

Victory accomplished and anticipated

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2020

Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

[0 : 00] It often seems to be the way when you're waiting for a bus, it often seems to be that you wait for two hours and then three come along all at once, doesn't it? It often seems to be the way in life that difficulties and troubles and uncomfortable circumstances, they don't come along by ones either, do they?

Often they can clump up and threaten to overwhelm us. All too often, just when you think you've dealt with one issue, then the next one rears its ugly head.

And sometimes it feels like you just can't catch a break. Well, David seems to be in that kind of situation here in Psalm 9. Did you notice as Duncan read it, the first half through to verse 12, it seems to be in a celebratory mood, rejoicing in the victory that God has won on his behalf.

But then verse 13, suddenly the enemies are back. Suddenly David is once again crying out to God and desperate for help. Again, in verse 19, just like in Psalm 7, David is calling out to God to arise, to get up, to intervene, to act in salvation.

So in this Psalm, we'll consider first victory accomplished and then move on to consider victory anticipated. So first victory accomplished.

[1 : 18] The Psalm begins with a declaration of praise. In the first couple of verses, there's a number of these closely related terms. Give thanks, be glad, rejoice, sing praise.

And the piling up of these synonyms emphasizes the enthusiasm with which David worships his God, Yahweh, verse 1. His God who is the most high, verse 2.

And further emphasizing the depth of this praise is the qualification in verse 1 that this is with all of his heart. This praise is not just the product of his lips.

This is not empty babble. This is not mere rhetoric. No, this praise arises from the totality of his heart. David is passionate about this.

This heart, this is the center of moral decision-making and trust. Remember, in Hebrew, we thought the heart isn't just where the emotions come from, but rather is the center of the whole person.

[2 : 23] So this is not emotional fluff. This is David's whole being devoted to praising his God. This is not just emotional fluff, but rather the content of David's praise is the tale of God's wonderful deeds.

The word for wonders here, this most often refers to that which God does, which he alone is able to do. So for instance, the first time we have this word in the Bible, it's in Exodus chapter 3, verse 20. God said, I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. So God's wonderful deeds, God's wonders are his acts of mighty power by which he redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt, as we've considered over the last few months in our evening services.

This is the God whom David praises, the one who has done these things. And therefore, he sings praise of his name. In the previous psalm, in Psalm 8, David cried out, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

You have set your glory in the heavens. And even before that, at the end of Psalm 7, I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High. God's name encapsulates who he truly is.

[3 : 44] God's name proclaims his nature. And that is what David goes on to celebrate in the following verses. So in the next section of the psalm, he celebrates the wondrous deeds of the Lord, verses 3 to 6, and celebrates God's nature, his character, his name, in verses 7 to 10.

So David's rejoicing is because, verse 3, victory has been accomplished. God's deeds are wonderful. David praises God, firstly, because his enemies have ceased to be a threat.

They have stumbled. They have perished. David's safety has come about because the threat has been removed. He no longer needs to fear. The enemies are no more.

Second, David praises God as the defender of his right and his cause. This is verse 4. You have upheld my right and my cause. And right and cause, these are two separate things. These are two different legal terms. It's not just his righteousness or his just cause, but rather these are two separate nouns.

[4 : 51] My right, this is the judge's determination of what ought to have been the case in a particular situation. He's then going to compare the actions of the two parties too.

That's the right. And then the cause is the verdict, the sentence. So in other words, David says, God, the judge, has exonerated him of any wrongdoing.

In fact, more than that, the righteous judge has declared that David has acted in accordance with what is right, and his enemies have not. His enemies are guilty.

In fact, God, the righteous judge, has awarded considerable damages. The enemies have been destroyed. Third, David rejoices.

Notice here that whilst in verse 3, these are David's enemies, he says, my enemies turn back. But verse 5 makes it clear that they are the wicked. God, the righteous judge, has not just arbitrarily ruled in favor of his friend, but rather these these immoral attackers have received what they deserve.

[6 : 01] And the result? Their name is blotted out. Indeed, it is blotted out forever and ever. We've said already the name encapsulates the character, but there's another dimension to the idea of the name as well.

The Old Testament, in common with the other surrounding cultures at the time, the Old Testament is concerned with the continuation of a person's name. That's what lies behind the principle of what's called leveret marriage that's described in Deuteronomy 25.

And you can all go and look that up later. We are concerned with the continuation of the name of the family line. There's a somewhat weakened version of that same idea in mind when we talk about somebody continuing the family name.

It's much stronger in the Old Testament. And this psalm, Psalm 9, is concerned several times over with names, concerned with remembering and forgetting and blotting out.

And David says, so totally have the foes been defeated here that their name is blotted out forever and ever. It wouldn't make for a very good English translation, but you get a sense of the seriousness of the blotting out that a literal rendering of the phrase would be something like, to eternity and evermore.

[7 : 16] Eternity and then evermore on top of that. It is really, really gone. It's never coming back. These enemies are comprehensively vanquished.

Where God's name is to be praised, the enemy's name is blotted out. Verse 6, endless ruin is yet another word for eternity. These enemies are no more.

So David rejoices because this threat has been comprehensively dealt with. He rejoices in God's wondrous deeds displayed in his life. But for David, his confidence in God is not just what God has done kind of just now in this moment, this most immediate case.

His rejoicing isn't only because of these present circumstances or this particular victory. No, David rejoices too in God's character. He rejoices, verse 10, in his trustworthy name.

I've lost track of where I am. This, there we go. That's where we should be. Sorry. Folks, if you're the sort of person who highlights verses in your Bible or if you're taking notes and you want a key thing to write down, if you want to memorize key verses, I'd go for verses 7 and 8 of this psalm.

[8 : 33] The Lord reigns forever. He has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity. Folks, this is the sort of God who David depended on.

And this is the sort of God who we worship. David says, it's not just about my victories. It's not just that our forces have defeated the enemy forces.

It's not just about this present deliverance. That's a foretaste. That present victory points towards the future when God's righteous rule will be fully realized from pole to pole that wars may cease. God has destroyed the wicked once and he will do it again. Why? Well, not so much because God is bloodthirsty but because he is just.

And because, verse 9, he is a refuge and a stronghold. God is the place of safety for those in need.

[9 : 37] A refuge for the oppressed. A stronghold in time of trouble. That is God's nature. That is what his name reveals. That is his character.

The name of the wicked has been blotted out. But for those who know God's name, verse 10, they can trust in him. Friends, we can trust in this God whose name we know, whose character we have seen.

So why, verse 11, does David call for praise? That's a command there. Sing. That's a command in the plural.

Once again, David's praise is not only on his lips, but it is on the people's lips. On your lips and mine. Why? Because, verse 9, God is a refuge for the oppressed.

He is a stronghold in times of trouble. Because, verse 10, he does not forsake those who seek him. Because, verse 12, he is the avenger. Because he does not ever ignore the cries of the afflicted.

[10:38] That's what God said caused him to act back in Exodus. He said to Moses at the burning bush, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.

I've heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I'm concerned about their suffering.

So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

The Lord said, I have heard them crying, so I have come down to rescue them. God does not ignore the plight of the needy. Jesus said he came to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The word poor there in Luke 4, to whom Jesus proclaims good news, that's the same word as afflicted here in verse 12. Jesus came into this world because God does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.

Friends, is knowing that about God's character, is that not worthy of praise and thanksgiving? Will you not join with David in saying, I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart.

[12:01] 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. Well, that would seem like a perfectly reasonable psalm, wouldn't it?

We could just stop at verse 12. We've got a lovely psalm of praise and rejoicing. Job done. But David doesn't stop there. There's another eight verses of the psalm to go.

And in fact, there's some evidence that actually Psalm 10 is probably originally part of the same composition. And Psalm 10 is even more kind of negative and concerned with the situation.

So why do we suddenly have verse 13? Well, as I say, my heading for the rest of this psalm is victory anticipated. Because for all that David has known victory recently, as the first half of the psalm described, for all of that, he needs God's victory once again.

But before we consider that confidence of victory, let me return to where we began. Isn't this all too realistic?

[13:14] All too often, there is no respite. You've just about survived the difficult experience. You feel like you're starting to come to terms with your grief.

The illness has passed. Or you've found some kind of an equilibrium with your ongoing health issues at least. That stressful time at work is over. You've finished your exams.

Whatever it might be, the crisis, the issue is passed. And you look and you feel confident that God has upheld your right and your cause. And yet, just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, suddenly you are back flat on your face in the mud.

But Dale Ralph Davis rightly points out that this psalm shows us that wonderful deliverances can be followed by fresh needs.

That a believer's life does not consist of a jam or two, but normally consists of troubles all along the way. And the reality is still that we live in a fallen world.

[14:16] It is still true that putting food on our tables requires the sweat of our brows, that it requires toil. Faith in Christ does not exempt us from ordinary struggles.

And folks, if you were told that becoming a Christian would exempt you from that, then you should go and beat the person who told you that around the head with a rubber brick, or worse than that, because that is not the gospel.

It is still true, even as believers, that there is often no respite. And indeed, there might be additional suffering precisely because of your faith, as we're going to see studying 2 Timothy over the coming weeks.

So what then is the good news? What has happened to the gospel here? Well, folks, the gospel is not that we get to float through life in supreme unconcern.

But the good news is that victory is assured. David's response to this renewed pressure.

[15:21] David's response to once again feeling persecuted by his enemies. David's response to seeing the wicked going and digging their pits and hiding their nets. David's response is not despair.

David's response is prayer. David calls out to God, verse 13, to recognize the situation, to see what he is going through, and to have mercy.

For David, for him, everything depends on context. It's important in life, isn't it, to get the context right. If you get the context that you're in, then you end up ending that call to customer services like you would end a phone call to your mom, and you embarrass yourself and leave the poor guy on the other end wondering just why you do love him quite so much.

The context that you are in matters. And for David, his context gives him confidence. His context gives him assurance. Of course, on one level, David's context is terrifying.

On one level, he's again facing persecution. He feels like he is close to the gates of death. That's one half of his context. But the other half is the first 12 verses of the psalm.

[16:31] The other, the more important context, is that he knows who his God is. He knows about God's wondrous deeds. He knows about God's trustworthy character. He knows that God is the avenger of blood, and he knows that God is the righteous judge.

David knows that the more important context than those enemies over there is the God who backs him up. Now, friends, you and I will do well to remember our own context, because we may well be faced with rather too much muck in this life.

We may be faced with struggles of many kinds. We may be faced with one thing after another, after another, after another. But as was true for David, the greater, the more important context is the wondrous deeds and the character of our God.

I've said it before, and doubtless I will say it again in the future, we must take steps to remember. Because we are, by nature, forgetful, fallible people.

We deceive even ourselves. We don't remember what actually happened. Instead, we kind of push our recollection to the extremes. It was either the best holiday in the history of the world, or it was an unmitigated disaster from beginning to end.

[17:47] We forget the reality. But we have to remember, because the past sets the context for the future. 1 Samuel 7, 12.

Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and he named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the Lord has helped us. Samuel takes the big stone and he sits it there so that they will remember that God has helped them this far.

Implication, he will keep helping us further. God instituted the Passover festival. Why? So that his people would remember that outstretched arm that brought them out of Egypt.

And for us, he gave us another different meal. Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In his grace, God gives us a tangible reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. In his knowledge of our forgetfulness, God enjoins his people not to give up meeting together, but reminds us that we do well to come together and to encourage one another, to come and to speak of who he is and of what he has done, to come and declare his wondrous deeds recorded for us in the Bible, and to come and declare his wondrous deeds in our own lives.

[19:13] God gives us songs to sing that rehearse his goodness, that declare his wondrous deeds and his trustworthy character. Friends, as believers this morning, we have a double confidence, if you like.

We have two histories to remember. We remember this history of redemption, this revelation of God's character and of his wondrous deeds, his faithfulness to his people in the biblical story, from Genesis right the way through to Revelation.

That's one history. The other history is your own life. Like David, we do well to look back on victories won, to reflect on the times when God has been faithful to you, a sinner, to consider the times when he lovingly reached out and drew you back as you were prone to wander away, to consider the times when he lifted your head as the waves threatened to overwhelm you, to remember the times when he granted you the comfort and the peace that you needed in your griefs

and your sorrows.

Friends, we must remember the context of God's faithfulness as we face the context of our present trial. And it's that knowledge, that knowledge of his true context that enables David's appeal for help in the second half of this psalm to actually be every bit as confident as the declaration of trust and thanksgiving in the first half of the psalm.

David can say, verse 15, that the nations have fallen into the pit they dug. He says that not, I think, because this has literally happened already, but because of what's called the prophetic perfect tense.

[20 : 54] David is so completely confident in God's character that these things are as good as done. We can speak of them as though they were in the past, even though they lie in the future, because we are so confident that that is what will happen.

Why? Because we are confident in the character of the God who will do it. The Lord is known by his acts of justice, and therefore the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.

David knows God will never forget the needy, and so he confidently asks, Arise, Lord, do not let mortals triumph. David longs for God to put an end to these wicked nations, to declare, it is finished. There is no more. To bring down the curtain on this wickedness. David's prayer at its simplest is, thy kingdom come. Lord, bring about what you have promised.

Bring in full what we have seen in part. And therefore, together with David, we sing in praise of God's excellence. We declare his righteous character.

[22 : 05] We celebrate his wondrous deeds. And together with David, we look at our trials. We look at the muck of life all around us.

We consider the lack of respite. And together with David, we pray, your kingdom come. Let's pray. Lord God, we pray this morning for your kingdom to come here on this earth. We pray for your will to be done. We look at the situations in our lives.

We look at the grief and toil and struggle in this world. And Lord, we need your mercy. We need your power to be at work.

We need you in our lives. We need you in our world. And so we cry, thy kingdom come. Amen.