
Prayers

To God

Praise God in silence, try to ensure that you do not dominate your time with God by your own thoughts; listen to Him.

For myself

Lord God Almighty, you have done so much more for me than I could ever have imagined, and I am grateful. I confess to you that my life is full of wrongdoing, and sometimes I do not recognise it. I need Your guidance and counsel, and the wisdom of Your Holy Spirit to guide me and walk with me through everything I experience. Bless me this day, I pray: AMEN

For others

Weekly theme: the United Nations

Pray for UNICEF, the United Nations fund for Children, and its work against child marriage throughout the world.

Meditation

Jesus, You are the brightness which fills my life,
When all around seems dull and cloudy.

Jesus, You are the colour which expands my vision,
Bringing meaning and life to all I see.

Jesus, You are the brilliance which designed the world,
Revealing Yourself through all You've made.

Jesus, You are the complexity which intrigues us,
Leading us to search for more and more.

Jesus, You are the happiness which floods our souls,
Leaving us to want more of God's good gifts.

Jesus, You are the kindness which surpasses generosity,
For all Your good gifts are undeserved.

Bible Passage

Psalm 9:9-14

- ⁹ The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
- ¹⁰ Those who know your name will trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken
those who seek you.
- ¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion;
proclaim among the nations what he has done.
- ¹² For he who avenges blood remembers;
he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.
- ¹³ O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me!
Have mercy and lift me up
from the gates of death,
- ¹⁴ that I may declare your praises in the gates
of the Daughter of Zion
and there rejoice in Your salvation.

Review

Psalm 9 is full of praise to God, and here in the middle, we discover the reason for the praise. David has just escaped death, and he gives God the glory for having rescued him (no specific event in David's life is described, but it is helpful to have this in mind in order to create a mental picture). Death was particularly abhorrent to an Israelite, because Sheol, the place of the dead, was believed to be a place set apart from God and to be saved from it was a matter for great rejoicing.

Within this passage, however, is one verse (9:12) that does not seem to fit the general theme. It speaks about the avenging of blood, and this does not quite fit with other descriptions of God, such as '*refuge for the oppressed*' (v9). However, the words 'blood' and 'avenger', have other meanings in Hebrew that can help us to understand the passage. Firstly, the Israelites equated '*blood*' with '*life*', as did many ancient peoples, and as we do when we celebrate the Lord's Supper (or 'Holy Communion'). Secondly, the word '*avenger*' is from a similar Hebrew found in verse 10 translated '*seek*'. It means something like '*active pursuit*', and it adds urgency to the meaning of '*seek*' in verse 10, and in verse 12 it means '*one who actively pursues justice*'; you can see that this fits well with the words that come next, '*He does not ignore the cry of the afflicted*'. In other words, God is just and is actively interested in what happens to us when we are in trouble. This is a good reason for praise and thanksgiving to God!

Closely associated with the praise of God in psalm 9 is Zion, mentioned in verses 11 and 14. Zion originally referred to the south east corner of Jerusalem, known as the '*City of David*' (2 Sam 5:7), the Jebusite city captured by David. It had a reputation as a stronghold long before this, and as time went by, 'Zion' was gradually used for all Jerusalem, including the Temple, and after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587BC, 'the word referred to the ideal

spiritual home of God's people. Many of these ideas are found in our psalm; for example, verse 9 speaks about God as a stronghold for people in '*time of trouble*', and in verse 11, God is described as '*enthroned*' in Zion, as a place to which he gathers His people. Then, in verse 14, David praises God '*in the gates of the Daughter of Zion*' having been saved from death (9:13), and these words help us feel we are talking about a living city rather than bricks and mortar. Zion is a word with a substantial Biblical heritage, and whenever we hear about Zion, the praises of God are not far behind!

There are other fascinating parts to the psalm. In verse 9, we read that God is a '*stronghold in times of trouble*'. This expression sounds very familiar, and it sums up much of what the Psalms say when they bring various personal troubles to God. The exact expression, however, occurs only here and in Psalm 10 verse 1 (related but not identical words are found in Psalm 41:1 and 59:16). This phrase is a powerful statement of faith, and one that relate strongly to Israelite and Christian experience. But because it occurs only in Psalms 9 and 10, it is often mentioned as a good reason why these two Psalms belong together!

Secondly, in verse 14, David praises God in the '*gates*' of Daughter Zion. You might gloss over this quite quickly unless you know from elsewhere that the '*gates*' of a city were very important as the place where the elders of the community met to do business. However, more than business happened when the elders of a city gathered; they were also there to dispense justice. When Amos was appalled at the lack of justice for the poor and needy in Israel (Amos 5:10, 12) he spoke out in prophecy to ask for '*justice in the gate*' (Amos 5:15); so when Psalm 9 talks of praising God '*in the gates...*' it means that in Israel, God must be honoured in the way justice is done in the community. This is just a small point in the psalm, but it reminds us that the words of Scripture tell a consistent story about the justice of God. Our passage starts with God described as a refuge for the oppressed, and ends with praising God '*in the gate of Daughter Zion*', where justice may be found for all. Justice is the characteristic of the one true God who can be trusted in all things, a God who also saves His people and has consistently provided for them.

It is worth looking at one feature of this passage. Verse 11 asks God's people to proclaim what he has done '*among the nations*'. This is a clear call to testimony, and remarkably, the ancient Israelites are asked to tell all peoples about the amazing acts of God; it is a call to mission! The people of Israel were God's people, chosen by him for his praise and glory. In much of the Old Testament, the idea that God might be interested in anything other than his own nation can seem remote; but this notion is wrong. God chose his people to be a '*light to the nations*' (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6), which meant that they had a duty to declare the Lord to all other peoples in order to fulfil their place in God's plan of salvation for the whole world. If David called the people of Israel to this task in psalm 9, how much more are we called to speak about the greatness of our God to other people today?

Discipleship

Application

God is involved in our lives

I have always found it liberating to think that we should praise God wherever He may be found. The very idea encourages us to think of looking for God in all aspects of life and in all circumstances, so that we may enjoy praising Him. It is too easy to go through life and compartmentalise everything, and in this way, we fail to perceive that God is involved in different aspects of life. When we realise we have been wrong to do this, then it can be

profoundly liberating to discover that God is deeply involved in far more of life than we ever imagined!

God of Justice

Sometimes, it is easy to forget that God is fundamentally just, and this is necessary if His love is to be true, consistent and dependable. Of course, we want His love. Unfortunately, we are not always as ready as we ought to be for love that is unquestionably just, true and consistent towards all people. We are fooling ourselves if we think that God will walk on others to please us, and ultimately, selfishness and love cannot work together. The mature Christian knows that God's love is to be found in its fulness when we seek justice not for ourselves but for those around us.

Ideas for what to do

- How does this Psalm encourage you to find new ways of praising God? In talking about Zion, does it help you think about where God 'dwells', such as in places of worship? Write your own poem of praise to God, covering all the places where you have come across Him today.
- Pray for the many people in this world who do not find it possible to equate God with substantial parts of their lives. Pray that the Holy Spirit will break down the barriers that prevent people from perceiving God, despite the testimony of so many people over the centuries.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Write a list of reasons why some people might find this psalm a little difficult. Discuss how this psalm can be used or presented so that its message is clear today
2. What does the word 'Zion' mean to people today? Is it wise to use this term given that it has a political meaning today?
3. How can Christians make their message of the Gospel known to the whole world today? Is it a realistic aim in today's religiously sensitive world?

Final Prayer

Lord, grant me peace this night, I pray. Strengthen my heart so that I may trust in your everlasting promises, and confidently rest in the knowledge that You can defeat all the powers of the Evil One. Glory be to God the Father who is faithful; glory be to God the Son who is compassionate; glory be to God the Spirit who is ever mindful of my soul. AMEN