
Prayers

To God

Shout out your praise to God! It may be that there are not very many places where it is possible to do this, but seek out such a place, if at all possible.

For myself

Spend a little time thinking about how you dress yourself, and present yourself to other people. What does this say about how you present yourself to God? Pray about the feelings raised up in you by these questions.

For others

Weekly theme: the United Nations

Lord God Almighty, You have raised up all authorities and powers within the world, and You have allowed the United Nations to become the world body that it is today. Protect its methods of governance and its influence within the world, that it might do good for all people and be respected for its humanity and good works. Bless its officers, that they may do what is right for world peace and serve all the peoples of the world. May the United Nations be an instrument of Yours, we pray: AMEN

Meditation

Are we available when the Lord requires?
Or, being otherwise occupied,
Do we fit the needs of God's Kingdom
Around a personal social calendar?

Are we available when the Lord requires?
Or, being too tired or sometimes lazy,
Do we stall, and put His work off 'till tomorrow
Because we don't want to do it today?

Are we available when the Lord requires?
Or, being otherwise minded,
Do we imagine that the things we normally do
Are more important than a call to holy living?

Are we available when the Lord requires?
Or, being blind to His Kingdom
Do we hold on to the temptations of the world
Because we've long since sold our souls?

So the Lord still calls, awaiting our response;
Be ready, for time does not wait forever.

Bible Passage

Psalm 9:15-20

- ¹⁵ The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug;
their feet are caught in the net they have hidden.
¹⁶ The LORD is known by his justice;
the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.

Higgaion.

Selah

- ¹⁷ The wicked return to the grave,
all the nations that forget God.
¹⁸ But the needy will not always be forgotten,
nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.
¹⁹ Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph;
let the nations be judged in your presence.
²⁰ Strike them with terror, O LORD;
let the nations know they are but men.

Selah

Review

We left psalm 9 at a highpoint of praise in verse 14. Having been saved from death, God's people praised Him for their deliverance (9:10,13) and were told to tell everyone about the greatness of God (9:11,14). Now, however, the psalm comes to an end with a more strident declaration of God's justice works, which gives hope to God's people but condemns the wicked (9:17-20).

These verses are straightforward, even if they sound rather brutal. It is easy to be side-tracked by the manner in which the psalm talks of death and war, but we must remember that this was real life for many people then, as it is today. We will not find the meaning of the psalm by focussing on this, rather, we should look through individual words to the real message of the psalm. Then, we will discover that God's justice works through the seeds of self-destruction within evil - '*the wicked are ensnared by the work of their own hands*' (9:16). Also, God remembers the poor and needy (9:18), and the psalm ends with a call for the Lord to complete his victory over the nations to give hope to His people.

In Psalm 7:15, we read; '*they make a pit ... and fall into the hole they have made*' and this passage makes a similar point to that found in our psalm today (9:15). This idea is important, for if God has made the world so that that wickedness and evil have within them the seeds of their own destruction, this gives enormous hope to all who fight injustice today, whether in local or international affairs. Working for justice can seem like a thankless task when faced with evils such as dictatorships, or the military autocracies of the world. However, these

regimes contain the seeds of their own destruction. Those who work for God's justice can, by His grace, identify such seeds and help them grow.

Given all this, the message of psalm 9 affirms that fighting for justice is God's work, and evil will always, in the end, be defeated. We may not see this in our lives here and now, but without such a hope, we could quickly become discouraged; but this is not an option for a Christian. We should work with God by challenging nations and peoples that do not act according to natural justice and the rule of God's laws built into the universe. Verse 17 says quite specifically that nations that forget God have no future, they will '*return to the grave*'. This is a dire threat; but does this refer to Israel or to other nations? Does the psalm writer think that Israel will one day forget her God and reap the consequences (as Moses reckons when he writes the book of Deuteronomy - see Deut. 27ff.)? Or could this psalm's message refer to nations such as those today that were once based on Christian law and ethos but have now rejected this in favour of secularism? All these questions should be asked, and God's Word in this Scripture explored. Anything is possible, and Psalm 9 stands as a warning to all who forget God by becoming ensnared by evil.

Within this passage a hope is expressed for the poor and the afflicted (9:18). Justice is needed so that such people may have salvation and deliverance from evil, and in this, Psalm 9 reflects Scripture's long-standing support for the poor of the world. As this psalm says, this task of deliverance was laid upon the Israelites, though it was not fulfilled through them. Time and time again they fell short of their calling as the Old Testament records (see 2 Kings 17:7f. for an essay on the failings of Israel). In the course of time, the Jewish hope was for a new Zion, from where God would rule amongst his people. But now Christ the Messiah has indeed come, there is no more focus on place, land or time. God's Kingdom, announced by Christ, works within the world for justice and against all evil, and we know the victory will only be finally accomplished in God's New Creation, in a new Jerusalem in which His Kingly reign will be complete, and the injustices of the world will be finally exposed and overcome for all time (Revelation 21:2).

Some people find it hard to talk about God's justice coming only at the end, when there is so much injustice in the world that needs to be tackled today. They suggest that by focussing too much upon the future to the detriment of our everyday responsibilities, we let injustice off the hook. However, what we believe about the future deeply affects how we each behave in the present, and in my opinion those who are most sure of their future in Christ are those who are most confident in their work for justice in the world now, and this fulfils what is said in psalm 9.

When Jesus began His teaching (Matthew 5:1ff) he said 'Blessed are the poor in heart, for they shall see God', and He went on to make it clear that the needy, oppressed and afflicted will inherit the Kingdom of God. His concern for justice in the affairs of this world and the raising up of the afflicted is not just a feature of Psalm 9, but it was the starting point of the Gospel as preached by Jesus.

Discipleship

Application

Trusting God for victory over evil

When we get our heads around reading a psalm such as this, we come to realise how important it is to trust God as we fight against evil within the world. We will never escape problems or difficulties within life, and the sooner we accept this the better. God alone can

give us the right perspective on what happens to us, and how to deal with the problems, afflictions, even those difficulties we face; indeed, He has placed the seeds of ultimate destruction within evil itself. We might like to think that an easy life is one lived without trouble, but in reality, an easy life is one in which we know we have the complete victory in Christ our Saviour.

The importance of fighting against evil

It is not easy to speak about God's judgement of evil, partly because we can sometimes find it hard to make judgements about what is evil and what is not. It is always easier to back out of making judgements in a world that says 'each to their own'. But society may just be beginning to realise again that unless good people fight evil, many people suffer. Christians, however, are called to challenge all evil in and through Jesus Christ, and we need to be close to our Lord in order to make right judgements.

Ideas for what to do

- How easy do you find it to say this or that is evil and needs to be defeated or destroyed? Do you feel confident to make judgements about the nature of evil and its presence in our communities? To what extent do you believe that a disciple of Christ should identify what is wrong in society or in other people?
- Pray for those who are engaged in attempting to put right some of the evils in our world, whether they be of inequality or of famine or maltreatment of people.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How do you respond when you read about God's justice like this here in psalm 9? Can this be a God of Love at work?
2. Is it always possible to see the seeds of destruction that lie within evil? How can we find out about evil and tackle it in the world?
3. Do you know what it is like to be in desperate need for help? How did God answer that need?

Final Prayer

You are our healer, Lord Jesus. You made each one of us and You know everything about why we are the people that we are. We commit ourselves into Your hands and we ask You to heal our damaged bodies and heal our wounded souls, so that we might have peace with ourselves, with others and with You. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN