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9 | PSALM 9

PRAISE FROM THE PERSECUTED

Drawing near to God when you suffer for Christ

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Announcements

1. Welcome visitors!
2. We are celebrating International Sunday for the Persecuted Church today. We are live broadcasting this on the Internet to people around the world. Many of the people joining us have prayed specifically for a very dear brother in our congregation: Alex Peace and his dear wife. To our Christian friends in New Zealand and in many places around the world, we welcome you. We are glad you can join us as we celebrate the miracle of Alex's asylum here in the USA.
3. Fall Cookout Today: all are invited to stay for our fall cookout. If you are visiting with us, please plan on staying. All have been provided.
4. Prayer for the persecuted church.

Introduction

Open your Bible if you will to **Psalm 9**. The title of our study this morning is: "Praise from the Persecuted."

A study came out this week about the happiest states to live in the USA. Illinois ranked 23rd out of 50. I thought Florida would be number 1, but it was 29. Hawaii was number 1, so I thought maybe Jill and I could be missionaries to Hawaii, but that wouldn't be right! Would it?! Utah was number 2, followed by Minnesota, North Dakota and of course, California.¹

The truth that we are going to look at this morning is that you can be **happy** anywhere because happiness is not about the *external* circumstances mainly – it's about the *internal* condition of your heart. In Psalm 9, we are going to see how David, even though he was severely persecuted, was able to write a Psalm of praise to God.

Praying for the Persecuted

I've never suffered direct persecution for my Christian faith, but I've known people who have. Today we want to take some time to think about and pray for the persecuted church around the world.

The United States Department of State reports that Christians in more than 60 countries face serious persecution or death from their governments or neighbors because of their faith in Jesus Christ.² When you woke up in freedom this morning, millions of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world woke up to family members killed for their faith, property destroyed because of their faith, and their lives ruined as a consequence of their faith in Jesus. Here are just a few of the statistics of recent persecutions.³

- 500,000 Christians have lost their homes in Syria.

¹ Adam McCann. "2018's Happiest States in America." WalletHub. September 10, 2018. Accessed September 15, 2018. <https://wallethub.com/edu/happiest-states/6959/>.

² Robert W. Boehme. "International Religious Freedom Report for 2017." U.S. Department of State. December 31, 2017. Accessed September 16, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm>.

³ "Persecuted Church Statistics." The Esther Project. April 27, 2017. Accessed September 15, 2018. <http://theestherproject.com/statistics/>.

- 100 Christians are publicly executed in Saudi Arabia every year (most by beheading). That does not take into account hundreds who are being tortured by the religious police every day.
- In the last five years over 900 churches have been burned down and destroyed in Nigeria.
- Over the last 20 years over 50,000 Christians have been martyred for their faith in Sudan.
- In the last 20 years 10,000 Burmese Christians have been put to death for their faith in Christ in Myanmar.
- In the last 100 years, 700,000 Christians have been put to death in North Korean prison camps.
- 348 churches in India were attacked in 2016. Some of these included terrorist bombers blowing up in Sunday morning worship. As shocking as that is, the attacks nearly doubled in 2017 to 736 attacks.
- Each month, 322 Christians are killed, 214 churches are destroyed, and 722 acts of violence are committed against Christians.⁴ All over the world, people who choose to follow Christ face a great cost.
- More Christians have died for their faith in the last 100 years than all other centuries of church history combined.

King David knew about persecution. What we find is that during times of great **persecution** David's **praise rises** and becomes more intense. During times he cannot see God with his *eyes*, he focuses on God with his *heart*. His highest *praise* comes during his greatest *pain* in persecution. How can we praise God in the pain? How can we pray for the persecuted? Let's study Psalm 9 and find out. The first thing we see David doing when he is oppressed is he is praising God.

1. **PRAISE FROM THE PERSECUTED (9:1-6)**

You are called to praise God in every circumstance.

WE WERE MADE TO PRAISE (9:1-2)

When hard times come, we are called to praise God! From the remotest jungle in Africa or the Amazon, to the most isolated island in the Pacific, every culture that has ever been discovered has worshiped. We were made to worship. We were made to adore something bigger than ourselves. What you worship is what you become like. We worship Jesus, and we want to become like him.

Psalm 9, though it is a Psalm about deep persecution, it is a praise Psalm. The prescription says: **“To the choirmaster: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of**

⁴ “Christian Persecution Today.” Open Doors USA. Accessed September 16, 2018. <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>.

David.” No one is fully sure what that means. Literally translated it is “the death of a fool.”⁵ It could be the name of a tune.

It’s very interesting because David writes it in the midst of severe persecution. He is worshipping God in the most difficult circumstances. Listen to David:

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
 I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.
²I will be glad and exult in you;
 I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

We see that David’s worship is from the heart. He says he gives thanks with his “whole heart” (9:1a). Praise is not just words, but it is what is in your heart. David says, even though he is persecuted, praise wells up inside him. How is that possible. He can’t just think of one thing God has done. He says, “I will recount **all** of your wonderful deeds” (9:1b). As you begin to thank God for one mercy, then other mercies will come to your mind. There are so many, you won’t be able to count them.

And the great key to rejoicing and worship is to get your focus off of self and circumstances and onto your great and mighty God: “I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, **O Most High**” (9:2). The great God who made you also made your persecutors. He has a plan in all your sufferings. So you ought to praise him.

The New Testament is very specific about our praise to God. We are commanded to give thanks in everything. That includes severe persecution which David was facing. Paul says: “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:18). Give thanks to God in everything? Yes! One reason why giving thanks is so important, is that it helps us **to elevate God over our circumstances**. You see, most people are only as happy as their circumstances dictate. But when we know the Lord, we always have something we can him thanks for. Whatever you are going through, praise God for God’s guiding hand. He’s got a purpose for your persecution and your pain. That’s why he deserves praise in everything: in all circumstances.

Worship in Spite of Fleas

If you don’t think God has a purpose for your pain, you might be challenged by the true story of Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie:

Discovering their new barracks in the concentration camp was swarming with lice, Corrie wailed: “‘Betsie, how can we live in such a place?’”

‘Show us Lord,’ Betsie prayed. ‘Show us how to live with lice.’ It was said so matter of factly it took Corrie a second to realize she was praying.

‘Corrie!’ Betsie said excitedly. ‘The Lord’s given us the answer from the Bible this morning ... “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:16-18) ... That’s it, Corrie! That’s his answer.

⁵ Or “death of a son.”

“Give thanks in all circumstances”! That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!

Corrie stared at her sister, then looked around me at the dark, foul-aired room. ‘Such as?’

Betsie replied: ‘Such as being assigned here together.’

Betsie told her sister Corrie to give thanks for the Bible. And then she said, they needed to give thanks to the crowds of women in the concentration camp and in their flea infested barracks who would hear the Word of God.

Corrie then prayed, “Oh, all right. Thank You, Lord, for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.”

Betsie then said, “And for the fleas. Let’s be thankful for the fleas.”

“The fleas!” Corrie shouted. That was too much. Corrie said, “Seriously? There’s just no way even God can make me grateful for fleas.’

‘Give thanks in all circumstances,’ Betsie quoted. ‘It doesn’t say, “in pleasant circumstances.” Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.’

And so Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas.⁶

It turned out that God had a purpose for the fleas. Those fleas kept the guards out and allowed Corrie and Betsie to read the Bible and evangelize for Christ freely in that prison camp!

Now their adventures in gratitude for the littlest things may sound almost a little bit silly, but by looking for something to thank God for in every situation, they were worshipping God, by **elevating him over their situation**. They were saying in effect: God is greater — even than this concentration camp — and he has given us things to give thanks for, even here.

Worship in Spite of Persecution

Give thanks in everything dear saint. Our sovereign, all powerful God has a purpose in every injustice or pain you suffer. You are shining the light of Jesus when you suffer. In fact Jesus says that when you are persecuted you are supposed to “rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Mt 5:12). In the book of Acts it’s exactly what disciples did. They rejoiced because they did not feel worthy to suffer for the high and mighty name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). David now gives the reasons he is worshipping and praising God in persecution.

DAVID’S REASON FOR PRAISE (9:3-6)

Though David is suffering persecution, he gives so many reasons to worship God. Why? Because God is on the throne, and at the end of the world will judge the wicked. Theologians call this *eschatology*. David’s reason for worship is eschatology. Eschatology

⁶ Revised from Corrie Ten Boom. *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1971), 209-210.

is the study of Last Things, or how things end. David knows how all this persecution will end. He knows the end of the story. God wins. God is just. God will take vengeance. God will repay. The righteous are forever God's possession. David knows how the story ends.

We Know How the Story Ends

David says, *I can rejoice and give thanks to God even when my persecutors hurt me. They can chase me down and cause me pain, but that can't stop me from rejoicing.* How is it possible David that you can rejoice in persecution and injustice? David essentially replies: *I know how the story ends.* Listen to David:

- ³ When my enemies turn back,
they stumble and perish before your presence.
- ⁴ For you have maintained my just cause;
you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.
- ⁵ You have rebuked the **nations**; you have made the wicked perish;
you have blotted out their name forever and ever.
- ⁶ The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins;
their cities you rooted out;
the very memory of them has perished (9:3-6).

We know how the story ends. The wicked lose. Already, David remembers that God has rebuked entire **nations**. He has turned back **Egypt** and Pharaoh in the days of Moses. He turned back the **nation states of Canaan** in the days of Joshua.

But the ultimate rebuke comes when all nations are gathered before Christ on the Day of Judgement. He will **make the wicked perish. The very memory of them will perish.** Indeed, the enemies of Christ will be **blotted out** of the book of Life forever. There is no hope if Christ is rejected. This is how the story ends for those who know not Christ. Jesus wins. Anyone who opposes Jesus, or his people, loses.

At Peace Because We Know How the Story Ends

Whenever I watch a **movie**, I usually end up falling asleep. Are you that way? I'll usually wake up at the last five minutes of the movie and see how everything is resolved. Even if I didn't watch the movie, I want to know how it ends. Then, when I actually make time to watch the entire movie, I'm not bothered by the ups and downs of the plotline because I know how the story ends.

For the Christian, we know the ending. **Jesus wins!** Knowing the ending always keeps us calm. We know how the story ends so we have peace in the difficult parts. This is also true in life. Too many people get anxious because they have no clue as to how life on earth will end. As people of faith, we know, so we can rejoice.

When persecution comes, and it will come, we must rejoice! We know how the story ends! When injustice comes because of the name of Christ: be glad! Jesus told us to be joyful when we suffer for him. Why? Because life on earth ends at the throne of God. We are rewarded for any injustices we may suffer at the throne of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you

falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for **your reward is great in heaven**, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt 5:11-12).

The wicked can only persecute Christ’s church for a limited time. Time is running out. The wicked’s persecution of the church will stop at the throne of God on judgment day. **They will turn back**, but will not be able to. It will be too late. **They stumble and perish** before the **presence** of God.

Live Life with the End in Mind

Saint of God, never live life worried about the future. It’s a sin to worry. We know how the story ends. Live life with the end in mind!

Jonathan Edwards at paltry 19 years old, wrote 70 resolutions about how to live. Listen to Resolution 19: “Resolved, Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trump.”⁷ Let’s live life with the end in mind. We know how the story ends. It ends with Jesus coming triumphantly to rescue his bride. Don’t be discouraged dear saint, rejoice! We know the end of the story! Praise him. Thank him. Rejoice in him. You know the ending!

We not only see the praise from the persecuted, but we see God is a refuge for the persecuted.

2. A **REFUGE** FOR THE PERSECUTED (9:7-12)

You are called to seek the comfort of Christ at all times.

A SOVEREIGN REFUGE (9:7-8)

God may not take away your persecution. He may not take away the opposition you face for being a Christian, but he does sit enthroned as King of your life. He is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. He “**sits enthroned**” guiding every circumstance of your life in righteousness. And he has a sovereign purpose for your suffering. Listen to how David counsels himself.

- ⁷ But the Lord sits enthroned forever;
 he has established his throne for **justice**,
⁸ and he judges the world with righteousness;
 he judges the peoples with uprightness.

David knows there is a throne that no one can touch because no one can get to it. No one can overthrow the throne of God. It is this God who rules your life with **justice** and with **purpose**.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards. “The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards.” Desiring God. December 30, 2006. Accessed September 12, 2018. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards>.

*Because of God's sovereignty, **justice** is certain.*

Paul quotes verse 8 in Acts 17:31, "God has fixed a 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." God has established his throne for justice. There will come a day when every wrong it's made right. There will come a day when sin is no more. God's total victory is coming. He will reign in justice. His kingdom will be world-wide and everlasting. God doesn't treat the righteous and the wicked the same. He has a day appointed. The standard you must have is righteousness. Do you have the righteousness of Christ? Does Christ live in you? That's the standard. God rules your life with justice. Those not justified in Christ will perish forever. You, if you have the righteousness of Christ will forever be established in that righteousness when Jesus comes. So he rules your life with **justice**, but also with **purpose**.

*Because of God's sovereignty, **purpose** is certain.*

One of the most important doctrines in the Bible is the **sovereignty of God**. All things work according to the counsel of God's will (Eph 1:11). How do you stay sane when the world is falling apart around you? You have to take refuge in a sovereign God. When David says God rules in **justice, righteousness and uprightness**, that means God's making things right in the world, and he's beginning with you. You are his "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). He's got a sure purpose for your life. God says to the Christian specifically: "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." And what is that purpose? That we who love Christ might be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:28-29). Seek refuge that God sits on his throne forever controlling his purpose for you: conformity to Jesus. Every event in your life is like a chisel or the grit of polish to make you like Christ. Count on it: this is God's plan in your suffering.

A REFUGE TO BE SOUGHT (9:9-10)

God is with you when you are distressed. He is a refuge and a stronghold for his people in times of trouble. But you must seek him. You must put your trust in him. He never forsakes those who seek him. That's what David says.

⁹The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.

¹⁰And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

God is always a **stronghold** or refuge for the **persecuted**. Remember **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**, God didn't put out the fire – he just put Jesus in there with them. It's not about God "putting out your fires." It's about who is in there with you. The Lord is with the persecuted. A couple of you that are here today have faced real and severe persecution. Can you testify that the Lord will never abandon or forsake his children?

Darlene Deibler Rose

I think of Darlene Deibler Rose. She sought God earnestly as a refuge in very deep ways as a missionary who was imprisoned in Japan in World War II. I got to hear her tell the following story in person in my college years. She was a missionary in Indonesia and was captured and imprisoned by the Japanese. She was **sentenced to death** because of her Christian faith. Starving in her cell, she looked out to the courtyard where more privileged prisoners were. She saw a woman sneak a bunch of bananas. No one knew she had those bananas, except Darlene. Suddenly, all Darlene could think about was how good a banana would taste. Darlene said,

I dropped to the floor of my cell. Exhausted from my efforts of simply peering out the window, I shook all over. Worse still, I began to crave bananas. Everything in me wanted just one banana. I could see them; I could smell them; I could taste them. I got down on my knees and said, “Lord, I’m not asking you for a whole bunch like that woman has. I just want one banana.” I looked up and pleaded, “Lord, just *one* banana.”

For months she had only been given a cup of rice a day (filled with worms, which she ate since she was starving). She began to rationalize that God could not possibly get a banana to her in prison. It was too risky. Darlene said,

There was more chance of the moon falling out of the sky than of one of them bringing me a banana.... I bowed my head again and prayed, “Lord, there’s no one here who could get a banana to me. There’s no way for you to do it. Please don’t think I’m not thankful for the rice porridge. It’s just that—well, those bananas looked so delicious!

She had witnessed miracles before and experienced true divine healing there in prison, but she could see no way in her mind how God could get a banana to her. The next morning, as the officers approached her cell, she knew she would have to get up and bow to them. She was skin and bones and was terribly weak, but she would be beaten over her back with a cane if she didn’t bow perfectly.

When the door opened, it wasn’t the terrible prison guards. It was her old friend Mr. Yamaji, the Kampili camp director where she had been before she was taken away and sentenced to death. She had told him about Christ several months earlier, and now Mr. Yamaji was a true Christian.

I clapped my hands and exclaimed, “Mr. Yamaji, it’s just like seeing an old friend!”

Mr. Yamaji didn’t say a word, but spoke with the guards that would normally interrogate her. He spoke with them for a long time. Finally Mr. Yamaji came back to my cell.

“You’re very ill, aren’t you?” he asked sympathetically.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Yamaji, I am.”

Mr. Yamaji turned around without saying much. As the prison door closed and the guards followed Mr. Yamaji out, Darlene suddenly realized she hadn’t bowed. She just knew that when Mr. Yamaji left, the prison guards would beat her for not bowing. After a

little while, she heard feet coming again to her prison cell. She just knew a beating was coming. The door opened. Struggling to her feet, she stood ready to get ready for her beating. But the prison guard opened the door, walked in, and with a sweeping gesture laid a gift at her feet—bananas! “They’re yours,” he said, “and they’re all from Mr. Yamaji.” She sat down in stunned silence and counted them. There were 92 bananas. Darlene recounts:

In all my spiritual experience, I’ve never known such shame before the Lord. I pushed the bananas into a corner and wept before him. “Lord, forgive me; I’m so ashamed. I couldn’t trust you enough to get even one banana for me. Just look at them—there are almost a hundred.

In the quiet of the shadowed cell, the Lord answered back within my heart: “That’s what I delight to do, exceeding abundantly above anything you ask or imagine.” I knew in those moments that nothing is impossible to my God.⁸

So many miracles happened in Darlene’s 4 years of captivity. She was eventually released. But the banana one is my favorite story of how God cares for the persecuted. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed and persecuted. Seek God as your refuge. Seek his face continually. You will not be disappointed.

Darlene Deibler Rose could say with David in verse 10:

And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you (9:10).

God will never forsake those who seek him. Though persecution may lead to death, we must remember that death is the greatest victory. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, not even death!

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:35-39).

A REFUGE TO BE CELEBRATED (9:11-12)

The Lord is to be celebrated! And he is especially celebrated by the persecuted Christians. David says, even when all is stripped away from you, you should **sing praises to the Lord**. He’s sweeter than honey. He’s fairer than ten thousand others. A day in his courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion!
Tell among the peoples his deeds!

⁸ Darlene Deibler Rose. *Evidence Not Seen* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 149-150.

¹² For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

Here is David, probably sitting in a cave somewhere, having been brought to within inches of his life through King Saul's javelin. We really don't know the context, but perhaps it is during this time of great persecution before he became king. And what does David sing about: **Yahweh sits enthroned in Zion!** He wants to tell everyone about it. He doesn't see the thousands of soldiers out for his life. He sees the LORD sitting enthroned over his life. David feels safe because he knows God is protecting him and **God never forgets the cry of the afflicted.**

Paul and Silas at Philippi

Why does David sing when he's being persecuted? It's the same reason Paul and Silas sang in the Philippian prison. Remember they got arrested for preaching the Gospel. We read in Acts 16:22-24,

The magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

What did they do?

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened (Acts 16:25-26).

Paul and Silas prayed and sang! An **earthquake** shakes the prison! The guard is about to kill himself, but Paul stops him and leads him to the Lord. Can I just say that God is a refuge to be celebrated! God is with you when you are suffering. When you feel forsaken, God is there! Paul and Silas celebrated even after they were severely beaten.

Richard Wurmbrand

Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand spent 14 years in prison for preaching the gospel. Although his captors smashed four of his vertebrae and either cut or burned 18 holes in his body, they could not defeat him.

He testified, "Prisoners and even the guards very often wondered at how happy Christians could be under the most terrible circumstances. We could not be prevented from singing, although we were beaten for this. I imagine that nightingales, too, would sing, even if they knew that after finishing they would be killed for it. Christians in prison danced for joy. How could they be so happy under such tragic conditions?"⁹ Wurmbrand says of his time in prison for Christ, that although he was often tortured, God's joy was constantly with him. After 14 years in a dark prison, he had forgotten what color looked

⁹ Richard Wurmbrand. *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Co., 2004), Kindle Locations 1029-1032.

like. He writes about his time there that he could not stop rejoicing. “Alone in my cell, cold, hungry, and in rags, I danced for joy every night.”¹⁰ He says:

Sometimes I was so filled with joy that I felt I would burst if I did not give it expression. I remembered the words of Jesus, “Blessed are you when men come to hate you, when they exclude you from their company and reproach you and cast out your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!” I told myself, “I’ve carried out only half this command. I’ve rejoiced, but that is not enough. **Jesus clearly says that we must also leap.**”

When the guard came by and peered through the spy-hole, he saw me springing about my cell. His orders must have been to distract anyone who showed signs of breakdown, for he padded off and returned with some food from the staff room: a hunk of bread, some cheese, and sugar. As I took them I remembered how the verse in Luke went on: “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy—for behold *your reward is great.*” It was a very large piece of bread—more than a week’s ration.

I rarely allowed a night to pass without dancing, from then on; although I was never paid for it again, I made up songs and sang them softly to myself and danced to my own music. The guards became used to it. I did not break the silence, and they had seen many strange things in these subterranean cells. Friends to whom I spoke later of dancing in prison asked, “What for? What use was it?” It was not something useful. It was a manifestation of joy like the dance of David, a holy sacrifice offered before the altar of the Lord. I did not mind if my captors thought I was mad, for I had discovered a beauty in Christ that I had not known before.¹¹

David rejoiced in persecution. Paul and Silas rejoiced. Richard Wurmbrand and millions of others of our persecuted brothers and sisters rejoice in persecution. How is it possible? Strangely enough, it is the joy that when all is stripped from you, and Christ is all you have, that he truly is your refuge. When he is all you have, you are fuller and happier, and more satisfied than you could ever be.

So we look back at Psalm 9, and we see in verses 1-12, David is praising God for past and present grace in persecution. David can’t stop praising God! Now the Psalm turns from praise to prayer. David begins to pray for God’s grace for future persecution.

3. **GRACE** FOR THE PERSECUTED (9:13-16)

You are called to find grace in Christ who suffered before you.

God has grace if you are being persecuted or unjustly treated because of your faith in Christ. But you don’t just automatically get all that God’s wants for you. He wants you to ask for it. There are certain things that God has ordained to take place only through **prayer**. James says, “You have not because you ask not” (Jas 4:2).

¹⁰ Richard Wurmbrand. *Christ in the Communist Prisons* (Coward-McCann, 1968), 46.

¹¹ Richard Wurmbrand. *In God’s Underground* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Co., 2004), 56–57.

GRACE THROUGH PRAYER (9:13-14)

The first thing David prays for is grace. When you feel alone and the walls are closing in, you need to know God is there. You need his presence. David simply asks for God's grace.

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**,
¹⁴ that I may **recount** all your praises,
 that in the **gates of the daughter of Zion**
 I may **rejoice** in your salvation.

David pictures himself at the Temple, at the gates of Zion's daughter. Zion is another name for Jerusalem. Zion's daughter is God's holy nation of Israel.

There are days when you will be tempted to think: I'll never get out of this mess. This mess has ruined me. This person has ruined me. I'll never recover. That was not David's attitude. David expected God's grace and restoration.

The Lord often brings his people to the brink of destruction, and then he delivers them. The people of God were brought to the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army about to destroy them. "Stand back and see the salvation of the Lord," Moses says.

Grace at the Gates of Death and the Gates of Zion

David looks to God and what he's done in his own life, and he realizes, God has always protected his people. But that protection comes through **prayer**. That grace comes through groaning. We have God's grace whether we are **persecuted** at the **gates of death** or praising God at the **gates of Zion's daughter**.

Persecution often puts God's people in impossible situations. It is there we learn to pray. It is there we learn to praise. It is there we see God's awesome power poured out in grace.

Hezekiah's Prayers Defeat and Army

Remember **Hezekiah** when Jerusalem was attacked by Sennacherib and the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:36-37, 2 Chron 32:21, Isa 37:36-38). Serious persecution brought serious **prayer**, and God took out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night.

The Disciples Prayer Shake the Church

I think of what prayer can do. When **Peter and John were released from prison** because of their faith, the church had a prayer meeting. We read in Acts 4:31-

When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was **shaken**, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

The place was shaken. God answered. They went forth from there with boldness, preaching the Gospel everywhere. People all around the world who are persecuted benefit from our prayers. Sometimes God will shake the bonds of persecution and allow a

persecuted brother or sister through our prayers. God can bring our persecuted brothers from the **gates of death** to the gates of **Zion's daughter** (9:13-14).

It's only because of the power of God that comes through the prayers of God's people that the people of God are still in the world. Christianity would have died long ago, but God **protects** his people. "The gates of hell cannot prevail" against Christ's church. Thousands will die in martyrdom this year, this is true. But as the early pastor Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Waves of persecution against the church only serve to spread the Gospel.

NO GRACE WITHOUT THE LORD (9:15-16)

The ones who are in **real trouble** are not the persecuted church, but their **persecutors**. When David was persecuted, he rejoiced in God's grace. But he also remembered the **everlasting judgment** coming to the nations. The ones in trouble are not in the church but in the world. The nations of this world are digging their own grave. That's what David says.

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*

Every day the lost are digging a pit of their own making. They are digging their own grave so to speak. They are caught in their own trap.

4. THE FUTURE FOR THE PERSECUTED (9:17-20)

You are called to understand God's plan for those who suffer.

A CONTRAST OF FUTURES (9:17-18)

We are not fatalists. We believe that God promises everyone of his children "a future and a hope" as Jeremiah says (Jer 29:11). We believe God will preserve his people right till the end of time. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). The godly saint, the born-again person has nothing to worry about. All persecutors will eternally perish.

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.

Some of God's dearest saints are persecuted and without home or family or food. They are forsaken on this earth. But **the needy** persecuted saint **will not always be forgotten**. **The hope of the poor** persecuted saint **shall not perish forever**. God will preserve his people till the end of time. We know that he will, but we also pray for it because prayer is claiming God's promises. God uses the means of prayer to accomplish

the preservation of the persecuted. Remember how David prayed in verses 13-14? **“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.”**

How we need to pray for the persecuted church. But we also need to remember that though the church be persecuted to the ends of the earth, no one and nothing can prevail against Christ’s holy church. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it!

In the end it’s not the godly that need to worry. It’s not the simple persecuted, humble childlike saint that needs to worry. It’s the world and the devil that need to worry. Anyone who does not find shelter shall perish. Indeed, **“all the nations that forget God”** (9:17). This applies to whole nations. Those nations that forget God and persecute his people should tremble. They should fear. We should pray for the wholesale conversion of countries. It happened in Burma (Myanmar). There’ve been radical revivals in entire nations. Let’s pray for the nations that persecute the church of Jesus. God can turn them. God can transform them.

THE FUTURE FOR PERSECUTORS (9:19-20)

Finally, remember the future is in God’s hands. He holds the future. If you are a Christian, you are in the Father’s hand, and no one can pluck you from his hand. David’s prayer ends on a great note of confidence.

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*

We need to encourage our brothers in the persecuted nations of this world. We can talk with them now that we have social media and online platforms. We are called to **“go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”** (Mk 16:15). We believe that God wants to save those who persecute Christians. God loves to take a Saul of Tarsus and make him Paul the Apostle of Christ. Don’t you believe that God can save anyone?

A Gospel Emphasis

I want to put a Gospel emphasis on these last two verses. I believe that the Holy Spirit has come to convict the world of “sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come” (Jn 16:8). So you pray for the terrorists and the persecutors of this world to be saved. God will save them. God will put them in fear for their lives so that they turn to Jesus.

Even today, the Lord is appearing to Muslims in dreams and visions and proclaiming his Gospel to them. He is putting them in deep fear of their present condition so that they will find rest and hope in the love of Christ.

APPLICATIONS

Let me leave you with four applications.

1 - Legacy

Don't sweat the small stuff. When people go to your funeral, they will forget the small stuff. What are you doing for the kingdom? It's worth any suffering. Chances are if you are not getting persecuted or facing opposition in some way, you are likely not advancing the kingdom. Where ever the Gospel goes there is either rioting or rejoicing. Are you living as salt and light in this world? The world will be offended at the light. No one will care about your bank account or house. Your job will likely just be a footnote. What you do for the kingdom is what matters. What's your kingdom legacy? If you are a mom or dad, are you pointing your kids to Christ with earnestness? Are you on your knees with them crying out to God for their souls? Are you praying for the lost? Not just your family, but your neighbors, your city, your world? What's your legacy? Branch out and take risks. You might get persecuted. You likely will get persecuted. Expect it.

2 - Boldness

Don't be afraid to be bold. Speak the truth. Do it in love. But speak the truth boldly and courageously. I pray that our church can preach Christ fearlessly as they did in the book of Acts. Whenever we are bold, God starts to work. Boldness doesn't mean you are a jerk. Rudeness never helped anyone see Jesus. That's not from the Spirit. But boldness pushes forward against opposition. The truth is offensive to people. Don't be afraid to speak the truth even if it brings opposition and persecution.

3 - Prayer

We waste so much time in a day that God intends for you to have in prayer. Pray for the persecuted church. Knit your heart with them. Connect with them on social media. I keep in contact with a pastor in Nepal. He sends me photos and videos of his evangelism in the remotest mountains where no westerner would ever go. I have a firsthand view. I pray for him. Find those people scattered through the earth who suffer persecution and pray for God to give them grace to suffer. Connect with them. Pray for them. Encourage them.

4 - Praise

You were made to praise God at all times. Are you only a part-time praiser? God wants you to be a full-time praiser. David says: "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psa 34:1). If you are a Christian, you always have something to give God thanks for, even in your worst situations here on earth. If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, Ephesians 1:3 says you have been "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Don't just praise him in times of peace. The world can do that. Praise him in the persecution. Praise him in the pain. Praise him at all times. He is worthy!

Conclusion

The story is told that John Wesley was riding his horse down the road one day when he realized that he hadn't been insulted or had any conflict because of holy living in over

a week. He immediately stopped and got down on his knees and repented. He thought he was **backsliding** and had lost his edge. He asked God to sanctify him and bring him back into his presence. As he got up from his knees a peasant man who was working in the field near him recognized Wesley and said “There is that heretic John Wesley” and threw a brick at him. Wesley rubbed the bump on his head, and praised God shouting: “Thank you Lord, I still have it!”

If you are bold with the Gospel you will suffer persecution. “All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12). Child of God, you will of face great rejection as you follow Christ.

This morning our call is to live in a way that shines the light of Christ in this world. That in and of itself will bring persecution. Don’t be dismayed by persecution, but *praise* the Lord that you are counted worthy to suffer for Christ. Our call as well is to pray for the persecuted church. When the disciples prayed in Acts 4:31 for Peter and John, the earth quaked. The place began to shake where they were praying. Oh that God would give us that kind of love and prayer for the persecuted church.