

Why Can We Trust God with Thanksgiving During Troubled Times?

~ Psalm 9:1-20

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It's Thanksgiving Sunday. We are in the only holiday weekend that instructs you how to feel. On Thanksgiving, we hopefully can express and feel thankfulness. On Remembrance Day, we remember those who served or serve. But we don't feel Remembrance. At Christmas we remember Christ but we don't feel Christmas. We commemorate a New Year but don't feel it. The same is true with Family Day and Easter in a way. Then there is Victoria Day in May – we don't feel Victoria, we don't feel Canada on Canada Day. I doubt we feel "civic" on the August long weekend. We don't feel like laboring on Labor Day.

Thanksgiving is a little different. There's an expectation to be and feel thankful. So are you? Do you feel thankful? It might be more challenging this year. Last year, few of us even knew the word COVID. Now, everyone's life has been affected and altered by it. We can find reasons for thanksgiving in the midst of these past 7 months. But maybe it's harder because we don't know how long this will go on. There is no certain end in sight. At least with winter, you know it will end by July in Edmonton. We don't know that with COVID. So how

can we feel thankful this Thanksgiving even with all this uncertainty?

That's what I hope to answer for you today. We're taking a break from the addictions series to focus on Thanksgiving. We're going to look at an unfamiliar Psalm to answer the following question – **Why trust God with thanksgiving even during troubled times?** This Psalm reveals several reasons. Yet they might surprise us at first. Yet I pray that God will use His Word and Spirit to help us see reasons for thanksgiving regardless of our circumstances. I pray that by the end today, you will have at least 1 more reason to be thankful than you had before we began. So our text is Psalm 9. Let's look at the entire 20 verses.

Psalm 9 (ESV) - A Psalm of David.

⁹ I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.

² I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

³ When my enemies turn back,
they stumble and perish before your presence.

⁴ For you have maintained my just cause;
you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.

⁵ You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish;
you have blotted out their name forever and ever.

⁶ The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins;
their cities you rooted out;
the very memory of them has perished.

⁷ But the Lord sits enthroned forever;
he has established his throne for justice,
⁸ and he judges the world with righteousness;
he judges the peoples with uprightness.

⁹ The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.

¹⁰ And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

¹¹ Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion!
Tell among the peoples his deeds!

¹² For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

¹³ Be gracious to me, O Lord!
See my affliction from those who hate me,
O you who lift me up from the gates of death,

¹⁴ that I may recount all your praises,
that in the gates of the daughter of Zion
I may rejoice in your salvation.

¹⁵ The nations have sunk in the pit that they made;
in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught.

¹⁶ The Lord has made himself known; he has executed judgment;
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.

¹⁷ The wicked shall return to Sheol,
all the nations that forget God.

¹⁸ For the needy shall not always be forgotten,
and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

¹⁹ Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail;
let the nations be judged before you!

²⁰ Put them in fear, O Lord!
Let the nations know that they are but men!

To understand this text, we need to go to the middle. The ancient Hebrew poets often put their central point in the middle of their writing. The first portion would build up to that center point and the portion after would flow from the center. Well I think this text centers around verses 7 and 8. They provide the key reasons for thanksgiving and hope in the passage. Verse 7 states – “But the Lord sits enthroned forever [...]”

Why can we trust God with thanksgiving even during times of trouble?

One - The Lord sits enthroned forever. 9:7. In ancient times, kings or queens were expected to fulfill multiple roles. First, he was the ruler over the kingdom and responsible for its security. So ancient kings would ride out with their armies to defend their kingdom from any threat. In times of peace, they would govern their kingdom from the royal throne at a palace likely in the capital city. The quality of life in the kingdom depended a lot on the king. If you had a good king you would live in security under a fair and just rule. If you had a corrupt king, you might live under heavy taxation or face threat if you did not give wholehearted support.

Yet your circumstances could change dramatically with the death of the king. People living in security and justice might soon find themselves living under a tyrant who exploited them. Others who lived

insecurely under a tyrant might gain hope with the new king with noble intentions.

But we don't have to worry about that happening when it comes to the reign of God. The Lord sits enthroned forever. He is the eternal king. He reigns over the entire universe from His throne. He will not be dethroned. His reign endures forever. David declares this reality in the first part of verse 7. Then he goes on to describe the nature of the Lord's reign.

This gives us another key reason for hope and thanksgiving today.

Two – The Lord is a righteous judge. Notice the emphasis on justice in the second half of verses 7 and verse 8. “He has established his throne for *justice* and he *judges* the world with *righteousness*; he *judges* the peoples with *uprightness*. So righteous justice reverberates through this verse.

This connection of judging by the king seems strange to us. We're used to separation of the leader of a nation from the justice system. But in ancient times, the king was protector, governor and judge. We see this in the kings of the Old Testament. We know David, for example, as the warrior who killed Goliath and won many military victories for Israel. Yet Absalom, David's rebellious son, called into question David's management of the justice system. 2 Samuel 15:2 –

“And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call . . . ‘See your claims are good and right but there is no man designated by the king to help you.’” You may also know about Solomon's wise judgment. Remember the two women who came before Solomon with one baby boy? Both claimed to be mother of the child. They came before Solomon to render a verdict and he uncovered the truth in a brilliant way. In this Psalm, David paints a picture of the Lord as the perfectly righteous judge.

He tells us that the Lord “judges the world with righteousness.” Yet we might struggle a little with this because in our day we don't associate judging with good news. We think of judgment as harsh or cutting down or difficult because we don't like being scrutinized by a judge. Yet there's one word that can completely transform our view of God as judge – righteous. According to Theologian Wayne Grudem, “God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the standard of what is right.” What is right? Grudem says, “Whatever conforms to God's moral character is right. If God is the final standard of righteousness, then there can be no standard outside of God by which we measure righteousness or justice. He himself is the final standard.”

Of course, many people disagree with this today. They reject God because they think He is unrighteous or unfair in the reports from the Bible. Or they disagree with what God says in the Bible or don't believe it to be accurate. Therefore, He's not right about everything which raises questions about Him being a righteous judge.

But when we see this claim that God judges righteously, we must see it in the context of a king who wants what's best for His people. This king will judge righteously in His kingdom. We must also recognize that God is perfectly balanced in His character. He is omnipotent or all powerful. And He is perfectly righteous. He is loving and He is just. So He has all this power but it is governed by His righteousness. He doesn't use His power to overwhelm or exploit the weak. He is loving. But His justice does not allow this love to just let things go that need to be confronted. His righteous judgment requires calling to account wrongdoing and rendering justice. He demonstrated love and justice at the cross. There God rendered justice on His own Son, Jesus, out of love for us. The punishment we deserved was poured out on Him. So when anyone comes to Christ, God can accept them without demanding just payment for their sin. Christ already paid that for us. The more we understand this, the more we can relate to God as good righteous judge. We can see the beauty of His righteous judgment and

the security that we gain from it. So these two verse provide the key reasons for thanksgiving even in troubled times. The Lord sits enthroned forever. The Lord righteously judges the world.

From these two, David then gives several other reasons for thanksgiving even in troubled times. **Three – God judges and acts on our behalf when we live justly.** **9:3-4.** "When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence." There's the power of God. Then verse 4 – "For you have maintained my just cause." So David does something just or right in God's eyes. Then end of verse 4. "You have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment." So there's God on the throne righteously judging. David says that this touches his own life. He experienced God acting and ruling on his behalf with respect to his enemies.

So say you or I join a just cause or live in a right way. We were ultimately made to do right or do good works that glorify God. Yet because of this, people mistreat us. They assault or attack us verbally or emotionally or even physically. God will one day call that to account. He will recognize the justness of our actions or lives.

I also think verses 3-4 help address the wound of injustice that may linger in our lives. Think about the bully that got away with bullying you – the classmate who cheated off you and stole your work – the fellow

employee who did wrong for which you received blame – the alcoholic who inflicted pain on your family and never repented or made things right. If people cheat us, take advantage of us, make fun of us or despise us, that sort of injustice can sting. Yet not one incident will escape God's eyes. God is the eternally enthroned King who judges righteously, and acts to respond to injustice against us. He only judges righteously in our individual lives.

Four - God sovereignly judges or will judge the nations for their atrocities and injustice. 9:5-6. Think about all the atrocities over the centuries that people, groups and nations have committed. Think about Josef Stalin who died before facing trial for the millions he had murdered; the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; the perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda; the 9/11 attackers; the harsh slave owners in, Africa, Britain, the American south, or the difficult parts of our own history. Ultimately, none of those acts collectively or individually will escape the Lord's notice and justice. Because He's enthroned eternally and judges righteously, we can be assured that justice will be served on all the perpetrators.

With all of this in mind, look what David declares in verses 9-10. "The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you

O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you." These verses mean a little more when we look from the perspective of someone suffering oppression or trouble because of some injustice. In fact, isn't most real oppression the result of some injustice? **Five - God is our stronghold when we endure trouble or injustice from others. 9:9-10.** Though we may live under the unjust rule of some leader, we also live under the just rule of the Lord. The Lord's rule will ultimately triumph over any earthly leader's rule.

If you currently experience some trouble where someone falsely accuses you, mistreats you or tries to get something unfairly from you, the Lord is your stronghold in trouble. Some of you have been through such difficult and strenuous times. They were difficult and strenuous. Yet He was your stronghold and did not forsake you. Even if the justice is somewhat incomplete today, it will be completed on the last day of the Lord's Judgment.

Then David applies this very personally in verse 13 and 14. "Be gracious to me, O Lord! See my affliction from those who hate me. O you who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may recount all your praises. **Six - God sees when we experience affliction from those who hate us. 9:13-14.** One great challenges in walking through injustices is the loneliness that comes with it. An accusation can

suddenly make friends scarce. If someone makes an accusation today, many people believe it without evidence. They condemn the person before any thorough investigation. Then, even if the accusation proves false, the retraction or apology shows up on page 13 of the newspaper. Or the apology comes after much damage and the suffering of much pain. But the Lord sees such affliction. His righteous judgement ensures the payment of that debt and revelation of the truth in this life or the next.

The last reason we see for giving thanks in troubled times is found in verse 15-17. **Seven - God will turn the schemes and plans of wickedness into self-imposed traps. 9:15-16.** Verse 15 - "The nations have sunk in the pit they have made; in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught." Well how did that happen? Verse 16 – The Lord has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands." Today, when we see governments pass laws that go against God's moral character, it can be discouraging. In Canada, if a leader of a political party even raises the question about abortion today, he/she is tarred and feathered as some extremist who wants to send us back to the dark ages. In fact, advocating anything that aligns with God's way of living but does not affirm personal autonomy is considered the new blasphemy. It can be

demoralizing to face this development from our governments or leaders. Yet the Lord has power and authority over every government and leader. He uses their schemes to entrap themselves.

The Psalm ends with hope. Verse 18 – "For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever." Sometimes, people get trapped in a cycle of poverty from which they cannot escape. Millions live with this reality today. Think about our own inner city, in Edmonton; the street people living even here in St Albert. They experience society's forgetfulness and their hope perishes. Yet the Lord does not forget. Who did Jesus spend most of His time with? The poor, the farmers whose families barely made it; the fishermen; the widows; the lame; the lepers and the outcasts of society. The enthroned King who judges righteously remembered them and provide hope. These all add up to seven reasons we can trust God with thanksgiving even in troubled times.

How might this help us deal with the pandemic's uncertainty? Maybe you have been unjustly treated during this pandemic. The Lord sees that. Maybe your employer took advantage of this situation and got rid of you just to save money. Maybe other people, even other Christians have unfairly slammed you because of your perspective on

the pandemic and the government regulations – God sees that and your affliction.

Though it can be difficult to deal with something that has no end date, the Lord sits enthroned forever. The pandemic stopped our courts for a while. But it did not stop the heavenly court. It has not displaced God from His heavenly throne. He reigns supreme over all. He still accomplishes His purposes. He calls us to trust in Him more than we trust in an end date for this pandemic. So we must use this time to go deeper into trusting Him maybe than we ever have before. If we do that; if we grow in trust of the Lord, it would be a great outcome with far-reaching impact in our lives.

So how might we respond today? **Come to Christ and confess your belief in Him for the first time.** To actually come under the Lord's righteous protection, we first need to come to Him. If you have never come to Christ before, you must first receive Him as Savior and Lord into your life. You must acknowledge that Jesus was God's Son and was raised from the dead. You must turn away from doing life your own way and instead trust Him to lead you as your good and loving King. It's a big decision but it would also be the greatest good that could ever come into your life. Despite the hardship of this pandemic, God will have worked all things together for good in your life during this

time. So if you want to receive Christ, you can do that now in your own heart with quiet prayer now.

Repent of any injustice we have participated in – of living unjustly – of failing to “do justice” to others. Repent to the Lord and to the one you wronged.

Thank the Lord for the times He brought justice to you and maintained your just cause. You may have noticed I did not talk about verses 1-2 which have the greatest thanksgiving focus of this passage. But I agree with those who say that David determines to give thanks because of the truths found later in the Psalm. Because the Lord is enthroned forever and righteously judges, “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.” He does the same thing in verses 11 and 12 where he calls worshippers to join in a song of praise because of the justice of the Lord.

Pray for the Lord to bring justice in your life, your circle and your world. Join Him in that work. So let us end with David's call - Verses 19-20. “Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you! Put them in fear, O Lord! Let the nations know they are but men!

(Lord's Supper) – (1 Cor. 11: 23-29)