**Praise and prayer go together** 16/1/21 dkm

Read: Psalm 9, Hebrews 13

Text: Psalm 9

Psalms: 12, 5:1-7, 34:15-22, 72old

‘Praise, the basis of an earnest plea for deliverance’ is the title one scholar has given to Psalm 9. But such a title can be misunderstood. Christians are being taught that if you simply praise God then you are sure to get what you want from him. But God is not open to flattery or manipulation. Sure, it is good to praise the Lord, but such praise must be based on knowledge not just emotion. Sure, David begins and ends his prayer with praise, but it is praise based on ‘the marvellous works’ of the Lord, and it is praise ‘with my whole heart’, my whole humble heart (9:1).

So if we say praise is the basis of earnest prayer, let us not think of this as some sort of formula guaranteeing we will get what we want from God. Psalm 9 is a psalm of praise as well as a prayer. Knowing the wonderful works of God, especially his acts of judgment, gives us confidence when we ask him to deliver us from oppressors or bullies.

The title of this psalms tells us that it is written by David; it also conveys information to the ‘Chief Musician’ regarding the tune. Neither the name of the tune or anything in the title gives us any indication as to the circumstances in which David wrote this psalm. The psalm itself points to it being written during the latter part of David’s reign. He refers to God rebuking and destroying nations (9:5), although he may be thinking of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. David’s reference to the Lord dwelling in Zion (9:11), indicates a time after the tent of meeting was set up on Mt Zion in Jerusalem, although he may be referring to the throne of God in heaven.

Finally, by way of introduction, Psalm 9 and 10 are often considered as a single psalm. The theme of both is the same, and Psalm 10 has no title, which is unusual. The Septuagint has them as one psalm. Moreover, in the Hebrew it is an acrostic, with this pattern extending across both psalms. Every second verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, although this pattern is broken in places. For this reason, some divide the psalm into couplets. We will divide it into two sections at verse 13, the first half focussing on praise for God’s past judgments, and the second a plea for God to continue his judgment of wicked nations and deliverance of his people. We will have subheadings within each of these two parts.

**1. Rejoice in the Lord**

The psalm begins with two verses of praise; the first half ends with another two verses of praise (9:11-12). David sings with praise from his ‘whole heart’. How much of your praise is whole-hearted and how much half- hearted? David says, ‘I will’ four times in these two verses; there is no ‘maybe I will praise the Lord’ or ‘if I feel like it’.

David sings praise to the Lord because of who he is, the ‘Most High God’, and what he has done, ‘Your most marvellous works’. These works are not specified, but like all the people of Israel, David would have grown up hearing of the mighty works by which the Lord brought his people out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. David also saw the Lord deliver him from the hand of Saul, and from nations like the Philistines; it is the latter that are the focus of David’s remembrance and praise at this time.

**2. Rebuke and destruction of wicked nations**

In verses 3-8 we do not hear ‘I will’ but ‘You have’ as David remembers how the Lord made his enemies turn back and fall before the Lord. David knew that he belonged to the chosen people of God and that his enemies were God’s enemies. In David’s time the Philistines were ongoing enemies of Israel. As a shepherd boy, David killed Goliath, a giant terrorising the army of Israel. David fought in the name of the Lord, and gave all praise and glory to the Lord. David was very conscious of the holiness of God and his name, and that God was powerful to deliver righteous judgment: ‘You sat on the throne judging in righteousness’ (9:4).

In terms of ‘blotting out their name for ever and ever’ (9:5), we think of the nations that occupied Canaan when Joshua came. The Lord told Joshua to destroy these nations completely as things ‘devoted to the Lord’. Hence their names are erased from history. The case of the Amalekites also comes to mind; through Samuel the Lord told King Saul to destroy the Amalekites, even man, woman and child and animal. The Lord wanted their name blotted out for ever and ever. Saul failed to do so, and God rejected him as king (1Sam 15).

In contrast to nations that come and go, or rise and fall, the kingdom of God endures forever (9:7). God’s throne is in heaven, but he is vitally involved in all nations on earth and their rule. He established Israel as his holy nation, and the nation through which his name would be made known in all the earth. God continues to ‘remove kings and raise up kings’ (Dan 2:21). He continues to defend his holy ones when they are oppressed by wicked ones.

There is a sense of prophecy in the words, ‘He has prepared his throne for judgment’ (9:7). At the end of the psalm, David calls for the Lord to arise and judge the nations, but the Lord does not always act according to our timetable. What we can be certain of is that even if the wicked escape God’s judgment in this life, they will not escape in the final judgment. In calling upon the philosophers in Athens to repent, the apostle Paul saw fit to remind them of the final judgment. He quotes the words of verse 8 saying, ‘He [God] has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness’ (Acts 17:31).

Verse 8 of this psalm has a parallel line declaring that God will govern the people with justice and equity. What nation today governs with equity? Even our democratic nation struggles to maintain equity at times! In many nations the poor and the powerless are dismissed by corrupt rulers and judges, but this will never happen in the court of the Lord.

**3. Refuge for the oppressed**

David’s remembrance of God’s judgment upon his enemies, and the reminder that God will judge the world in righteousness, was encouraging to David and to others being oppressed by the wicked. David was king but at this point in time he feared death at the hand of his enemies (9:13). Through praising the Lord and remembering him as the just and all-powerful judge of the nations, David found refuge in the Lord: ‘The Lord will also be a refuge to the oppressed’ (9:9).

The Lord is like a rock on which those who know his name and trust in him can stand in times of trouble. Augustus Toplady wrote the hymn ‘Rock of Ages’ while sheltering from a fierce storm in the cleft of a rock just outside Bristol, England. The picture of God being a place of refuge and strength in times of trouble is scattered throughout the psalms (see Ps 46:1). I pray it is a picture, and a reality for you. The Lord’s promise not to forsake those who seek him (9:10), began with Joshua (Josh 1:5), continues into the NT (Heb 13:5) and continues today.

Such comforting knowledge leads David to once again lift his voice in praise to the Lord (9:11). When he sang praises to the Lord, he invited others to join him. He wanted to encourage others just as he was encouraged. This is an essential part of Christian worship. We sing praises to God but also to one another, and indeed to the world. The Lord dwells in Zion exercising justice in all the nations, and delivering those who turn to him for refuge. The Lord is like the ‘avenger of blood’ who sought justice for a murdered brother. The Lord ‘does not forget the cry of the afflicted’ (9:12). Is this what you believe? Is this what you have experienced? Will you cry to the Lord when you are oppressed or afflicted?

**4. Plight of a man**

In the second part of this psalm David prays about personal troubles brought on by those who hate him. This section begins and ends with prayer, just as the first part began and ended with praise. As king, David had many enemies, even within his own family, but this psalm seems to focus on other nations. His song of praise, and reflection on the judgments of God, gave him confidence that the Lord would deliver him from some dangerous situation: ‘From the gates of death’ (9:13). Even while David is waiting for the Lord to deliver him from ‘the gates of death’, he promises to give praise to the Lord ‘in the gates of the daughter of Zion’ (9:14), a personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants.

David envisages the nation that is threatening him falling into the pit they have dug as a trap for him (9:15). He had seen the salvation of God before this time and knew how the Lord often uses retribution when judging the wicked. We saw reference to the wicked falling into the pit they dug for a righteous man in Psalm 7:15. This is a vivid image, one that we should take note of if we ever contemplate setting a trap for an enemy. A man in our church wanted to get rid of an elder but in doing so he has ‘landed himself in hot water’ as we say. Beware that you do not get your foot caught in the trap you lay for another because the Lord likes to trap the wicked in their own net (9:15). We sometimes speak of ‘cutting off your nose to spite your face’. So often we see people who set out to hurt someone else ending up hurting themselves the most.

The end of verse 16 has a strange Hebrew word translated as ‘Meditation’, as well as a ‘Selah’. It appears that the psalmist really wanted the reader to pause longer than usual to think about what he had just said.

**5. Poor remembered**

The nations and the wicked are combined in verse 17 because nations are made up of people. There are god-fearing people, and there are people who forget God. Those who forget God or turn their backs on him will be judged or ‘turned into hell’, the place of the dead (9:17). They may bring judgment upon the whole nation, as happened in the time of Jeremiah, but God will save those who fear him. The poor, usually people who are oppressed by the wicked, will not be forgotten by God. When the Lord chooses to judge the world in righteousness (9:8), the expectations or desires of the poor in spirit will be fulfilled, ‘for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Mat 5:3). The story told by Jesus of the rich man and Lazarus comes to mind!

**6. Put man in his place**

Just as the first part of this psalm ended on a note of praise because the Lord does not forget the cry of the afflicted, the second part reaches a climax with David calling out to the Lord, ‘Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail’ (9:19). David pleaded with the Lord to act and judge the wicked became they were exalting themselves against God and even regarding themselves as gods. In ancient Egypt and Rome some rulers declared themselves to be gods. There are rulers today who dare not say they are a god, but certainly behave as if they were.

The Lord is ready to judge men or women who exalt themselves against him, and we should be praying that he will bring them down, that he will humble them, that they might know there is a God who judges the world in righteousness. The Lord did this with King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4), and he can and will do it again today. Jesus said, ‘I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it’ (Mat 16:18). ‘Throughout all history, man has given evidence of the most audacious pride. The church’s defence against all such is prayer’. May you, and all the world, know that the church of which Christ is the head will prevail, and the kingdoms of this world will fail?