

What's in a name? (Psalm 9)

A sermon given at
St Matthew's Anglican Church
West Pennant Hills (Sydney)
17 January 2010
by Bob Mendelsohn

Introduction:

Thank you to your pastor for the kind invitation for me to speak today. Steve, you've known and watched Jews for Jesus from afar, and from up close, and I appreciate your support for our ministry.

Thank you friends at St Matts for giving me your ear to hear what God might be saying to us today from the passage chosen for me by your pastoral staff so many months ago.

At the end I pray that you will know God more clearly and have confidence in his sustaining and love and capacity to embrace us and keep us to the end.

And as a missionary to the Jewish people, I trust you will also keep us often in prayer so that Jewish people in Sydney, and beyond, will experience this psalm and the whole Bible for themselves.

Remember Shakespeare's classic tragedy of Romeo and Juliet? After their first kiss, the star-crossed lovers separate. Act II features Juliet's soliloquy, "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo," and continues with "'Tis but thy name that is my enemy, thou art thyself though not a Montague. What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man. O be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet; so Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, retain that dear perfection which he owes without that title/ Romeo, doff thy name and for that name, which is no part of thee, take all myself."

Except Juliet-- here's the problem; the name of Romeo IS part of him. He is linked with both the name *Romeo* and the name *Montague*. All the while, we like Juliet ask, "what's in a name?"

Friends, in today's Bible passage, we have some hints and I will try to fill in some other information which will help us read Psalm 9 for modern people, pained, hurting, longing, looking far beyond ancient Italy for answers to life's real questions.

Let's look at the Bible and see what it has to say to us as 21st century people. (For those online, scroll to the end of this sermon and you will find the entire text printed. Thanks.)

Psalmist's (situation and) determination

.2 I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

Maybe you've noticed the superscript in the Psalms. These tell us the setting of the psalm. In the English versions they are called superscript, but in the Hebrew Bible, they are actually verse one of the psalm itself.

So here we see the occasion of the writing of the psalm. The NASB and KJV say "Upon Muthlaben" The NIV says, "For the director of music. To [the tune of] "The Death of the Son."

A psalm of David." Wow, if it's the tune of the death of the son, then it's probably a funeral dirge. It's a sad song. It's not one of the chart toppers from Australian Idol. Maybe it's like *Forever Autumn* by Justin Hayward: The Moody Blues' lead singer sang this 32 years ago. The sense of loss – "'Cause you're not here, 'cause you're not here" – makes this song particularly sad, especially wrapped by all the minor chords. The flute that marks the end of every chorus is especially dirgeful. Or *Yesterday* by the Beatles or Phil Collins singing *Separate Lives*. Now with those in mind, can you imagine the opening lines being what we read in verses 1 and 2?

"I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Thy wonders. I will be glad and exult in Thee; I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High." What! What incomprehensible conflict!

And maybe that's part of what makes this psalm, this poem, so great. David knew God. He knew God to be one who was trustable and worthy of the song of his own pain. Singing praise to his name....that's our Lesson One today (On your outline it's titled the **Psalmist's determination**). His determination was to worship God's name and sing God's praises. No matter what.

I became a believer in Jesus in 1971. I had been raised an Orthodox Jew in Kansas City, in the center of the US, and was 19 years old at the time. When I prayed to receive Christ as Saviour of my life, immediately my life changed, inside out. And as a result, I've never been the same.

I returned to my parents' house in town, and told them of my new-found faith. Oy, oy, oy. They were not happy. They threw me out of the house. You could hear the funeral dirge and the flutes warming up. Phil Collins was loosening his vocal chords. But inside I knew that God had done something marvelous and He was worthy of our praises. In fact, some Jewish families actually do go through a funeral service for the relative who leaves traditional Judaism and joins up with the likes of St Matts.

I don't mean to demean the superscript, for the death of a son is a huge thing, and it wrenches my gut to stop and consider such a loss in my own life. And yet, in that condition, with something so painful in mind and heart, David wrote this psalm.

What's in a name? Worship. David said, "I will sing praise to your name, oh most high."

Let's unpack a little more of the poem.

Who is who in the psalm?

It's good to get a list of characters in a playbill when you go to the theatre. When we read this Psalm there are many, but basically they are 1) God, the Righteous Judge, 2) the enemies of King David sometimes called the nations or the wicked, 3) King David himself, and 4) those who long for justice. Sometimes they are called poor, afflicted or needy.

When we think about justice, some want it awfully badly while most of us are a bit shy. I'm a golfer and the refrain I hear from partners on the links is often, "That's not fair" usually said after an otherwise wonderful golf shot hits the only limb on the only tree for 200 metres. Children, and certainly teens are good at joining that refrain as well. "That's not fair" whether a punishment or a withdrawal of some benefit or opportunity. In my own life, I've sorted out that we should never demand justice, but we should always give it. Let me repeat that. We should never demand justice, but we should always give it.

King David took that advice. He DID seek for justice, especially for those who were downtrodden and oppressed. And his inspiration was the Lord who ever seemed ready to do such, although not as quickly as we would like. Asaph, the great music minister under

King David, wrote Psalm 73 which echoes this longing for justice and the apparently requisite delay in obtaining it.

Let me zoom in a bit more on a couple of those characters listed. First, who really is this God?

Who, really, is this God?

Look at these 7 attributes listed in the 9th Psalm:

1. He is Just (verse .4, .7-8, .16)
2. He destroys wicked (.5)
3. Endures forever (.7)...that's a clear contrast with the wicked.
4. Refuge for oppressed (.9)
5. Loyal (.10, 12)
6. Blood avenger (.12)
7. Encourager: lifts up despondent (.13). No wonder David felt the list was warranted at this time. He must have been feeling a bit down, listening to the funeral dirge, and now, recalling the nature of God, the name of God, the power of God, the person of the Lord Himself...that would encourage the king almost immediately.

Don't you feel that when you sing certain hymns and spiritual songs? A lifting, a rising, a celebration occurs inside you and you remember who God is, even God who dwells in you, and wants to work his purposes in us.

When I first became a believer, I heard about a man who was going around preaching about praise. His whole ministry was devoted to getting people to praise the Lord, no matter what was occurring around them. I found his message full of anecdotes and a good rhythm, but I wondered if it would really matter when the bottom fell out of his life.

Friends, not only did I watch from afar and find his experience full of truth, but I've lived it the last 38 years and agree. Praise, and particular praising God for who he is, will give us a perspective on life and death and troubles and good times and all times that is beyond human psychobabble and any special messages from Rhonda Byrne's discovery of *The Secret*.

What about the enemies?

Every psalm falls into a category, a poetic genre if you will. Psalm 9 is a classic lament psalm. Dennis Bratcher writes this about laments,

“The theological significance of a lament is that it expresses a trust in God in the absence of any evidence that He is active in the world. Through a sequential and deliberate structure, the lament moves from articulation of the emotion of the crisis, to petition for God to intervene, to an affirmation of trust in God even though there has been no immediate deliverance from the crisis”

With that in mind, let's look at another in the list of characters, the enemies. The enemies do the following:

1. Keep coming (.3)
2. Rebuked and destroyed (.5)
3. Ruinous (.6)

4. Hate David and godly (.13)
5. Forget God (.17)
6. Men (.19-20)[This is really a summary of the other 5]

These characteristics are not exactly the kind you want recorded for perpetuity. How would you like to be titled ruinous or a forgetter of God... no thanks. I'll stand in the other line, if possible. In your high school yearbook or on your Facebook page, are these the kinds of items you would list for yourself?

You see, these phrases are names. They are part and parcel of the person or nations or enemy of King David and the Jewish people.

So what's in a name? Listen to verse 5:

.5 Lord, you have blotted out their name for ever and ever.

Whatever was in their name, and their national name, is long gone. God wipes them out. Consider the names of the nations abundant at the time of the Conquest under Joshua. The Hittites, the Hivites...anyone know anyone with such a passport in Australia today? Or the Jebusites or Amorites? Did you sit next to one on a recent Middle East flight? Nope, you didn't and you won't. Those nations are gone. God's word is true, and he blots out the name of the enemies of Israel.

By the way, as a sidelight, the Israeli word for Jesus today, according to young and old alike is Yeshu. That's not his name, but it's a slur. Its letters correspond to the abbreviation (ישי) for the Hebrew expression ימח שמו וזכרו (yimmach shemo vezikhro), meaning "May his name and memory be blotted out." an expression used for deceased enemies of the Jewish people. The term is explained as such in the medieval Toldoth Yeshu narratives. You can understand why most Jewish believers in Jesus don't use that term today.

What is my response?

What's in a name? Biblically everything about a person is in his name. In modern times, certainly in the Jewish world, you will things about people at their funerals. This is the memorial of a person. Their name is their memory and that should persist into the ages. Unfortunately, most are forgotten within 3 generations.

At times in the Bible God changed peoples' names to indicate a future for him or her. At times, God gave the parents the names to give their children. He did so with Y'shua, our Messiah and Lord, didn't he? We've just come through the Advent and Christmas seasons and heard the story over again. The angel tells Joseph to call the baby by the name "Y'shua" for he shall 'save' his people from their sins. We might miss that in the English, but any hearer of this angelic instruction in the day would have understood. Y'shua is the name which translated to Salvation and when the angel says 'call him Y'shua' he is saying that his name and his ministry are the same.

Fascinating to me that the angel did not say 'call him Teacher' for he will teach. Or 'call him Prophet' for he shall so be regarded by millions of people 2000 years from now throughout the Middle East. Even though Y'shua prophesied, his name was not prophet. The angel did not say 'call him miracle worker' although he did miracles. No, the angel said, 'call him Y'shua' for he will "save". That's his name. That's his title. That's his ministry.

So in light of this information, what is my response?

Hear what King David said in verse

.10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

The name of the Lord is like a strong tower, the righteous runs into it and is safe. (Prov. 19.10) In a lament, either personal or corporate, either local or national, our confidence in handling things rolls back and rolls out from our relationship with the Almighty. I have a friend for 4 decades now. Her name is Anne. She was part of my church back then, and came to Bible studies faithfully. We used to talk about things that might happen to us in the future. All the while, as youth, we knew God would look after us. When Anne was living and working in the Inner City of a major US town, she was raped. Shockingly and horribly raped without notice and without anyone's outside help. And yet, in the midst of it, she kept hearing words from the Scriptures we had studied. And what kept her then and to this day is the assurance that God is with us. And that no matter what the situation, God has never forsaken those who seek him. That doesn't mean we don't experience pain, but that in the midst of our pain, God is with us. Wasn't that in the heart of the message through Isaiah we read again and again during the last month? "The virgin will conceive and bear a child... and his name will be called Immanuel" (God with us). Isaiah knew that promise. King David knew that promise. Do you know that promise?

Evangelism: A major reply

Look at verse 11 "proclaim among the nations what he has done." Whatever else we can say about David, we cannot miss this feature which highlights so many of the psalms. He had a massive concern that all people throughout the world, even the goyim should find the eternal God and be known by Him.

We are Jews for Jesus, and as such we have a purpose to make the Messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to our Jewish people worldwide. Maybe that's why I moved to Australia 12 years ago, 16, 000 kilometres away from New York City.

I'm not saying you have to put stickers on your Subaru saying "Goyim for Jesus" or move halfway across the world, but you do have to share the Gospel with those around you, and especially with Jewish people you know. God wants us to be helpful in this evangelism program of the Lord.

Maybe you can help us in this program as well.

After you fill out the white card you have (for those online, you can simply write to me at bob.mendelsohn@gmail.com) and drop it into the offering plate, you extend to us the privilege to speak to you again, and we sincerely appreciate this. And we work together to proclaim what God has done among the nations.

A Heavenly Perspective

As I draw us to our conclusion today, let me ask you to consider this poem from the heavenly side of things. The superscript tells us someone had lost his son. Remember that on the cross, about which we so wondrously sang this morning, that

- 1) **God lost his son.** And though that reality was shocking to every heavenly system, even so, God was glad. The Bible says (Isa 53.10) "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," because it brought about our redemption.
Secondly, the justice of God was met on Calvary, where the Saviour died. There
- 2) **God destroyed death and the enemies of Satan, flesh and sin.** "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of our sins," (Heb 9.22) but God's justice was met in his son's death. Then those who demand justice and those who ever want to extend it meet together. God's favor and God's mercy and God's love and justice all meet together in his son, and particularly there in his son's death.
- 3) **Jesus trusted his father, on the cross.**

And finally, listen to those words spoken from the cross, “Eli, eli, lama sabachtani” (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?) We hear many sermons with that text, for this morning, consider the very personal nature of this lament psalm. Y’shua from the cross, echoing what King David wrote in Psalm 22 a millennium before, personalized the forsaking. By that I mean that he trusted the name of the Lord. He trusted God, no matter what. God was ‘my God’ and the forsaking was intentional and something about which Y’shua was informed. Even so, he had to cry from the cross his very faith in the lament psalm style. Again from Bratcher, “Lament Psalms are not often seen as praise, because we have too often associated praise only with the bright and happy moments in life. Lament psalms are prayers that articulate to God what it is like to live in a real world. They cry out to God from the darkness of the hurts, pains, anger, frustrations of life.”

Conclusion:

Today all we have to say is one word and it conjures up imagery. Brittany. Tiger. Madonna. Pop culture has helped us memorialize people at least for a while. More serious imagery is conjured when I say to you today the word Haiti.

In light of our conversation today, what imagery pops up when I say the name *Jesus* or *Y’shua*? What associations arise? What’s in a name? For you, is it one that is to be blotted out? Or is he to be trusted beyond measure, beyond time, beyond human reason?

I believe he is. I will sing praises to your name, oh Most High. You made yourself known to me in Jesus. I will trust in you. You have never forsaken those who trust in you.

Thank you Steve for the chance to address St Matt’s today. Thank you friends for listening. Thanks for helping me extend this message to my Jewish people in Sydney and Melbourne and beyond.

Thanks be to God for letting us know him personally.

Amen.

Sources:

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Volume 3, 1986, pp 479-493

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, IVP, Downers Grove, 1998, pp 582-586.

Bratcher, Dennis, *Patterns for Life: Structure, Genre, and Theology in Psalms*, <http://www.crivoice.org/psalmgenre.html#Lament>, 2000. His site ends with a recommended reading list, not sure if he uses these sources, Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Augsburg, 1984. Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message*, Augsburg, 1980. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, John Knox, 1981. Bernhard Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd. ed., Westminster, 2000.

Roberts, Mark, on Bible.ca, <http://www.bible.ca/ef/expository-psalm-9.htm>, and his sources include Expositor's Bible Commentary, Psalms, pages 116-117 as well as ISBE on the QuickVerse ver. 6 CD-ROM. April, 2001.

To buy Merlin Carothers book, *Prison to Praise*, visit this website.
<http://www.foundationofpraise.org/prisontopraise.html>

Actual text (NASB)

Psa. 9.0 ¶ For the choir director; on Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.

Psa. 9.1 ¶ I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Thy wonders.

Psa. 9.2 I will be glad and exult in Thee; I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High.

Psa. 9.3 When my enemies turn back, They stumble and perish before Thee.

Psa. 9.4 For Thou hast maintained my just cause; Thou dost sit on the throne judging righteously.

Psa. 9.5 Thou hast rebuked the nations; Thou hast destroyed the wicked; Thou hast blotted out their name forever and ever.

Psa. 9.6 The enemy has come to an end in perpetual ruins, And Thou hast uprooted the cities; The very memory of them has perished.

Psa. 9.7 ¶ But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment,

Psa. 9.8 And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.

Psa. 9.9 The LORD also will be a stronghold for the oppressed, A stronghold in times of trouble,

Psa. 9.10 And those who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; For Thou, O LORD, hast not forsaken those who seek Thee.

Psa. 9.11 ¶ Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion; Declare among the peoples His deeds.

Psa. 9.12 For He who requires blood remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

Psa. 9.13 Be gracious to me, O LORD; Behold my affliction from those who hate me, Thou who dost lift me up from the gates of death;

Psa. 9.14 That I may tell of all Thy praises, That in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in Thy salvation.

Psa. 9.15 The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made; In the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught.

Psa. 9.16 The LORD has made Himself known; He has executed judgment. In the work of his own hands the wicked is snared. Higgaiion Selah.

Psa. 9.17 ¶ The wicked will return to Sheol, Even all the nations who forget God.

Psa. 9.18 For the needy will not always be forgotten, Nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever.

Psa. 9.19 Arise, O LORD, do not let man prevail; Let the nations be judged before Thee.

Psa. 9.20 Put them in fear, O LORD; Let the nations know that they are but men. Selah.