

Psalm 10

Intruduction

The book of Psalms was the hymnbook and the prayer book of Israel. And similar to some hymnbooks today, the book of Psalms went through quite many revisions over a period of over 500 years before it came to the final form that we have in our Bibles today. Sometimes, there are clues in the text that can help us detect what some of those earlier editions of the Psalter might have looked like. We can't know for sure, but it seems like Psalm 9 (which we looked at last week) and Psalm 10 (which we'll look at this morning) might have originally been composed by David as a single Psalm. There are signs that the two Psalms *together* may have originally formed a complete acrostic with different sections of the Psalm beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In the first three books of the Psalms (that's the first 89 Psalms) there are only four Psalms that don't have a title (apart from the two introductory chapters) and Psalm 10 is one of them. Could this be a sign that Psalm 10 originally shared the same title with Psalm 9 because they were originally one Psalm (cf. Ps. 42 & 43)? In a number of ancient manuscripts of the Psalter and in the Greek translation of the Psalms, Psalms 9 and 10 *are* actually combined as one Psalm, which explains why the numbering is off for all the rest of the Psalms in the Greek Psalter compared to the Hebrew. Finally, as we'll see this morning, Psalms 9 and 10 share quite a lot of words and themes in common. This last observation is why I'm convinced that even if these two Psalms weren't originally a single composition, the reason they were placed together in the Psalter is because they were meant to be read and interpreted together.

And yet we still remember that Psalms 9 and 10 have come to us in the final edition of the Hebrew Psalter as two *separate* Psalms. Maybe one reason for this is that, as we're about to see, the "mood" in Psalm 10 feels significantly different than the "mood" in Psalm 9. Last week, David was afflicted and distressed, and even close to death and yet he begins Psalm 9 with these words:

PSALM 9

I. Psalm 9:1–2 — 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.

David comes to God as one who is in covenant with Him – who knows Him not just generically as God, but as the one who has given Himself to us in a relationship of committed and everlasting love. And so for David, even in his deepest distress, there is still reason for wholehearted praise. This "being glad" and "exulting in the Lord" isn't a means of forgetting our troubles or pretending they don't exist. Instead, it's the means of strengthening our faith and our trust in Him so that *in* our affliction and *in* our distress we might cry out to Him all the more earnestly. After determining to recount the wonderful deeds of the LORD, that's just what David does:

II. Psalm 9:3–6 — When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence. For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.

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.

Remember that this is intended to be a prayer that we all make our own. But how do we praise God for the enemy coming to an end in everlasting ruins, their cities being rooted out, and the very memory of them perishing? We have to remember that this is first of all a song or a prayer of the king. When the king prays these words, he's praying as one in whom all the people are represented. So when the king prays these words, the people can all pray these words along with him. The king's enemies are also their enemies, the king's victories and triumphs are also their victories and triumphs, and the king's joy is also their joy.

We also have to remember who the "enemy" is. They're all the wicked and the ungodly who hate God. They're all the wicked and the ungodly who cruelly oppress God's people. Shouldn't we, then, rejoice and be glad in God's righteous judgments? Shouldn't we be able to sing with David, knowing that these are the things God has actually done in history?—"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."

III. Psalm 9:7–10 — But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness. The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

David reminds himself that the LORD who sat on the throne in the *past* giving righteous judgment is the LORD who still sits on the throne *today* judging righteously because He "sits enthroned *forever*." The Lord's judgments are all His "wonderful deeds" (cf. v. 1) on behalf of His covenant people to defend them and to rescue them and to deliver them when they're oppressed and mistreated by wicked people who are more powerful than they are. And so we, too, can confess with the psalmist: "The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." Now that he's recounted the "wonderful deeds" of the LORD, David concludes:

IV. Psalm 9:11–12 — Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

This is the third time that David sings of the Lord sitting on His throne. And this is the third time we're reminded that the Lord doesn't sit enthroned just for the sake of sitting there. Always connected to the Lord's enthronement are the Lord's "wonderful deeds," and especially the Lord's "righteous judgments" on behalf of all the afflicted who cry to Him. And then, all of a sudden, we see David counting *himself* among the afflicted of God's people.

V. Psalm 9:13–14 — 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, that **I** may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion **I** may rejoice in your salvation.

On the one hand, David counts himself *with* and *among* all the afflicted of God’s people. On the other hand, because David is the Lord’s anointed king, he also sees *all* of the “afflicted” as those that are his charge and his responsibility. So we see that the Lord’s answer to David in *his* affliction must, in the end, be the answer to the cries of *all* His afflicted people. That’s why even when death appears poised and ready to swallow him up and there seems to be no way of escape, David still trusts that the Lord will lift him up from the gates of death. That’s why David can go on to sing these words:

VI. Psalm 9:15–18 — 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. Higgsaion. Selah The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

Remember that there are four different Hebrew words that appear for the first time in the Psalms right here in chapter nine. We hear for the first time of the “oppressed” (*dak*; 9:9), for the first time of the “afflicted” or the “poor” (*ani*; 9:12-13, 18), and for the first time of the “needy” (*evyon*; 9:18). And it’s in the context of *these* “firsts” that we also hear for the first time of God’s “throne” (*kisse*) – the “throne” of the one who is to these oppressed and afflicted and needy people their covenant King.

- **Psalm 9:4** — You have maintained my just cause; you have **sat** on the **throne**, giving righteous judgment.
- **Psalm 9:7** — The LORD **sits** [enthroned] forever; he has established his **throne** for justice.
- **Psalm 9:11** — Sing praises to the LORD, who **sits** [enthroned] in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

It’s in this context of confidence and faith that the king in his affliction cries out to God—and all of the oppressed and afflicted and needy cry out to God in and with their king:

VII. Psalm 9:19–20 — 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! Selah

But the psalmist isn’t finished. We come now to Psalm 10, and right away we can’t help but notice how it feels very much like the mood has changed.

PSALM 10

I. Psalm 10:1 — Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

That word for “trouble” and that expression “times of trouble” appears only one other time in the whole book of Psalms and that’s in chapter nine. In chapter nine, the Psalmist confessed by faith:

□ **Psalm 9:9** — The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, *a stronghold in times of trouble*.

Now he cries out: “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? *Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*” It’s very much in vogue, today, to be “real,” and there are some senses in which this is a good thing. The psalmist is being very “real” here, isn’t he? But when “being real” means dishonoring God by failing to trust him wholeheartedly, then being “real” is just the same thing as being “sinful.” And we are sinful “for real,” aren’t we? It’s just that that’s not something to boast about. There’s a difference between saying to someone else, “Why does God hide Himself in times of trouble?” and saying, “Why does my Lord hide Himself in times of trouble?” There’s even a difference between saying *to someone else*, “Why does my Lord hide Himself in times of trouble?” and crying out *to God*, “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do *You* hide Yourself in times of trouble?” Those aren’t the “real” words of a doubt that dishonors God; they’re the very “real” words of an unshakable faith expressing itself in the midst of the utmost confusion and distress. Jesus didn’t cry out on the cross, “God has forsaken me!” Neither did He simply say, “Why have you forsaken me?” Instead, what did He cry out?—“*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mat. 27:46) Even as the psalmist is asking why the Lord stands far away and why He has hidden Himself, he still believes that the Lord is present with him to hear his cries (cf. Calvin). And so we learn that even when the Lord *hides himself* “in times of trouble,” it’s still true that He can be at the very same time *our stronghold* “in times of trouble” because it’s still *to Him* that we cry out and it’s actually in that act of crying out to Him that we not only express our trust, but that we also *find Him to be* our stronghold. As one commentator writes: “Such questions [as we have in verse one]... form the cry of a *faithful believer to the LORD, the covenant God.*” (Ross)

And yet none of this changes the fact that in the midst of this underlying trust, there is the definite feeling, here, of abandonment. Why is this? The psalmist goes on to sing—and to pray and cry out to God:

II. Psalm 10:2–6 — In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. The wicked, in the pride of his face, says, “He will not seek out [my ways]”; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.” His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, “I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.”

Are you feeling even more the change in mood from Psalm 9? Why does God seem to be hiding Himself and standing far away? Because it’s the wicked who seem to be magnified in our eyes and “larger than life” (cf. Craigie). Here are five verses all about the wicked! Why does it seem

that God is hiding Himself and standing far away? Because the wicked actually boast that He *is*, and then they go about living their lives successfully on the assumption that He *is*.

All the thoughts of the wicked are: “There is no God.” That’s not a theoretical atheism that denies the existence of God; it’s a practical atheism that denies the relevance of God. In other words, God may be “there”—in fact, let’s admit that He is—but He doesn’t ultimately matter; His existence is irrelevant to me and to the life that I live. That’s what the wicked man is telling himself every day, all day long. And do you know why he can get away with telling himself that? It’s because God remains “hidden.” “The wicked boasts of the desires of his soul... His ways prosper at all times.” So, naturally, what’s he going to do? He “curses and renounces the LORD. In the pride of his face [he] says that the Lord will never “seek out” his ways. He’ll always get off scot-free; He’ll never be called to account. And as the days, and the weeks, and the months, and the years, and even an entire lifetime goes by, it sure seems like he must be right. In chapter nine, we read:

□ Psalm 9:10 — Those who *know your name* put their trust in you... you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

But this is actually the cause of a very real problem for us. The more we’re a people who truly know the Lord’s name and are trusting in Him and seeking after Him, the more distressing it is to us to know that the wicked are cursing and renouncing the Lord’s name, boasting in the desires of their own soul, refusing to seek after the Lord — and all the while getting away with it. How can that be? How can they be successfully living a life that’s built entirely on the philosophy that “there is no God”? And do you know what the answer is? It’s because there is a sense in which to all outward appearances it’s true—there is no God. I guess you could say that’s being “real.” We just read in Psalm 9:

□ Psalm 9:7 — The LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for judgment.

Those are encouraging words, but as far as the wicked are concerned, “[the Lord’s] judgments are [all] on high, out of his sight.” And so we’re reminded again that what we’re talking about is not a philosophical atheism (God doesn’t exist), but a practical atheism (it doesn’t *matter* that God exists). It’s in this sense that the world is full to overflowing with atheists. And it’s in this sense that we have to admit there are times when to all outward appearances it does seem to be true: “There is no God” — not practically, not when it matters the most. If it’s the Lord who sits enthroned *forever* (cf. 9:7), then how can the wicked be saying in his heart, with every apparent justification for doing so: “I shall not be moved; throughout *all generations* I shall not meet adversity”? Maybe we haven’t been forced—yet—to grapple with this very real “problem.” Maybe we’ve chosen to stick our heads in the sand and pretend it doesn’t exist. But it does. One day we might be forced to admit that it does. And this is why we really do need to learn, now, how to cry out ourselves with the psalmist: “**Why**, O LORD, do you stand *far away*? **Why** do you *hide yourself* in times of trouble?” One day we may see for ourselves the “poor” being pursued and hunted down by the wicked. One day we may be confronted personally with the things that David describes in verses 7-11:

III. Psalm 10:7-11 — His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.”

As long as the wicked keep their wickedness to themselves—as long as their “wickedness” doesn’t hurt others, or perhaps especially, doesn’t hurt me—we may never feel that God is hiding Himself or standing far off. But what happens when we see the wicked cruelly oppressing the “innocent,” and the “helpless,” and the “poor”—and getting away with it, and never being called to account? What happens then? What happens when the innocent and the helpless and the poor is us? Calvin writes:

It is possible that a righteous man may not check an injury which is done to a poor man before his eyes, because he is destitute of the power; but this cannot be the case with respect to God, who is always armed with invincible power. If, therefore, he act as if he took no notice, it is the same as if he withdrew himself afar off.

In chapter nine there were three words introduced in the Psalms for the first time — “poor/afflicted,” “oppressed,” and “needy.” In chapter ten, two of these words are repeated (“poor” and “oppressed”) and then three more words are added, also appearing here for the first time in the Psalms — “innocent,” “helpless,” and “fatherless.” Can you see the picture that’s being painted? These are all vulnerable people, without any means of protecting themselves. They’re defenseless and totally helpless. They’re also “innocent.” They’ve done nothing to deserve being oppressed, and afflicted, and so cruelly persecuted and taken advantage of. And finally, the “poor” in the Bible are always those who know the Lord’s name and who cry out to Him as those who are a part of His covenant people.

That’s one part of the picture that’s being painted — the poor, and the needy, and the oppressed, and the innocent, and the helpless, and the fatherless. But then do you remember the “wicked” from verses 2-6? Do you remember their “arrogance” and their “boasting” and the “pride of their face”? It’s before *these* wicked that the *helpless* are crushed, sink down, and fall. It’s by *these* wicked that the *poor* are seized and drawn into the net. It’s *these* wicked who lie in wait in ambush in order to murder the *innocent*. And these are also the wicked who, as they hunt down and pursue the poor, boast of the desires of their soul because their ways prosper at all times. These are the wicked who say in their heart: “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it” — which is the same thing as to say, for all practical purposes, “There is no God.” And the larger the wicked loom in our minds, and the longer they pursue their cruel ways of oppression toward the poor and the innocent and the oppressed without any consequences at all, the more it can seem to all outward appearances that, in fact, “There is no God” — not practically, not at the very moment when it matters the most. If this isn’t a “problem” for the Christian who confesses that God has established His throne for justice and that He sits on His throne forever (cf. Ps. 9), then what is?

For ten straight verses, now, the psalmist has been describing in detail all the ways and the thoughts of the wicked and all the miseries and afflictions of the poor and the innocent and the helpless. The wicked have, indeed, been “looming large.”

And yet we have to remember that this whole description of the wicked has come in the context of *prayer* (vv. 1, 2, 5). All along, David has been conscious of speaking these things before the Lord. And so in the end, even though the wicked may seem to the eyes of the flesh to be larger than life, to the eyes of faith it is always God—the faithful God who is in covenant with His people—it is always *this* God who looms the largest. It’s for this reason that after all we’ve seen in the last ten verses – in spite of all the apparent “evidences” that “there [really] is no God” – David still goes on to pray:

IV. Psalm 10:12–15 — Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not seek out [sin]”? But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; seek out his wickedness till you find none.

Notice how bold is David’s prayer! He begins and ends with imperatives: “**Arise**, O LORD; O God, **lift** up your hand; forget not the afflicted... **Break** the arm of the wicked and evildoer; seek out his wickedness till you find none.” It’s as though the psalmist is calling out to the Lord: “Do something! Please, *DO* something!” We know these imperatives aren’t expressing commands. David obviously can’t command the Lord to do anything. Instead, the imperatives are expressing what David feels about the urgency and the absolute necessity of God taking action. Could we use the same imperatives in our own prayers? After the realities of verses 2-11, do we feel the same sense of the urgency and the absolute necessity of God taking action?

And yet in the midst of all this, at the heart of all these calls for “action,” there’s still an unshakable, deep down conviction that even if God doesn’t act now—even if He seems to be standing far away and hiding Himself in times of trouble—nevertheless, He *does* still see all, and He *does* still care about all that He sees, and He *does* take all things into account, and He *will* one day *act*. It’s this deep, deep down, underlying conviction of faith that actually enables the psalmist to cry out as one who feels abandoned: “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” And then, in turn, it’s actually in the act of crying out to the LORD with words like these that the psalmist is strengthened and fortified in faith. Even if it seems for all practical purposes that “there is no God,” nevertheless, we know that God will not always be silent – “the hope of the afflicted shall not perish *forever*” (9:18). “Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, ‘You will not seek out [sin]’? (cf. vv. 3b-4a) But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless.”

Remember how the “mood” seemed to change in Psalm 10? The overall mood of Psalm 9 was one of confidence and hope. Three times in Psalm 9 David sings of the Lord sitting on His throne for judgment (9:4, 7, 11). So far, here in Psalm 10 there’s been no mention of the Lord sitting on His throne. Here in Psalm 10, that confidence of Psalm 9 has been made to pass through the

crucible of all those harsh realities of life that seem to so powerfully contradict our faith. And having passed through that crucible—and even while still being tried and tested in the midst of that fiery crucible—we find that our confidence now is just as strong as it ever was – in fact, if anything it’s even stronger and more deeply rooted now than it ever was before. Remember how Psalm 9 ended:

□ Psalm 9:19–20 — 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**!

And now see how that cry at the end of Psalm 9 is replaced at the end of Psalm 10 with this settled confession of faith:

V. Psalm 10:16–18 — The LORD is king forever and ever; the **nations** perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that **man** who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

Here at the end of chapter ten we see again the “afflicted,” and the “fatherless,” and the “oppressed” – the needy, and the innocent, and the helpless. And here, again, we see the “wicked.” Only this time the wicked aren’t called the wicked are they? What are they called?—“*Man who is of the earth.*” The word for “man” at the end of chapter 9 and here at the end of chapter 10 isn’t the usual word for “man” (*adam*), but a far less common one (*enos*). It’s a word that emphasizes man’s weakness and frailty and creatureliness. I think of the words of the hymn: “frail creatures of dust.” We saw this word first in Psalm chapter eight when the psalmist asked:

□ Psalm 8:4 — What is man [*enos*] that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Do you remember why it is that God seems to be hiding Himself and standing far away? It’s because “the wicked” seem to be “magnified” in our eyes. It’s because the wicked seem to us to be “larger than life.” But as we come to God *in prayer* and as we cry out to God *in prayer*, we see more clearly that it’s our covenant God who always looms larger than the wicked — and it’s in this light that the wicked are finally seen to be what they really are: frail creatures of dust; mere men, who are of the earth. As we come to God *in prayer* and cry out to Him—even as we’re honest with ourselves and with Him about all the cruel realities of this life—the wicked recede into their place, and faith triumphs, and we’re enabled to truly confess with the psalmist:

“***The LORD is king forever and ever;*** the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear *to do justice* to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.”

Conclusion

Remember who it is who “first” prayed this Psalm in the days of His own affliction and suffering at the hands of wicked men (cf. Acts 2:23). This is the one who now leads us in singing these same words as He sits enthroned above, ruling and reigning “until He has put all His enemies—and ours—under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). Remember *Jesus*, and let Him teach us how to sing these words in humility and in faith (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3-10).