



Today is the last of nine messages in our series called The Songs of Summer. We've been looking at the first nine psalms, which means after today we only have 141 more to study! But even though we're going to start a new series in two weeks in the letters of John, I hope by studying these first nine psalms you've developed a taste for the psalms and you'll be more motivated to use them in your own prayer life.

We started in Psalms 1 and 2, which are like twin pillars that function as the entrance to the whole psalter. Both of them talk about the blessed life. Psalm 1 does that from an individual perspective. It says the blessed life is one which is governed by the word of God. *"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night."* Psalm 2 does it from a worldwide perspective. It says a people are blessed when they submit to and trust in the King of kings and Lord of lords. *"Blessed are all who take refuge in him."*

Then we looked at Psalms 3–7. These are all songs of lament written by David. Isn't it fascinating that immediately upon entering this grand structure we call the book of Psalms we're clobbered with the harsh realities of life? *"Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked"* (Psalm 3:7). *"Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies..."* (Psalm 5:8). *"Arise, Lord, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies..."* (Psalm 7:6). In the midst of these harsh realities we've learned to run to God and make him our refuge. *"But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy..."* (Psalm 5:11). *"Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me..."* (Psalm 7:1).

Then we came to Psalm 8. Finally, we left the cry room and entered a much happier place. We declared the majesty of God as seen in both the universe he's created and human beings made in his image with dignity and worth. *"Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"* Honestly, I thought we'd be able to enjoy the expanse of that glorious mood for awhile, but today we come to Psalm 9 and we're right back in the presence of our enemies. Just like life, isn't it? You think you've finally got it licked, you think you've got your head above water, and before you know it you're right back fighting for your life.

But there's something different about how David deals with that battle in Psalm 9. Psalm 9 teaches us how and why to praise God

right in the midst of the battle. The harsh reality is found in what he says in verse 13, *"Lord, see how my enemies persecute me!"* Yet, in the midst of that, he manages to begin the psalm with praise.

The Praise the Lord Deserves

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;

I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

I will be glad and rejoice in you;

**I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High
(verses 1–2).**

Look at how he begins. There are several things that stand out here. The most glaring truth is we can and we must give thanks and praise in the midst of our pain, our troubles and our battles. And the praise doesn't just end here in verses 1 and 2. He doesn't start out with a bang and then slowly the air leaks out of his worship until he's left with nothing at the end. He also says in verse 11, *"Sing the praises of the Lord enthroned in Zion, proclaim among the nations what he has done."* You see, that's precisely **why** we can praise the Lord in the midst of our troubles—the Lord is enthroned in Zion. The Lord is still on his throne! He's still ruling; he's still in control! Do you know that? So much of our problem is we've forgotten that or perhaps even we've been talked out of it. Do you believe God rules over the affairs of your life? Do you believe he's not only sovereign but he's good? Do you believe the One who feeds the sparrow and clothes the lily would ever forget or abandon his beloved son or daughter?

So the first thing we must do is reset our focus on him. This isn't about our feelings. You don't wait to do this until you're in the mood. This is an act of the will. Sometimes it's even like getting up and going to work; you just do it. He says, *"I WILL give thanks... I WILL tell of all your wonderful deeds. I WILL be glad and rejoice in you. I WILL sing the praises of your name..."* How many times must he say it: "I WILL!" Have you said that? Have you determined to give thanks and praise his name? How is it that Paul and Silas, having just been stripped and severely flogged, can sit in a dark prison cell with their feet fastened in the stocks, and pray and sing hymns through the night? I doubt Silas said to Paul, "Oh gee, Paul, isn't this fun? Don't you just feel like singing a few songs?" No! Together, by an act of the will, they said, "We will..."

Notice also David says he'll do this *"with all of my heart."* What keeps us from doing that? We focus way too much on

our preferences in worship style. "Oh, I like hymns." Or, "I like loud, rockin' worship music." Or, "I like to raise my hands and jump around." That's not the issue. The issue is our heart. Are you worshipping him with the totality of your being? For some of us worship is a routine formality. We worship with about as much passion as a guy watching a last place baseball team in September (and we all know what that's like).

For others, we worship like halfhearted participants. Before the end of our worship gatherings, I go to the back of the auditorium so I can slip into the lobby and meet a few of you as you exit. I can't help but watch people as they're singing that last song and I'm always surprised at how many are just standing there with their hands in their pockets and a look of complete boredom on their face. If your lips are even moving I'd need a microscope to see it. Some even beat me out the door and race out of here like they're late for a plane. Come on! We're worshipping before the throne of God! David says, "***I will SING...***" We say, "But I don't feel like singing." No. "I will sing!" We say, "But I sound awful." No. "I will sing!" We say, "But I don't like the music!" No. "I will sing!" You say, "But I'm not sure I even believe that stuff." If that's the case, you don't have to sing, but if we believe it, let's open our mouths and **sing** it!

This ought to impact us when we arrive here as well. Would you show up late to an important appointment with your boss, much less the President? Would you come unprepared to such a meeting? Wouldn't you make allowance for the possibility of traffic, parking and walking from your car to the meeting? Why do we sometimes treat this time with such indifference?

Do you know about the letter Jesus sent to the church at Laodicea? He said, "***...you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!***" All of us like a cold drink on a hot day, or we like a hot drink on a cold day, but there's really no day for a lukewarm drink. Who wants that? So Jesus says to that church, "***...because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.***"

The reason we shouldn't be lukewarm is who he is and what he's done. He says in verse 1, "***I will tell of your wonderful deeds.***" That's what he's talking about down in verses 13b–14 when he says, "***Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death, that I may declare your praises in the gates of Daughter Zion...***" The gates of a city are a very public place where come and go. David says, "That's where I'll declare your praises!" How about you? Think of what he's done—for you. What are the blessings you enjoy today? Do you have a job? Do you have some measure of health? Do you have loved ones? Do you have food, shelter and clothing? Have you seen him work in your life? Has he answered prayer? Even if you have a hard time answering yes to some of those questions, I can think of some others you **can** say yes to. Do you have a Savior? Do you have the promises of a faithful

God? The forgiveness of sins? The presence of the Holy Spirit? The hope of eternal life? Child of God, you have all these things and much more, so praise him.

Not only does David thank the Lord and tell of his wonderful deeds, but he also just rejoices in him. "***I will be glad and rejoice in you. I will sing the praises of your name...***" It's like, "Lord, even if I have none of those things, I have you." It's like, "What do you want to do tonight, honey? Do you want to go out? Maybe a fancy restaurant or a show? Maybe we can go shopping and I'll buy you a gift?" "Nothing, dear, I just want to be with you. That's enough for me. I just want you."

The Power the Lord Displays

We've taken a long time to talk of the praise the Lord deserves. Next, David moves from the praise the Lord deserves to the power he displays.

My enemies turn back;

they stumble and perish before you.

**For you have upheld my right and my cause,
sitting enthroned as the righteous judge.**

You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked;

you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.

Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies,

you have uprooted their cities;

even the memory of them has perished.

The Lord reigns forever;

he has established his throne for judgment.

He rules the world in righteousness

and judges the peoples with equity (verses 3–8).

One of the reasons he praises the Lord with all his heart is what the Lord will do to his enemies, and not only his own enemies but all those who oppose God. David sees God as his rescuer and sings of him as the righteous judge. Notice how his mind leaps ahead from his own story where he talks about "***MY enemies***" and "***MY right and MY cause***" to what God will do on a much larger scale. He'll rebuke the nations. He reigns forever and rules the whole world in righteousness. He speaks in the past tense and it sounds almost as if the Lord has already done this, and we wonder how that can be when there's still so much evil and injustice in our world. Scholars tell us David is employing a common feature of the Old Testament literature in describing coming events as if they've already happened, and this is a way of communicating how certain their fulfillment is.

Nevertheless, this isn't something I hear us doing a lot these days. I don't hear people singing and praising God for his righteous judgment. There's a reason for that. The ancient Jews thought of God's judgment like an earthly court of justice. The difference is we picture the case as a criminal case in which we ourselves are

the accused, and that's hardly something to rejoice over. But the psalmist pictured it as a civil case with himself as the plaintiff. In the first case, you hope for acquittal or pardon, but in the second case you hope for justice with heavy damages against the defendant. We've all seen the jubilation in a courtroom for a family when a righteous judgment has been made in their favor and finally justice is done. So we shouldn't be surprised if the Psalms are full of the longing for judgment, and regard it as good news. Millions of people in the history of the world who have been stripped of all they possess and have justice entirely on their side will at last be heard. They're not afraid of judgment. That's their hope.

Do you long for and rejoice in the righteous judgments of God? Some of you understand this. You know what it is to be victimized at the hands of cruel and unjust people. If you're one of them, you can be comforted and even give thanks and praise to God because *"He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity."*

The Protection the Lord Provides

This idea leads very naturally to the next thing in this psalm for which David praises God and that's the protection he provides.

**The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.
Sing the praises of the Lord, enthroned in Zion;
proclaim among the nations what he has done.
For he who avenges blood remembers;
he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.
Lord, see how my enemies persecute me!
Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death,
that I may declare your praises
in the gates of Daughter Zion,
and there rejoice in your salvation.
The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug;
their feet are caught in the net they have hidden.
The Lord is known by his acts of justice;
the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.
The wicked go down to the realm of the dead,
all the nations that forget God.
But God will never forget the needy;
the hope of the afflicted will never perish
(verses 9–18).**

You see, the Lord's judgment cuts both ways. It's a scary thing for the oppressor, but it's a relief for the oppressed. He's a refuge. He's a stronghold. He doesn't ignore the cries of the afflicted. He won't forget the needy.

Does that in any way describe you this morning? Do you feel oppressed? Do you feel afflicted? Are you troubled? It could be in your work or marriage or something regarding your children. It could be in school or in a particularly difficult relationship. I love what he says in verse 10, *"Those who know your name trust in you..."* God gave his name to Moses and through him to all the Jewish people. His name is Yahweh and that name communicates his character as One who is forever faithful to his covenant people. Do you know his name? He's made promises to you. *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Do you know him as faithful and true? Look what he says in the rest of verse 10, *"...for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you."*

In 2008, a documentary came out called *Man on Wire*. It's about a tight-rope walker named Philippe Petit. In 1974, Petit had a secret plan to extend a steel wire between the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York. After much planning and practice, he and his fellow conspirators snuck to the top of the buildings, shot a wire across the vast quarter-mile-high canyon that separated the two Towers, and Petit went to work. When all was said and done, he was on the wire for 45 minutes. Thousands gathered below to watch him. On each end of the wire, police waited. He made eight passes before finally coming in.

Petit now lives in New York's Catskill Mountains. He still practices several hours a day. He told a *Newsweek* reporter it "never occurred to me to use a safety net" when walking the wire. He added: "I never fall. But yes, I have landed on the earth many, many times."

What an interesting statement. It's a pretty good way of describing the believer's experience in trouble. We never fall, but we land on the earth many times. It's not that bad things never happen to us; we all know they do. But we have this promise: *"... for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you."* David is saying, "Those who seek you will never fall. We may land on earth many times, but we'll never fall."

The Prayers the Lord Receives

We've seen the praise the Lord deserves, the power the Lord displays, the protection the Lord provides. Finally, David ends this Psalm with a prayer in verses 19–20.

**Arise, Lord, do not let mortals triumph;
let the nations be judged in your presence.
Strike them with terror, Lord;
let the nations know they are only mortal.**

In Psalm 8 we learned of the dignity of man. David said, *"You have crowned him with glory and honor,"* but here he reminds us we're mere mortals. *"Do not let mortals triumph... Let the nations know they are only mortal."* This is the fundamental problem with people today—we don't really understand we're just mortals. God certainly knows it. In Psalm 103:14–16 the psalmist says, *"For he knows how we are formed, he remembers*

that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." God knows it. The problem is so often we don't always know it. Someone wrote, "We are always complaining that our days are few and acting as though there would be no end of them."

It's like the guy who went in for his annual checkup and got a phone call from his doctor a couple of days later. The doctor said, "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

"What's the news?" the man asked.

"Well, you have only 48 hours to live."

"That is bad news!" said the shocked patient.

"I'm afraid I have even worse news," the doctor continued.

"What could be worse than that?" the patient stammered.

The doctor replied, "I've been trying to call you since yesterday."

It's a good thing for us all to be reminded of our own mortality. James wrote, "*You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away*" (James 4:14). It's ironic that Steve Jobs preached the same thing. In a commencement address at Stanford in 2005 he said, "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important."

At the outset of WWII, when Great Britain was being bombed and defending itself against Nazi Germany, C.S. Lewis preached a sermon at his church in Oxford. He said, "War does do something to death. It forces us to remember it. The only reason why the cancer at 60 or the paralysis at 75 do not bother us is that we forget them. War makes death real to us: and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the Christians of the past. They thought it good for us to be always aware of our mortality. I am inclined to think they were right. All the animal life in us, all schemes of happiness that centered in this world, were always doomed to a final frustration. In ordinary times only a wise man can realize it. Now the stupidest of us knows. We see unmistakably the sort of universe in which we have all along been living, and must come to terms with it. If we had foolish un-Christian hopes about human culture, they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world

from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon."

Really, that's what David is praying here. Let these people who strut around and think they can live their lives apart from God be struck with terror. Don't let these people triumph who think they can build a city that satisfies the soul of man independent from their Creator. That's his prayer and it should be our prayer as well.

This morning on each of our campuses we're coming to the Lord's Table. I've been thinking about how poignant this psalm is as it relates to what the Communion table is all about. This has often been called the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving. Psalm 9 began with praise and thanksgiving. We have even more cause to offer God praise and thanksgiving than David did because we have before us symbols of the body of Christ broken for us. It really doesn't matter what's going on in our life, we always have this to thank him for.

Not only that, the Communion table is a symbol of God's power over our enemies. Not long before he was crucified, Jesus said to his disciples, "*Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out*" (John 12:31). He was talking about our ultimate enemy—Satan. His name means *adversary* or *accuser*. The death of Jesus defeated him; silenced him. Paul says through his death, "*He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*" (Col. 2:13b–15). In other words, God's law no longer can condemn us, because Christ has canceled our debt, thus Satan has no more grounds to accuse us.

Not only that, just as we see in this psalm, there's protection for those who put their trust in him and him alone. This table is the ultimate place of refuge. This table is a stronghold like no other. Those who are beaten down and weary from sin and a sense of condemnation before God can run to this table and find protection, rest and safety. Those who are gripped with a sense of their own frailty, those who know they're but a vapor can come to this table and find everlasting life. That's why we can praise and give thanks in the midst of our enemies.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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