

Psalm 10

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Preacher: Fergus MacDonald

[0 : 00] I'd like us now for a few moments to turn back to these two Psalms that we read in the Old Testament on page 546.

And I'd like us to note the opening words of each of these Psalms. First of all, Psalm 9, I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart. I will tell of all your wonders.

Then Psalm 10, Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

There's quite an extraordinary contrast between the beginning of these Psalms.

And yet, these Psalms almost certainly were originally one Psalm, and I'll explain more about that in a moment. And we find these two themes coming together.

We are gathered here today to worship God. We come here to affirm, to praise him with all our heart, and to recite his wonders, his great deeds of salvation.

[1 : 11] But at the same time, in the light of events, recent events and other events in other parts of the world, we cannot help but have that thought at the beginning of Psalm 10 in our hearts.

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? I think what this juxtaposition does is to give us permission to bring our complaints, to bring our perplexities, to bring our laments to the Lord.

So that when we come to worship the Lord, it is not simply a question of praise and of adoration, important and crucial as that is.

God also wants us to be honest with him and to bear our hearts before him. He gives us permission. We see this in the book of Psalms again and again. The key, the most popular genre in the Psalms is the genre of lament.

Now, one of the problems that we have in the church in this day and age in which we live is that we have marginalized lament and that we've focused almost exclusively on praise and on happiness.

[2 : 30] We have allowed the humanist dream to invade the church that God wants us to be happy, and he does. But we ignore the hard corners, the hard edges of life.

And the psalmist is here urging us to bring our perplexities, to bring our complaints, to bring our laments to the Lord. There's a sense in which the psalmists were the first Protestants, because they bring their protestations to God.

They say, things, O Lord, are not as they ought to be if you are the sovereign ruler of the world. And so often in our worship we tend to be ultra-passive, rather than following this strain of lament and of protest when we come to God in our prayers.

And so there's a sense in which the opening of Psalm 9 conjures up for us worship in the temple or worship in a church, worship here together this morning, when we come and we take this day which God has set apart to create space for us to worship him, to praise him and to acknowledge him and to exalt him and to enthrone him, to acclaim him as king.

But at the same time, it is not an escape from the hard and harsh world in which we live, a world of terrorism in Iraq and now much closer to us, a world of poverty and servitude and exploitation in Darfur.

[4 : 07] That is the world in which we live. And God wants us to bring that world into our worship. God is concerned for that world. That is the world which God loves.

That is the world which Christ died to save. And he wants us to bring the needs of the world before him in our worship.

A lot of people, a lot of people are asking, are perplexed today, this morning, having looked, have seen the news of the last few days, saying, how can I live? How can I have faith in a world where there is so much terrorism, where there is so much bloodshed, where there is so much injustice?

How can I live? Well, the psalmist had that problem. We are not alone. The psalmist had that problem again and again. But he didn't bury the problem. He didn't suppress it. He didn't go into some kind of a spiritual denial. He brought the problem to the surface. He brought it with him into the house of God. He brought it into his psalms. [5 : 10] And God has given us these psalms in order that we might do likewise. That we might bring our pain. That we may bring our puzzlement. That we may bring the agony of our hearts into the presence of God.

God is giving us permission to do that. And sometimes our worship can be ultra-spiritual. And we ignore, as it were, shut out the world.

For God wants us to bring the needs of the world with us into the house of God. And we come before the one who is the sovereign Lord of the universe. And we are given permission to ask him why he is allowing these things to happen.

If he is the sovereign Lord, why are these things happening? We have permission to do that. And this ought to be part of our worship. And I think that in these two psalms and throughout the Psalter as a whole, and throughout the Bible as a whole, we are given some clues as to how we can live. How we can live in a fallen, broken, fractured, rebellious world. And still believe that God is sovereign. We live in an imperfect world.

[6 : 27] We live in a world in which we can see very imperfectly. Even when we try to see from God's point of view. But God has given us his word to be a lamp to our feet.

And a light to our path. So these two psalms are like two windows. God has given us his word to be a window to help us to see life.

To help us to look out. These two psalms emphasize both that God is sovereign, God is on the throne, and that things have gone wrong on earth. And so if you like, at the beginning of Psalm 9, the top half of the window, the glass is clear.

The bottom half, the glass is opaque. Go to Psalm 10, it's the opposite. You've got the top is opaque. And the psalm ends with clarity.

Now these two psalms almost certainly were originally one. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was made several centuries before Jesus from the Hebrew Scriptures, puts these two psalms as one.

[7 : 32] And that's one of the reasons why the number of psalms in the Greek version, or the Septuagint as it is called, the total number differs somewhat from the number we have in our Bibles, which is translated directly from the Hebrew Bible.

But we know that these two psalms are one because together they form an acrostic. And although these psalms are dealing with life and death issues, they do demonstrate not the expressions of desperation, but the result, the fruit of a lot of reflection.

There's a lot of poetry here. And what we have is that every second verse begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And this goes right through from Psalm 9 into Psalm 10, almost certainly indicating that these psalms were originally one psalm.

And perhaps for ease of use, they were separated in the temple worship, and in this way they found their separate existence in the Hebrew Bible.

But they are one. And the psalmist wants us to bring these things together. And he does this in a very artistic way, as I've said, a beautiful literary way to remind us that God is sovereign on the one hand, but the world is fallen on the other.

[8 : 56] So let's seek to use these two psalms as a window, as a couple of windows today, to look out on life. To look out on life in the wake of the attempted terrorism, which we have heard of in the last couple of days.

To look out on life in the light of such terrorism that is an everyday occurrence in Baghdad. Or to look out on life in terms of the misery that is occurring in Darfur, or the terrible civil war in the Congo.

One could go on and detail many of the deformities that are spoiling God's world today.

And God has given us these two psalms to help us to make sense of these kind of situations. I think that these psalms help us to look at God's world from three different angles.

First of all, they help us to see what is before our eyes. When we look at the news, when we read the newspaper, we see history unfolding before us.

[10:07] It helps us to understand what is happening. I think the fact of military terrorism is a very real one here in these psalms.

David speaks about the nations, or really they're not nations in the modern sense, their peoples plotting against him. And he speaks about the power of the wicked and the allies, the wicked, and these peoples or these nations.

And I think he's demonstrating, he's confirming to us that although God has made the world, the world has fallen, and that there is a mystery of iniquity at work in human history, not only in the past, but also contemporary.

And so we look out on the world, and we have to recognize the reality of evil. And it's important that we do that, that evil is something deep-seated, it's not something superficial, it's not something that's going to be solved by act of parliament, it is something which only the gospel of the grace of God can resolve.

Evil is deep-seated, is deep-rooted, we belong to a fallen, fractured humanity. And the Word of God reminds us of that.

[11:33] And the Word of God helps us to be realistic in our attempts to ameliorate the problems of evil in the world in which we live. But as we look through this window, we also see the evidence of what we today call secularism, not just terrorism, but secularism.

If we look at the picture of the wicked that is presented in Psalm 10, and particularly what the wicked say. Look at verse 6, for example.

He says to himself, nothing will shake me. I will always be happy and never have trouble. Nothing will shake me. I will always be happy and never have trouble.

I mean, that's the dream of many people today. And it's a dream which is only a dream, because we live, as I've said, in a fallen world.

Then again in verse 11, he, that is the wicked, says to himself, God has forgotten, he covers his face and never sees. God is forgotten. God is put to the margin.

[12:45] God is excluded from the centre of our lives. And that's what's happening in our secularised society today. In the words of Alistair Campbell, in government we don't do God.

God doesn't matter. God is put to the side. And that's one of the problems that we are facing today. We live in a secularised society that believes that God doesn't matter.

And yet, we know that God is the sovereign Lord. And he holds the key to resolving the dilemmas, the problems and the tragedies that we face.

Then in verse 13, the psalmist says, Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, He won't call me to account? The wicked man says to himself, the wicked person says to himself and herself, He won't call me to account.

That's one of the crucial problems that we face today. We've lost in our society the fear of divine judgement. And that's one of the key things we need to reassert.

[13:58] This is part of the word of God. It is part of the counsel of God. And it is the backdrop against which the gospel makes sense. And we need to encourage people in our personal witness to believe that there will be a day of judgement.

And that God will call people to account. And that every one of us will have to stand before God and to give an account of how we have lived our lives. We live in a world that is accountable to God.

But so often, the pressures in society, the pressures in the media, the pressures in government, the pressures in our professions are to discount these things. And to say you can believe in God, yes, on Sundays and on weeknights, but don't bring him into politics, don't bring him into business, don't bring him into the centre stage of life.

We need to try by the grace of God to reverse that and to give God his place in the public square of life. And these psalms also help us to see the oppression.

There's a great deal of reference in Psalm 10, especially to the poor, to the oppressed. And God is concerned about the poor. And often we forget that in our comfortable middle class way of living.

[15:17] We forget that God has got this deep concern for the poor. And the psalms remind us of that again and again and again. The afflicted or the poor.

One of the key themes of the psalms. God's concern for the poor. And how we need today to break out of our complacency and demonstrate in tangible ways a concern for those who are afflicted, a concern for those who are poor.

We think of people in Iraq, for example. I heard the other day of a child in Iraq, a child of five, saying to his mother, Mother, will we be killed today?

That's the kind of life which many thousands of people are living. There are four, perhaps, children asking, will we die today? The Congo, civil waters raging.

And it's so easy for us to isolate ourselves from these harsh realities and see them purely as celluloid realities, as virtual realities. God is wanting us to demonstrate his compassion for the poor. [16:27] to the deep concern for those who are poor. So that's the first angle that this psalm, or these psalms, help us to look out with, to look what is before our eyes, what we see and what we read about and what sometimes we experience day by day.

But the second angle, this psalm helps us to see not only what is before our eyes, but what is behind the scenes. This psalm affirms that God is on the throne.

Here is David, he's afflicted, he's being attacked, he's under terrorist threat, and here he is saying God is on the throne.

We see this in verse 4 of chapter 9, you have upheld my right and my cause, you have sat on your throne judging righteously. Again in verse 7, the Lord reigns forever, he's established his throne for judgment or for justice.

verse 11, saying praises to the Lord, enthroned in Zion, proclaim among the nations what he has done. And then in chapter 10 in verse 16, the Lord is king forever and ever, the nations will perish from his hand.

[17:45] And so we have this strong affirmation that God is on the throne, that although we cannot see it, David couldn't see it, and we can't often see it, but God is on the throne.

We read in the first gospel of Mark that when Jesus came and he began to preach, he said, the kingdom of God is near. Now by the kingdom of God, we perhaps want more correctly to translate that phrase, the kingship of God, the rule of God, is near.

Jesus came to proclaim that God is on the throne. And that's what these Psalms tell us, that's what Jesus tells us, that's what the Bible tells us, God is on the throne.

And he gave us this peep behind the scenes to enable us to realise that although things may appear to be topsy-turvy to us, and higgledy-higgledy here in this world, yet there is a sense, a very real sense, an ultimate sense, in which God is on the throne.

And God has given us his promises. And we are called to live, to fix our faith upon these promises. Someone has said that history is what happens between divine promise and divine fulfilment.

[18:59] And that, in a very real sense, is true. God's promises have not been negated by the terrorism, the war in Iraq, the poverty, exploitation in Darfur.

God's promises are alive and active. God's promises are sure. God's promises are there. And God's promises are there for us to be believed.

And we're invited to look behind the scenes and to see that God is on the throne. And that ultimately, it is he who holds the whole world in his hands.

And so the psalmist reminds us that God does indeed see, verse 14 of chapter 10, but you, O God, do see trouble and grief.

God does hear, look at verse 17, you hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted. And God will judge. We see that he comes to judge the world.

[20:04] There will be this judgment which will be effected. We see that in verse 8 of chapter 9. He will judge the world in righteousness. He will govern the peoples with justice.

Again, in chapter 10, verse 16, the Lord is king forever. The nations will perish from Islam. Those who oppose him will be defeated. So we see here that the kingship of God, the rule of God, being portrayed.

The psalmist is given this glimpse behind the scenes, just as we are given later in the book of Revelation. And there, in the context of a church that was suffering, the church was able to see that in the midst of their suffering, God was on the throne.

And they were able to believe that Jesus is Lord. It wasn't Caesar. who was the most powerful man on earth. It was Jesus who was Lord. And they were given that revelation.

We still have that revelation in God's word. We have it in this psalm. And we, at Encarnation, we come into the presence of God to recognize that God is on the throne, that God is sovereign.

[21:16] And that's what worship is, is to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and to give him and to give him the glory as the king of the universe and as the Lord of history.

Often we cannot see it with the eye when we look out. We do not see it. We do not see it before our eyes, but we can see it. We can believe it. That it is there behind the scenes.

As Jesus said in one of his short parables, the kingdom of God, the kingship of God is like a farmer sowing a seed which he sows and he buries it in the ground and it grows.

He said, he doesn't know how it grows, but it grows. And we are like that. We don't know how God is exercising his sovereignty today. But just like the farmer believes that having sown the seed, that that seed will germinate and will bear fruit, so also we are called upon to believe that the kingdom of God, the kingship of God, will, is being fulfilled, that it is germinating and working underground incognito.

But it's there. And one day it will be seen by all. And that brings us to the third angle that these psalms provide for us.

[22 : 28] We see here the first angle. It helps us to see as we look out in events and in history. It helps us to understand what is before our eyes. It helps us also to see what is behind the scenes.

But it also helps us to see what is over the horizon, what is yet to come in the future. The psalmist is here affirming that God reigns.

And he tells us that God will judge the world. He says, over the horizon there is the judgment of God. Jesus Christ will return and all the nations will be judged before him.

That is over the horizon. And the psalm affirms that again and again and again. Looking forward to that day when God will put right the injustices, the inequalities, the unrighteousnesses of this world. Now this was a vision rather than present reality for the psalmist and it still is a vision for us. That we are called upon to have this vision.

[23 : 36] To believe that God will judge the world. To believe that there will be a final judgment. And to believe that God in his mercy and in his grace will intervene and establish a new order.

A new heavens and a new earth from which sin and evil will be banished. But in the meantime we know that there is also behind the scenes the mystery of iniquity at work. There is an evil empire that is spiritually active.

And it is doing its utmost to frustrate the purposes of God. And that's why we live in an age of turmoil. That's why we live in a world of injustice. Because evil is loose in the world.

And yet God tells us that he will only allow evil to go so far. He is still sovereign. And one day as the book of Revelation tells us he will call even the devil and all his angels to account and punish them forever and ever and establish a new heavens and a new earth.

Now that is the vision that we are invited to believe as we read this psalm and as we sing this psalm. And as we sing many of the psalms this emphasis upon the fact that God will judge.

[24 : 46] And the psalmist believes that. He doesn't take the Lord into his own hands. He uses in a figurative way the phrase about he asks the Lord to break the arm of the wicked. Of course that's a figurative expression.

But it's interesting the psalmist doesn't do it himself. He asks God to do it. And he commits his, he commits judgment to God. And as one Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has said the path to the Sermon and the Mount to loving our neighbour is through these psalms in which we hand over our sense of injustice our sense of vengeance to God.

And we don't take the law into our own hands. We ask him, we commit it to him. And what does he do with it? He absorbs it in himself in his own son. And he invites us to forgive our enemies.

And so the challenge is a challenge not simply to proclaim and to witness to God's judgment but also to demonstrate God's forgiveness, God's love and God's mercy.

So this is the age in which we live today. And perhaps it may be that the threat of terrorism may become greater rather than lesser. We hope not that even if it were to become much more serious than it is today God is still on the throne and God is still calling you and he's calling me to be his witnesses in a rebellious world and to point a rebellious world to the Lord Jesus Christ who alone is the saviour of the world and who alone can put things right.

[26 : 23] He calls us to live our life in the light of God's throne both today his throne in heaven when he's sovereign over the world and in that last day when we will all appear before his throne and be judged.

And in his mercy God is inviting us today to prepare for that great day. Paul tells us that we may be justified by faith. Now the word justified is in fact a word which refers to the last day.

It's a word a legal word it's a word from the law courts it's a word of absolution it's a word it's a word which says that the judge will accept us.

Why? Because Jesus has lived our life and died our death for us. And so by believing on him we can be saved on the day of judgment. we can be delivered on the day of judgment not because we haven't sinned because all of us have grievously but because Jesus has not sinned and Jesus has lived and died for us so that when God accepts us now as he does through the gospel he anticipates his action on the day of judgment.

The act God's act of justifying a sinner is an anticipation of his act of judgment on the final day. And so it is possible for each and all of us to have an assurance today that on that great day we will be acquitted because God has already accepted us through trusting in him.

[27 : 57] And if there is someone here this morning who has not yet exercised that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ I would urge you to trust in him to put your faith in him and to receive him as your Lord and Savior Savior because God will accept you that is his promise God will justify you God will give you an assurance that on that great day of judgment you will be saved you will be acquitted you will be part of the new heavens and the new earth what a great opportunity may God grant that we may all grasp this opportunity today while we still have it with both our hands let's pray our heavenly father as we come before you into your presence at the close of this service we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ we thank you that he lived our life we thank you that he died our death we thank you that he rose again in order that he might justify us in order that he might bring us to you grant oh God that in this moment when we are awakened as to the fragility of human existence and as to the existence of evil in our fallen world that we may turn to

Christ as our refuge and find our strength in him grant that we may receive him now as our Lord and Savior and commit our lives to him to serve him forever and forever we ask this in his name and for his sake Amen now before we sing our final psalm I have to read an edict from the presbytery concerning the signing of the call and the edict is as follows in the name and by appointment of the free presbytery of Edinburgh and Perth I hereby intimate that in consequence of an application from this congregation the said presbytery agree to meet within this church on Wednesday the 11th day of July at 7.20 o'clock in the evening for the purpose of moderating in a call for filling up of the vacancy of this congregation the moderator of presbytery the Reverend Professor J.A. MacLeod to preach and to preside on the occasion now it says 7.20 because the presbytery will meet at 7.20 but the congregation will meet at 7.30 just as though the presbytery will be organised before the meeting could I also say that since this will be a closed call that is a call with one single name it is possible for those of you who will not be able to be present on the 11th of July to sign a mandate authorising the session clerk or any of the elders to sign on your behalf now please don't interpret the mandates as a reason for not coming to the meeting the mandates are for those who are unable to come for genuine reasons but I would urge those of you who are able to come to come so that we have a good representation because for the call to be sustained we have to have the signatures of over 50% of those who are on the communion roll these mandates are found in the vestibule in the top half is a mandate for communicant members those who are on the communion roll and the bottom half is for those who are regular worshippers but who are not in the communion roll you may be in the communion roll somewhere else but if that is the case then you sign the bottom half of the mandate or you may not be in the communion roll anywhere and simply be an adherent then you're also encouraged to sign the bottom half of the mandate if you cannot be present with us on the 11th of July then after they have the benediction please don't leave because the children will return for the prize giving