obviously a longer Psalm and we're going to have to treat parts of it very superficially here this evening. If there's anything I would want you to walk away with from tonight's message is to wonder at, to marvel at, to love God for, to worship him for, are two aspects of his character that you wouldn't guess go together. There is a balance and a symmetry to the character of God in what I'm about to describe that fascinates me and that I think calls us to a particular kind of worship.

Psalm 9 describes God as the King of the nations and as the God who will judge the wicked and it makes no bones about the fact that God will bring retribution and punishment upon sinful men for their evil and wicked conduct. God is able to do that because he is strong, he is mighty, he is Sovereign, he is Master, he is King, he is a Warrior on behalf of his righteousness and that is one of the great themes that you see as you read through the 150 Psalms. Along with that, in what has to be one of the most precious aspects of God's character, side-by-side here in verse 9, is the fact that the very power that he uses to judge and control and subdue the wicked, he uses and exercises to protect and help and show compassion upon those who put their trust in him. The severity of God toward the wicked is he takes and uses for good to display kindness to those who put their trust in him. Look at verse 12. We'll get to this in a moment but I just want to highlight this to kind of focus your thoughts, "He who requires blood," that is, he who will bring justice upon the wicked, "remembers them." Remembers who? "He does not forget the cry of the afflicted." Verse 10, "O LORD, those who know Your name will put their trust in You, For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You." So there is this seemingly, if you would just to look at it very superficially, these things that are almost in tension with one another. They're not in tension but God is strong and mighty and powerful toward the wicked and yet he takes that power and uses it to bless those who seek him and put their trust in him.

So that aspect, that dual aspect of God, is what we're going to see here in Psalm 9, a message that I've titled, "The Stronghold of the Oppressed." We're going to break this Psalm down into two big parts: verses 1-12 is David's praise. His praise that we see in verses 1-12 and then in verses 13 through 20 we're going to see his prayer or his petition.

David opens with thanksgiving and with praise and he works through the reasons that he praises God and then he turns to prayer in the latter part of the Psalm. God's universal reign. God is a Warrior and God is a Protector of those who seek him and David praises him for that.

Let me just show you in an overview way why we're breaking down the Psalm this way. David opens up in verse 1, "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart," and then down at the end of verse 11, he says "Sing praises to the LORD who dwells in Zion." So he opens with praise and then in the middle he's praising God again. So in verses 1-12 we see the themes of praise uniting it together like bookends, putting together books on a shelf, praise frames verses 1-12. Then in verse 13, it shifts and he starts to make requests and he says in verse 13, "Be gracious to me, O LORD; See my affliction from those who hate me." So he's now turned from praise to petition. "Lord, I'm in trouble here and I need you to be gracious to me. I need you to show kindness to me." So his praise has led him into prayer. His worship has led him into a petition and that's the way that it should be as a characteristic of our prayer life. Our knowledge of God should cause us to praise him and flowing out of that praise comes our requests and petitions to him. Verse 13 he says, "Be gracious to me." Verse 19 you could even go to and he says, "Arise, O LORD, do not let man prevail; Let the nations be judged before You. Put them in fear, O LORD; Let the nations know that they are but men." Again, requesting God to do something in that latter half of the Psalm. So I say that simply so you can see why we're breaking the Psalm down this way. Praise in the first 12 verses, petition, prayer in those final eight verses 13-20.

Let's walk through this Psalm together as we do this. What can we say about David's praise? First of all, in the first two verses, you see his commitment to worship. If you're going to take notes, this would be a subpoint. Under David's praise we see his commitment to worship. He says in verses 1 and 2,

1 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.

Even though as we know from having read this Psalm, he's in a time of trials and afflictions, he's opening up with this commitment to praise God, to worship God, to ascribe glory and honor to his name and he uses five different verbs there: "I will give thanks, I will tell, I will be glad, I will exult, I will sing praise to your name, O Lord, O most high. I will tell of your wonders," meaning, "I will tell of your mighty deeds." David looking back over the history of Israel could look back on the call to Abraham, the way God delivered the nation from Egypt and the ten miracles that surrounded followed by the Red Sea parting and the other things that we read about in the Old Testament. Beyond that, David had his own mighty deeds that God had done for him as well, didn't he? It wasn't by the strength of his own hand, unaided, that he slew Goliath. David had a long history of Israel, now that he is king, he has a long history of Israel to look back and say, "God, you have been great in our nation and you have been great in my personal life."

And he says, "I am going to declare all of those wonders. I am going to praise you. I am going to be a thankful king. I am going to be a thankful believer."

Now, knowing that he's in the midst of affliction as he writes this, I want to point something out to you: we must have a settled commitment in our hearts that we will praise God no matter the circumstances. We need to grow beyond the kind of immature believer that responds to circumstances rather than the character of God. When circumstances get desperate, our praise starts to shrivel up and we just start to pray in panic, "God, you've got to get me out of this situation." Well, that's not where Christian maturity lies, let's put it that way. It is good and gracious of God to be sympathetic to the panicked cries of his young children and he receives us and he deals with us graciously because he's a loving and a gracious God, but what I want you to see, beloved, in terms of where you target your own spiritual life, the affections and commitments of your heart, what kind of believer that you're going to be: what I would set before you is what David says here in the first two verses is for you to settle and resolve it in your mind that whatever the circumstances around you may be and whatever else other Christians or non-Christians may be around you, settle it in your heart vertically in the presence of God and settle it tonight before you walk out if this isn't already anchored in your heart that, "I am going to be the kind of man, I am going to be the kind of woman that no matter what comes into my life, you will find me praising God, giving thanks to him because I understand that he is supremely worthy of my praise regardless of what's happening in my life. I want to love the Lord my God with all of my heart so supremely that nothing detracts me from the ultimate priority of my day-to-day worship of my God. That is going to be the commitment of my heart."

You see, one of the things that the Psalms teach us, one of the challenges for us, is this: we don't wait until we see how the difficulties turn out before we start praising God. There is no faith in that. That dilutes the honor that we give to God if we say, "I'm going to hold back or I'm too worked up about this to praise you right now. This has to work out and then I'll praise you." No, that's kind of getting things reversed. What we need to do is say, "God, I'm going to praise you. I'm going to worship you. I'm going to give thanks to you before I know how this turns out: before the check arrives, before the doctor gives me a good report, before the problems in my family are resolved. God, I'm going to praise you right now because you're worthy of praise right now." And so, and I ask it sympathetically, I ask it to encourage you, I ask the question having had to process it in my own heart in my preparation to stand before you this evening: ask yourself, look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself are you committed to praising God like that throughout life or does your praise of God ebb and flow based on whether you like your circumstances or not? If it ebbs and flows, realize that there is a point of spiritual growth for you to pursue and aim your heart after, to be committed like David was. "I will give thanks to you with all my heart, period. God, I declare that commitment before you without condition, without qualification. Lord, I hold nothing back in my heart. I am totally, unreservedly devoted to being a vessel of worship to you come what may. God, you will find me always with your praise on my lips." I want to be that kind of believer, don't you? I want to love God like that and not grumble my way through life. I've grumbled enough for the past 52 years. You know, let's get on with the good stuff. Let's

get on with what we were put here on earth to do, what we were created to do, to be a vessel displaying the glory of God and returning to him a heart of worship in response to the salvation that he has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Right? Why don't we all just be like that? Why don't we just be a church like that? Wouldn't that be great?

That's David's praise. He expresses a commitment to worship and as I said, he wrote this during a trial and that teaches us something important. That teaches us something really important. One of the things that I love about being a pastor to the same group of faithful people and seeing you week-after-week, is knowing and letting it tinge the tone in which I speak to you, knowing something about the trials that you go through and some of the hardships and the real heavy heart-aches that you go through. It lets me speak to you about something like this with hopefully a pastoral tone as I speak. Think about an airplane: what gets an airplane up in the air is actually the force of resisting wind. That's all I know about aerodynamics and so I'm not going to try and embarrass myself by going any further but the wind resistance ultimately is what gets the plane up into the air because the wings are properly set to make it take off. Well, what I want you to see is that your trials in life are like that when it comes to praising God. The common Christian on the street can let trials depress them and they declare their worry and anxiety to everyone around them. Look, let's you and me be different. Let's you and me understand that the trials that come rather than coming down and crushing us are actually that which can lift us up to even higher praise. That we can say, "No, the force and pressure of trials is not going to buckle my knees. It's going to lift me up and make me even more committed to praise God and to show and to display in my own heart in the presence of God that my praise of God, my love and devotion to God, my obedience to God is independent of my circumstances and the harder the circumstances get, the more my commitment to praise him will be on display." Why don't we be like that? Why don't we let trials lift us up to a purer and more intimate worship rather than letting them depress us down? Trials can actually be that which strengthen our resolve to praise God because it is a better test of our faithfulness to our King. You don't need much faithfulness to be happy in the presence of God whenever things are the way you want them to be, right? It's when adversity hits. It's when the shrapnel starts flying with the metal that a soldier is proven in battle. Well, let's you and me be the soldiers that are proven in the test of trials and the test of adversity and we say, "God, I'm going to praise you even now. This does not detract me from worship at all." Are you with me? I want to be like that, don't you? That's David's commitment to praise.

Now, as you move on in this first half of the Psalm, you see something else that David uses to inform his praise of God and that's God's conquest over the wicked. This would be the second part of the first main point. We've seen David's praise and that he has first of all, a commitment to worship in verses 1 and 2 and now we're going to see that he's praising God for his conquest over the wicked in verses 3 through 8. The context of David's praise gets more specific now as he moves into verse 3 and the context of his praise is that God rules over his enemies. God rules over God's enemies, God rules over David's enemies. Look at verses 3 and 4 with me. Remember, he's praising God here. He says,

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.

In very simple terms, let's just say that David recognizes the fact that the enemies of God ultimately stumble and fall either in the Providence of this life, you see that disaster befalls them. Or in the judgment to come when God judges the world in righteousness, there will be no unrepentant sinner that survives the hand of God in judgment. God conquers them all. God is a Warrior. God rules even over his enemies. It is futile to sin against God unrepentantly. It is futile to raise your fist against him because no one has the power or mettle to stand against him. That's how great God is. Nations can rise up against him and Christ in that great day will slay them with the breath of his mouth. Wow! That's greatness! That's mighty power that transcends anything that we know in our natural persons. David says, "God, because of your great power that is manifested in your control and judgment over your enemies, I will praise you."

Now, David says in verse 4, in fact he's talking about it, he says, "When my enemies turn back," verse 4, "You have maintained my just cause," probably looking back on past ways that are unspecified here in Psalm 9 where God had helped him. Let's just take another pastoral moment here with each other and speak to our hearts and address our hearts that we might respond rightly to God's word tonight. I realize that it's difficult to bear the relentless attacks of people who are opposed to you, to deal with the vicious things that are said and the difficult obstacles that people place in your way and the criticisms that are unjust sometimes simply because you are trying to be faithful to Christ in his word and it invites this vitriolic reaction, this angry reaction, from the people around you. That's difficult and I won't pretend to be one who's experienced a whole lot of that in my life. I often think about that and I think, "Boy, I wonder if that's just a measure of my own lack of faithfulness." But that's for another time. But it's difficult to sustain that, to bear that kind of attack. I don't lightly dismiss the heartache that it brings to you. But here's what I want you to think about, here's where your mind needs to go in those times when your loved ones are spurning you because of your faithfulness to Christ and your pleas for their repentance and their call to come to Christ fall on deaf ears and it's obvious that they would prefer you to just be quiet: listen, God is over and God reigns over those who oppose him. He reigns over those who oppose Christ. He reigns over those. He rules over those who attack us and make our life difficult in unrighteousness and we have to come back to that and rest in that. Rather than simply view it on a human level that says, "Why is he treating me this way?" come back to the fact, again, let the wind of that opposition lift you up higher like the wind lifts the plane up higher, let it lift you higher and remind you of the fact that, "My hope, my satisfaction, my earthly contentment is not based on how the men around me treat me. I rest in the anchor. The foundation of my heart is in the faithfulness of God who reigns over all of this. If he sees fit for just a short time to allow me to endure something of the difficulty that Christ himself faced when he was on earth at the hands of wicked men, then I'm going to accept that. No, I'm even going to embrace it because this will simply be the wind that blows me closer to God in the process and this will teach me," you say to yourself, "this will teach me to love the world a little bit less because it's kind of a pain in the neck right now and it

will make me love my God who is my stronghold, who is faithful, who is my refuge, who is my eternal rest and home. It's going to make me love him and draw my affections to him all the more. Therefore, the opposition that I'm feeling is actually doing me a favor because it's teaching me to wean myself from my inborn affection and love for the things of this world and the approval of men and let me be just a little bit more completely devoted to my Christ." I want to be like that, don't you? Why don't we all be like that? Why don't we instead of getting riled up at the opposition, just let that drive us closer to our God and maybe that earthly opposition is just a little bit of discipline to draws back even more to where our heart belongs. That would be alright, wouldn't it? That would be okay to live life that way.

Well, that's what David is doing here. He's praising God for God's control, his conquest over the wicked. And when you realize, understand what David goes on to say in verses 5-8, you realize that this is no close call for God. It's not difficult for him. In fact, his control is so complete and so dominant that there's really no other way for us to view it except to worship him and to let our affections be to him alone. Look at verse 5. Those of you that have in the past maybe gotten worked up over political issues that don't go your way, the election turns out wrong or whatever. Let this help you in what we see here in verses 5-8. David is still praising God: praising him for his power, praising him because he's a Warrior. He says,

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.

God will so completely destroy the wicked that they won't even be remembered. They'll be like that dream that you have and you wake up with a start, "Oh, what was that?" And then all of a sudden you can't even remember the details of it. That's what wicked people are like in the presence and the plan of God. Those who are without Christ, this is their destiny. They will be forgotten. God will erase the memory of them in judgment and the righteous will not be tormented by them any longer. That's how great the power of God is and those of you who do not know Christ here today, that massive, omnipotent power is aligned against you right now. This would be a great time for you to repent and come to Christ for salvation and say, "God, save me from that kind of destiny. Forgive me for my indifference and my rebellion against you. Thank you for giving me a word of warning so that I could wake up tonight and come to you through faith in Christ." Yes, that's what you should do. For those of us that know Christ, this is our call, our invitation, yes even our command to put the wicked in perspective and to realize that they are living on borrowed time. God has the wicked on a short leash and one day he's going to yank that leash and it's going to be over. That's how great his power is.

You go on in verse 7, "the memory of them has perished," verse 6, "But the LORD abides forever." Their memory is going to disappear like a morning fog in the sunlight. It's just going to evaporate but God, by contrast, this God, the Lord, the God of the Bible,

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.

God rules. There is no doubt about the outcome. There is no question about how this turns out. And the wickedness of people who have hurt us in positions of spiritual authority or who have sinned against us and used us and abused us in the past, all of that, God is going to judge. God will make it right in the end. We don't have to settle scores here on this earth. We don't have to be troubled by what is happening to us now. We can simply rest in the fact that our God reigns. He will judge the world. He will judge it in righteousness and we can leave it with him. Beloved, what that does for you is it takes a huge burden off your mind, a huge weight off your shoulders when you say, "Lord, I'm just going to leave it with you and I'm just going to go about and live my life in the perspective, in the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. God, you deal with it. It's your prerogative anyway. You're the only one who can. I can't do anything about it. I'm just going to trust you and as I trust you for your judgment, I'm going to praise you because you are so vast and great." We can sing even when we're under attack because we know who rules over all. Beloved, get this, write this down if you're taking notes: the one, the God, the Warrior who will judge all the world is the same God and Warrior who upholds your cause as well. You're in the hands of a mighty, mighty, mighty God. That's all you need to know. That's all you need to know.

So God receives David's commitment to praise. David praises him because God conquers the wicked and then David goes on further. He continues his praise with what we alluded to a little bit earlier, this is a third aspect of his praise here and it's God's compassion toward the weak. God's compassion toward the weak. There is this wonderful acknowledgment of the kindness of God. This mighty Warrior against the wicked is a tender Father to those who trust him. That blows my mind away. That fractures my ability to maintain coherent thought almost because it is so great. In earthly life, generally speaking, not to say too much, but the people who are the alpha males, the really strong, aggressive people, don't have the ability to turn and be kind to those who are less fortunate. Those who can do them no good find that they get overlooked by guys like that. God's not like that. God is the perfection of power and yet look at how he uses it. Verse 9, I love him for this and you should love him for this too. Verse 9,

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.

God is strong and mighty and yet Scripture tells us elsewhere, Psalm 18:35, that his gentleness makes us great. This great Warrior is a God of unending compassion toward those who seek him. So David praises God for his kindness and his protection of the weak and he says, "You're a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." Well, a stronghold communicates the idea of a high, protected place that the enemy can't get to; a safe retreat where there is security. What David is saying, he's using this metaphor to say, "God, you're like that to those who seek you. You are like a fortress

of protection for those who take refuge in you." He says, "God, I love you for that. I praise you for that. That is such a marvelous perfection of your character that you are like that." God has wisdom and might to overthrow the wicked, to turn their plots against them and yet he has love and compassion and gives attention to those who trust him. What a great God! There is no capacity to adequately declare the glory of one like that. Sovereign perfection and power, condescending love that cares for the weak and neglected and oppressed. On this side of the New Testament, we see how far that condescension and love would go, all the way to the cross of Christ. All the way to offering himself, his own life as a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of God. A once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ for the sake of those who would repent and believe in him. Are you kidding me? God's really like that? That's how much, beloved, that's how much of a stronghold he is. It's not that we're righteous and strong and we go there and find that kind of compassion and care. No, no, quite to the contrary. We find the stronghold of God when we go to him in weakness and confession of sin and say, "Lord, I have no righteousness of my own. I take my refuge in you alone."

Jesus says, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Are you weary of sin tonight? God says, "I am a stronghold for people like you. Come to me. I will protect you. I will help you. I will cleanse you. I will forgive you." The mirror image of that, the other side of that is that for those of us, those of you, because I'm not in this camp, those of you that think you're good enough, those of you that think you're strong enough, those of you who think, "I can do it on my own," God's not a refuge for you. God's not a stronghold for you. God's a Warrior against your pride and self-righteousness. For those of us who are repentant and humble ourselves before him, God says, "Come. Dwell in my fortress. Dwell where no one can assail you. Dwell in my perfect love and faithfulness and protecting wing." You know, the cost that you pay, the price that you pay for that is to forfeit all of your claims of self-righteousness. You just lay down your pride and self-righteousness and say, "Yes, I need a fortress. I don't deserve it. I could never deserve it."

Look at the verse with me again, "a stronghold for the oppressed. Those who know Your name. Those who put their trust in You." Scripture says, "The Lord will not forsake those who seek You." It reminds us of Hebrews 13 where Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor will I ever forsake you." That passage is a triple negative in Greek. "I will never, never, never leave you nor will I ever, ever, ever forsake you. Ever." That's how great his faithfulness is to those who trust him. You see, what all of this means for us here is that we need to seek him. We need to gear our hearts and mind and our time and our priorities to make room to love and worship this God in an undistracted way. You can't enjoy this kind of relationship that David is describing in a life that is always going 500 miles an hour with all the different activities of this world. At some point, you've got to say, "I've got to clear some things off my schedule so I can dwell in the presence of this great God." That's part of your act of worship to do that. And he's worthy of it. Maybe some of us should give up a little bit of our ambition as an act of worship to this God. Think about it.

Because God, watch this, God takes note of those who seek him. God takes note of those who make seeking him a priority in life. He does not forsake those who seek him. Be



honest with yourself tonight as you walk out and ask yourself: where is there in my life the evidence that I've really sought him and not simply my own pleasure and ambition in life? I'm not trying to tell you what to do with your life, I want you to know the blessing of God. That's why we talk to each other this way. Seek him. Well, that must mean something more, whatever seeking him means, it must mean something more than simply going blindly doing whatever you want to do and hoping that God will give you success in your efforts. You don't have to be a Christian to want God to bless what you have predetermined to do. A faithful Christian though, is someone who says, "I'm going to find a way to make this a priority." For so many of you, I thank God for the fact that you're here tonight is an expression of the fact that seeking God is a priority in your life. That's why you'd be here on a Tuesday night. Praise God for that.

Our God is a Warrior. Our God is a Father. We respect him for his power but we love him for his compassion. David concludes this section of praise in verses 11 and 12 by calling others to join him in this worship. He calls us tonight, the Scripture, the Bible calls us to join in this praise tonight as we look at verse 11,

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.

Sing praises. It's a command. It's a call to worship. David, as it were, says, "Through the first 10 verses, I've been telling you that there's commitment to praise God and he conquers his enemies and he has compassion upon the weak. Oh, won't you join me in lifting your heart to worship and give thanks to this great God? Sing praises to his name in response to the truth of who he is." And the believing hearts says, "Yes, amen. I will."

So David has led us through a brief theology of praise, the power of God and the love of God and praises him in response to that. God reigns over all. He judges sin and yet he has mercy on the repentant. What a great God! What a great God! If I could get up on this roof and proclaim it to the community from this rooftop, I would do it right now. Just get me a ladder and call an audience around so that we can declare the glory of God outside the walls as well. Shout it from the rooftops, "Our God reigns! He is great and he is compassionate and you need to come to Christ to know him!"

Now, David having expressed his praise to God, turns to prayer, turns to petition in verse 13. Before we get there, let me just stop and remind you of something that we've been saying multiple times here on Tuesday nights. Here's what I want you to see in addition to the text that we've looked at tonight, what I want you to see is this: you and I are both convicted about how shallow and superficial our prayer lives are. I get that so I speak as one in need of grace myself. But what we should see, what should ever more be drilling just a little bit deeper week-by-week, evermore sinking in, the water going deeper, the roots going down deeper in our hearts, is that David's praise of God is a very theologically informed, precise, intelligent active praise. He is thinking about the attributes of God and responding in praise toward them. The sovereignty of God, his nature as a Warrior, his compassion, his love, his grace, he's articulating all of that as he

expresses his praise. It's not simply, "God, I praise you now let me get to what I need here today," as if praise were an afterthought. David prefaces everything with a thoughtful engagement of his mind and affections with the character of God and that's the way we should be also. These things are written for us to model as an example and our hurried lives are the enemy of this kind of meaningful worship. We need to recognize that and somehow account for it in the way that we live.

Now, we've seen David's praise, let's turn to his prayer beginning in verse 13. There are two things that need to come out of my mouth right now. Number one: in the context of Psalm 9 as it is written, remember this that David is the king of Israel as he's writing these words. He's the king. He's God's anointed. Truly anointed, not self-anointed. He's God's anointed and look at how he prays in verse 13,

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.

Here is this great king, David, chosen by God, head of the nation of Israel, and he's praying in this humble way, "God, I'm afflicted and I need your help. God, I'm sinful and weak, please be gracious to me." David was not ashamed to speak the praise of God or declare his dependence upon God. It is so utterly contrary to the spirit that dominates most of the self-promoting aspects of what passes for evangelicalism in Western culture. If I see another self-promoting pastor on the Internet tonight, I'm probably going to get sick so don't expect me to answer your email tonight. I'm not even going to look at the Internet. I don't want to see anymore of it. It gags me. It sickens me. Look, there's something really fundamental, that's why I speak this way, there is something really fundamental at stake here: it's the very nature of what it means to be a believer is this humble, dependent, self-effacing nature of the man of God.

Look at verse 13 with me, "Be gracious to me, O LORD; See my affliction from those who hate me. Be gracious to me and I'll tell you what I'll do, God, I'll tell of all Your praises, That in the gates of the daughters of Zion I may rejoice in Your salvation. Before your people, God, I will rejoice. I will declare your praise. I will worship you with abandon." Remember how his wife despised him because he was dancing with all of his might? That was David. That's how much he loved God. In his heart as a king he was humble and prayed this way. He said, "Lord, I'm in need here. Won't you help me?" Somehow his circumstances had brought David very low. It seems like he's on the brink of death. He says there in verse 13, "You lift me up from the gates of death," and in that condition he asks God to be gracious. Do you see it, beloved? I ask you to see what's in the text before us. Once again, as we've seen over the weeks that we've been studying the Psalms, David is not asserting his own righteousness. David isn't saying, "God, you owe me one." He's not declaring, "God, I've done this and therefore you do that." David makes no appeal to his own righteousness or merit. He is casting himself on grace, not asserting an entitlement in the presence of God.

That's the basis on which he approaches God. David's appeal to God is this in what I'm about to say, he says, "God, based on your character, based on the way that you've delivered me in the past and have displayed your power, God, on that basis I ask you to help me in this present affliction that I have. I don't simply want relief, Lord," he says as I pointed out in verse 14. He says, "I want another opportunity to praise you." Look at it with me in verse 14. He says, "See my affliction. Be gracious, see my affliction." Verse 14, "So that I may tell of your praises. God, it's not just that I want out from under this burden. God, I want another opportunity to declare your praise before men. Won't you deliver me so that I can do that?" He wants to praise God again. Isn't that convicting? Doesn't that just kind of slice open our selfish hearts? You know, I am speaking autobiographically here. So many times the desire in prayer is simply, "God, make this problem go away," without any thought of any concern of, "So that I could glorify you more." When we stop at, "God, make this problem go away," we need to realize that's really kind of self-centered. We need to go a little bit further in the training and discipline of our hearts and say, "God, I want relief so that I can tell someone that you've been good to me once again, so that I can declare your praise because that's what I really want, Lord. Because my fundamental commitment is that I'm going to give thanks to you. I will praise you with all of my heart, O Lord most high. That's why I'm asking, God. It's secondarily about me. It's primarily so that I can declare your name once more."

You know, in years gone by when I was interacting with a lot of seminary students and all of that, everybody wants a a pulpit. All those guys, they all want a pulpit. A lot of times guys wanted it for the right reason. Sometimes you could tell, guys just wanted to be up front. It was about them being the focus of attention. The right attitude is, "God, give me deliverance. If you're going to give me a platform, O God, it's so that I can declare your praise. Nothing else matters."

The relief that he sought was for the greater goal of positioning him to praise God yet again and so his prayer in the second half of the Psalm flows out of his commitment to praise in the first half of the Psalm. You know, we talk about David being humble and praying this way, go into the New Testament and find the humility of Christ praying to his Father, loving his Father. The Son of God praying in humility before his Father. Wow. David's great attitude in prayer was surpassed by the greater David who came to deliver us from our sins.

So David prays, "Lord, relief my distress," there in verses 13 and 14. Verses 15 through 20, time is not our friend again. David has prayed, "Lord, relieve my distress." In verses 15 through 20 he says, "God, rebuke the nations." Rebuke the nations. Look at verses 15 and 16,

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.

Just think about it this way: when you're watching the news and hearing news accounts of people that have committed crimes and died while they are doing it, recognize that in that, this boomerang principle of those who do evil will receive it back on their heads, that's at work. There is a reason why that is reported so commonly, it's because it's one of the ways that God judges wicked people, that their own evil comes back to cut off their own life. It's not that they took their lives in their own hands or that the cops shot them and killed them in the process, no, it's much more theologically significant than that. It's that in their pursuit of evil they met their own end and that's because that's how God operates the universe. It's part of how he judges wicked people. Evil boomerangs on its perpetrators and that principle can be seen throughout the world and it shows that God is not some mere local deity. He rules over the world and what happens in microcosms day-by-day in little incidents like that are simply the rumblings of a greater earthquake of the coming judgment of God when he will display his power over all of the world to judge evil and bring it to an end. When evil fails and comes back on the heads of individuals in this life, it's one more token, it's one more spotlight, it's one more warning sign from God, "This is what happens to the wicked." It's all rumblings coming up to a greater climax when God judges the entire world and all of the nations in righteousness. We need to theologically interpret the news around us and understand what's being said, what's happening, what the Scriptures say about all of that.

Verse 17,

17 The wicked will return to Sheol, [the realm of the dead] Even all the nations who forget God. 18 For the needy will not always be forgotten, Nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever.

God will judge the wicked and yet he's going to remember and protect by name all of those repentant, humble ones who took refuge in Christ. I love him for that! Don't you? I love him for that! In this massive display of unmitigated power and righteousness, he's going to have his eye, as it were, on the sparrow of those who have trusted in him and says, as it were, "No worries. I'm not going to lose you in the process. My hand is safely upon you while I execute judgment on the wicked who deserve it." I love him for that. I trust him for that. That is my hope and refuge, that Christ bought for me and for you with his blood on the cross. Our hope will not perish. We will not be forgotten. Christ when he executes judgment will remember us by name. Our Brother will not forget us. I love him for that.

And so David ends his prayer here in verses 19 and 20. Knowing the greatness of God, knowing that weak, mortal men are opposing him in futility, recognizing that for a time they have been prevailing apparently, he asks God in prayer to act. He says in verse 19,

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.

David is saying, "God, I know that your righteousness is going to be vindicated. You will punish the wicked. You will give justice to the innocent. You'll do that in that great final day. God, exercise some of it now in the midst of my affliction and against those who are opposing your rule."

Let's bring this to a close. The strongest, most influential, powerful men who are enemies of God are doomed to failure. The weakest of those who trust in Christ are destined for compassion. Would to God that the enemies would repent. Would to God that those who are weak, trusting in Christ, would find the source of their refuge. There is one final thing that I want to show you that we could have said about almost every Psalm that we've studied so far. Psalm 9 has simply applied the principle that opened the entire Psalter back in Psalm 1:6. Turn back there with me. I want you to see this. I said at the time when we first studied this that Psalm 1 is enunciating principles and there's a sense in which Psalms 2 through 150 are simply applying it and interpreting that principle. Here is another illustration of this in Psalm 9. We could have said this about virtually every Psalm we've studied so far. David's confidence is rooted in what Psalm 1:6 says, "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." Psalm 9 is simply an outworking of that principle. As you read the Psalms, the more that you go back to Psalm 1 and say, "Here's the big picture outlined in Psalm 1," you start to see that the other Psalms are simply explaining it and applying it in different situations. What a great God! What a great word of God! These principles, "God knows the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked will perish," this is indestructible truth that you can rest your heart in. As you trust in Christ and as you see wickedness prevailing around you, come back here. Come back to your anchor. Come back to your hope. Realize that your God reigns over all and that he is going to remember you along the way.

Let's pray together.

*Father, our hope comes not from our situation. Our hope is not threatened by those who oppose us. Our hope is in you, the God who reigns over nations and yet the God who will not forget the repentant cry of the afflicted. God, of course our hearts are triumphant, of course our hearts are joyful as we close tonight, because you are our God and you will not ever, ever, ever, ever fail and you will not ever, ever, ever forget us in our affliction. We worship you as the Warrior over all the earth; we worship you and love you for being the Father of those who put their faith in Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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