

All Are Accountable

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[0 : 00] I'm doing Psalms 9 and 10 together because in my studies I learned that they're intimately related, not just thematically but also in their original composition.

They may have been written together because they're written as an acrostic, so with each kind of metric unit beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and it continues all the way through 10.

It begins in 9 and goes through 10, even though it's not unbroken, but it's clearly discernible. So they're united by several themes.

One speaks of God as the righteous judge, and it also uses certain unique phrases like affliction, times of trial, suffering.

So they seem to be intimately understood together. So let me read the two Psalms out loud and then share some thoughts on it, and then we'll pray on the basis of that Psalm.

[1 : 03] I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.

I will be glad and exult in you. I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence, for you have maintained my just cause.

You have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment. You have rebuked the nations. You have made the wicked perish. You have blotted out their name forever and ever. The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins.

Their cities you rooted out. The very memory of them has perished. But the Lord sits in throne forever. He has established His throne for justice.

And He judges the world with righteousness. He judges the people with uprightness. The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

[2 : 07] And those who know your name put their trust in you. For you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the Lord who sits in throne in Zion.

Tell among the peoples His deeds. For He who avenges blood is mindful of them. He does not forget the cry of the afflicted. Be gracious to me, O Lord. See my affliction from those who hate me.

For you who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may recount all your praises. That in the gates of the daughter of Zion, I may rejoice in your salvation. The nations have sunk in the pit that they have made.

In the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught. The Lord has made Himself known. He has executed judgment. The wicked are ensnared by the work of their own hands.

Higayon, Selah. The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten. And the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

[3 : 08] Arise, O Lord. Let not man prevail. Let the nations be judged before you. Put them in fear, O Lord. Let the nations know that they are but men. Selah.

Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance, the wicked hotly pursue the poor. Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him. All his thoughts are there is no God.

His ways prosper at all times. Your judgments are on high, out of his sight. As for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, I shall not be moved.

Throughout all generations, I shall not meet adversity. His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. He sits in ambush in the villages.

[4 : 09] In hiding places, he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless. He lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket. He lurks that he may seize the poor.

He seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, God has forgotten.

He has hidden his face. He will never see it. Arise, O Lord, O God. Lift up your hand. Forget not, be afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, we will not call to account?

But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands. To you, the helpless commits himself. You have been the helper of the fatherless.

Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer. Call his wickedness to account till you find none. The Lord is king forever and ever. The nations perish from his land.

[5 : 10] O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted. You will strengthen their heart. You will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

It's obviously a longer section we're going through tonight than usual. So if you have your Bibles, please follow along with me. And so this is a psalm written in the context of a broken world.

And we live in a broken world where innocent people suffer, and the guilty people roam free and even in some cases prosper. And in such a world, then the question is, how can we persist in our faith in God, in a good God, in a righteous God?

How can we believe in him in a world such as this? And that's the question that these two psalms, Psalms 9 and 10, address. And it teaches us that we can entrust ourselves to God in the midst of our own afflictions because he's the righteous judge to whom all are accountable.

All are accountable to him, therefore we can entrust ourselves to him. And so I can talk about that in three points. The first one is that those who recount God's deeds suffer in this world.

[6 : 28] So those who remember him and recount his deeds suffer. And then secondly, those who discount God prosper. And then thirdly, that God brings all to account in judgment.

So I'll talk about those three things in turn. And the psalm teaches the hallmark of those who are righteous are that they remember God. They recount his deeds. So in Psalms 9, Psalm 9, 1 to 2, it says, I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.

I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you. I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. Verse 10 of the same chapter also says this, And those who know your name put their trust in you.

For you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you. Right. And then Psalm 9, 14 again says that I may recount all your praises. Right. So that those who are righteous seek God.

They recount his praise, his wonderful deeds. But unfortunately, those who seek him and remember God, recount his wonderful deeds, don't automatically have good and easy life.

[7 : 31] Because David, who wrote this psalm, is writing in the midst of his anguish and affliction. So he writes, even though he says that he talks about God judging these people and the wicked, he's writing from a place where that judgment has not yet taken place.

So the Hebrew tenses, even though it's translated as a past tense here, is not actually past tense. Because Hebrew tenses don't have, they're not on the basis of time. So they're more referred to aspects.

So they use the perfect kind of past tense to refer to something that's certainly going to happen. Usually it's what's happened already. But even with regard to future events, they'll use the past, so-called past tense, if it's going to happen for sure.

And so what the psalmist is saying here is that God's judgment is going to happen for sure. But he's still in the midst of affliction. And we see that in verse 13. Because he writes, see my affliction from those who hate me.

And in verse 18 of chapter 9, he says, The needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever. Indicating that in the time being, in the current situation, it does seem like the needy have been forgotten by God.

[8 : 41] The poor seem to be perishing. And so in verse 1 of chapter 10, he cries out, this communicates this feeling of being abandoned by him.

Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? So that's the state of the righteous. Even though they recount God's deeds, they suffer. But then, in stark contrast, those who discount God seem to prosper.

And the characteristic of the wicked is that they forget God, in verse 17 of chapter 9. And verse 3 to 4 of chapter 10 also describes him this way.

The wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him.

All his thoughts are, there is no God. And so this is not merely a theoretical atheism, but it's a functional atheism. They live as if God does not exist.

[9 : 43] And these wicked people are not shy in their wickedness. They're brazen. So verses 7 to 9 describe this, right there. Mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression.

Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. So the expression that the iniquity is under his tongue is supposed to poetically convey, it's kind of almost a savoring, enjoying, tasting wickedness.

That they enjoy wickedness. They delight in it. And they're not shy about their sins. And they flout God's justice.

And the worst part of it all is that the innocent are the ones that are victimized by these wickedness of the wicked. So in verse 10, the helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might.

And of course, it's not true that all atheists are immoral. And that's because not all theoretical atheists are functional atheists.

[10 : 44] Some atheists still live as if God existed. They live as if morality really existed. But the truth is that there cannot be true accountability or morality apart from God.

And the Yale legal scholar Arthur Allen writes about this. He says, Stated that boldly, So what he's saying is that if God's not the arbiter of justice, of morality, then no single individual or society can claim the exclusive right to determine what's right and wrong.

Then morality becomes relative. And if that's in a relative society, where morality becomes relative, then there can be no true accountability. And so that's what the Bible is teaching, what this passage is teaching, that functional atheism, living as if God doesn't exist, is at the heart of wickedness.

Because it's living as if God does not exist. But of course, the problem is not just for functional atheists. Functional atheists are not just a problem for theoretical atheists, but it's also a problem for theoretical atheists.

Because you can claim to believe in God, but still live as if God doesn't exist. And if that's the case, then that's even worse. Because not only are we functional atheists, but then we're also hypocrites if we did that. And so the psalmist hopes that these people who live as if God didn't exist, those who discount God, would be held accountable.

[12 : 42] But rather than facing judgment, they appear to be prospering. So verses 5 to 6 of 10, chapter 10 describe this. His ways prosper at all times.

God's judgments, your judgments are on high, out of his sight. As for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, I shall not be moved. Throughout all generations, I shall not meet adversity.

So they are so confident that they'll never have to give account to anyone. They're assured of their own success, that they will never face adversity. And so in this world, then the greedy fleece the poor and enrich themselves.

The violent ravish the weak and the murderous kill the innocent with indemnity. They do whatever it takes to achieve their own selfish ends and they succeed at it.

And that's why they say, it seems as though God has forgotten. He has hidden his face. He will never see it, they say in verse 11. In verse 13, they say, you will not call to account.

[13 : 42] So the righteous, those who seek God, those who recount God's deeds suffer, those who discount God prosper.

Then how are we to live in such a world? In this problem, evil, world full of suffering and injustice, then how can God truly be loving and just? And the key, these Psalms teach us to living in this kind of world is to live by faith and not by sight.

Because even though we don't place our confidence in our experience, but we have to place our confidence in our hope, in what God promises.

Because if we base our theology on the empirical data, just what we see here on the ground, then we would become functional atheists like the enemies of this psalmist. But instead, we have to base our theology on our faith that God will deliver us.

So the psalmist again and again reiterates his faith in God as the righteous judge. So the word judgment and words related to it occur in Psalm 9 and 10 over and over again throughout these passages.

[14 : 55] So David says in chapter 9, verse 4, You have maintained my just cause. You have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment. Verses 7 to 8, it says, But the Lord sits enthroned forever.

He has established His throne for justice. And He judges the world with righteousness. He judges the people with uprightness. Again in 9, 16, and then again in chapter 10, verses 17 to 18, the psalmist says over and over again that God is still the righteous judge who is still enthroned.

He's still reigning in this world. And therefore, we can trust Him to execute justice. And the way God does that is by remembering the people that belong to Him.

So it says that those who remember God, God will remember and not forget. It says in verse 12 and 18 of chapter 9, verse 12 of chapter 10. But those who forget God, God will blot out their memory from the earth.

It says in chapter 9, verses 5 to 6. And this is a really fearful prospect. I don't know if you guys ever thought of being blotted out from the face of the earth.

[16:03] No one remembering you. Your memory even lost. And this is a fearful prospect because our identity is rooted in our memory, right? So a few years ago, this was in the Chicago Tribune.

I was reading the Chicago newspaper for some reason. And there was an article about the Office of State Guardian, which is an office that basically takes into custody people who have lost their identity.

And so they're basically John and Jane Doe's. And at that time, there was about seven people like that in Chicago. And this one particular John Doe was cared for by the state, had been cared for by the state for 13 years.

So for 13 years, no one knew who he was. So he, for all intents and purposes, had no identity, no social security number, no record of anything, any kind, no relation of any kind.

And he had seemed to have suffered brain damage from his stroke, which is why he was so lost. And so he's kind of a desolate nobody, and he used a wheelchair to get around.

[17:12] He always wore a helmet to prevent injuries. And his only reaction to people who would speak to him would just be to smile and just laugh giddily. That was his only response to people.

But 13 years later, the Office of State Guardian ran a fingerprinting procedure against law enforcement databases. And when they did that, there was a matched name and a birth date that came up for this man, for this John Doe.

And so on that very day, the staff who cared for him went to him, and then they uttered the name, Crispin Marino. And usually a giggly man fell silent after hearing his real name for the first time in 13 years.

And then he started crying. Just because in hearing his name, the man finally recovered his identity. He found himself. And so that's the kind of warning that this past issue, he found issue to those who refused to acknowledge God and to seek him.

But for those who remember him and seek him, those who recount God's deeds, God promises to remember us. So in our most desperate loneliness, in our deepest struggles and sufferings, God remembers us.

[18:28] He knows us. We're in his memory. He doesn't forget us. It says 9, 12, he who avenges blood is mindful of them. He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

He will not forget us as we cry out to him. But in contrast, the wicked who refuse to acknowledge him, the wicked who discount God, God will blot out their name forever and ever and the very memory of them will perish.

This is verse 5 and 6 in chapter 9. So that's a fearful prospect if you think about that. And the destiny of the wicked is oblivion. They're blotted from the memory forsaken by their very creator.

And because of this, we can then, without despairing, cry out to him when we're suffering at the hands of injustice. When we're afflicted by the wicked, we can cry out to him like the psalmist does in verse 19 of chapter 9.

Arise, O Lord, let not man prevail. Let the nations be judged before you. And again, in chapter 10, verse 12. Arise, O Lord, O God, lift up your hand. Forget not the afflicted.

[19 : 32] And arise, O Lord, was the phrase that the Israelites used when they went into battle. They say, Arise, O Lord, and go before us. And so this is a battle cry. And for us in the Western world, you know, like crying out to God for vengeance may not fit our politically correct sensibilities.

But I think that's because, frankly, we don't suffer very much in the present time. To those people who have been unjustly deprived so that, you know, their children are starving but they don't know where the next meal is coming from.

For the people who wake up every morning wondering whether they're going to be raped again or not. For the people who have lost their family member who have been widowed or been orphaned by ravaging violence of the wicked.

It's a terribly callous thing to just speak nonchalantly of the God of love. These people need to hear about the God of wrath. They need to hear of the God of justice. They need to hear the battle cry, Arise, O Lord.

And that's indeed what God will do. And there's a wonderful poetic justice contained in this psalm. It says, because the words seek that's used here and the word account as well as the word avenge, all three of them come from the same Hebrew word.

[20 : 49] Those three English words are translated from the same Hebrew word. And once you recognize that, there's a beautiful poetic justice because it says that the righteous are those who seek God and the wicked, it says in chapter 10 verse 4, are those who do not seek him.

And the wicked also say that God will not hold them to account. God will not bring them to account. Again, all the same word, seek, account. But then it says that God, in chapter 9 verse 12, is the one who avenges blood.

So all the same word. So if that's the case, then God remembers those who seek him, but those who do not seek him will in turn be sought out by God in judgment and wrath.

And those who flout accountability to God then will be brought to account by God. So there's poetic justice there. And that's why I use those three English words to kind of convey that sense.

Those who recount God's deeds suffer. Those who discount God seem to prosper. But in the end, God will bring all of them to account in judgment. And the psalmist may not have ever seen this, may not have ever seen this, in his lifetime.

[21 : 58] But yet he lived in faith, in attention, holding out hope that God will bring this justice to him. But for us, we have an added benefit of having seen Christ come.

Because he came to bear God's judgment. And Romans 3, 23 to 26, talks about how we were all sinners. And God made his son die for us on the cross to show his righteousness and justice.

And the cross shows his righteousness and said justice because it was unjust of God to formally pass over sinners. It was unjust of God to let the wicked prosper in the past. But now, in the cross, we see God's judgment poured out in full.

And his justice displayed in his son, his righteous son being punished for the penalty of our sins, those who trust in him. And so that, at the same time, assures of us, assures those who repent and entrust themselves to him of God's mercy.

But it also assures us of the fact that those who refuse to repent, those who continue to perpetrate wickedness and acknowledge God, will be held accountable.

[23 : 06] Because God does not let injustice endure. And so, this psalm, I hope, gives those of you who are suffering much hope and also, it prepares us, it guards us as we live in an unjust world and to place our hope not in this world and to live as functional atheists who seek to take things into our own hands and to make might right, but rather to entrust ourselves to God and hold that hope that he will execute good justice on our behalf.

So with that, let's sing a song, Jimmy, and let's pray.