

“Learning From Experience”

4 July 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 125 Lord Of The Years

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Psalm 9

Sermon:

Carrick-a Rede rope bridge on the North Antrim coast is a scary experience but when you have been over it once, the experience is helpful, as is seeing others go before you. Your fears are calmed. It is always wise to learn from experience.

A surgeon who does his first operation finds the next one slightly easier until you will be surprised how they might be talking about the latest football match or their weekend activities as they cut into your flesh and expose some life-giving organ. Experience and knowledge help.

This week we travelled to Edinburgh to collect David from university. You may remember the car issue and the amber warning light of the engine. It reappeared just before we were to travel and this time, we consulted our mechanic who was not overly reassuring but did give us good advice. It appears the fault is related to the engine thermostat and if the temperature increased, we were to stop immediately but if the temperature remained normal we could drive on and if the light went out we were free to drive. Though frustrating I was less anxious, and God was good because somewhere before Ayr on the Scottish coast the amber light disappeared and has not been back since. We learn from experience!

In Psalm 9 David similarly recounts an experience of help he had from God with “enemies” (v.3) where the outcome was positive (v.4) and so when he faces a renewed and serious attack from “my enemies” (v.13) he is better prepared to trust God. As he recalls the past and God’s nature, he is full of praise (v.1) and the psalm is written so that we might praise God, to help us he writes this song and gives the words and the music to the music director for everyone to sing.

He also writes it so that we might learn from his experience of God. The psalm is an acrostic psalm, each verse begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As you can see in your Bibles there is some evidence that Psalms 9 and 10 were originally one psalm but it is not conclusive, and we have been given them as two so we will look at them individually. David also writes that we might learn about God, and he proclaims many things about God particularly in v.7-9 and from that he exhorts us to trust God. Lastly, he writes this as a prayer for God to act in justice, which is important because this is not only about personal faith and getting through the experience it is about God being vindicated and the need for God to act in the light of the terrible reality of human sin and injustice in our world (v.13ff and v.19-20). So let us see what we can learn from David’s song in Psalm 9.

I. David Remembers a Time of Deliverance (v.1-6)

When we read of David's wholehearted devotion in v.1, I always feel rebuked, because my heart is often controlled and cold. David was a passionate man, and when he remembers God's past deeds, which he calls wonders, he sings God's praise. What is he thinking about? The previous Psalm 8 speaks of the glory of creation and the wonder of the Exodus, their salvation is always on his mind. It is a significant truth, that no matter what is happening the wonder of creation and our salvation in Jesus Christ is something we can wholeheartedly praise God for. Let us ask God to help us do so.

As he pauses to consider the character of God, the name of God (v.2) what is he thinking of, God provides, God is alongside, God cares, God is good, God is true, God is powerful, God is just. He is telling us that because of God's character no matter what is happening to us we can always say, *"I will be glad and rejoice in you."*

In verses 3-4, he recalls a personal experience when God delivered him. Perhaps he is thinking of how God delivered him from an encounter with a lion when a shepherd. Can you recall times when God has delivered you? In church we have had the privilege of hearing stories of deliverance, from sickness and disease, from certain disasters in cars, some of these have even been miraculous and numerous smaller things which are often overlooked. All Christian believers have a testimony of God's help from enemies, sin, the flesh, the devil you have been saved and God has on many occasions demonstrated his ongoing goodness to us. God judged righteously and David was vindicated.

He recalls times of national experience (v.5-6) He is referring to victory in battles. As the King of Israel, he has led them to many successes in battle and he recalls God's active work in making that happen. Perhaps he is remembering the defeat of Goliath the Philistine. They are no more; they are not even remembered, it happened, and we have moved on.

Remember God, his deeds, his character, his deliverance and his sovereign plan of salvation for his people and let your hearts be assured and wholehearted committed in praise. *"I will praise you O lord, with all my heart, I will tell of all your wonders."* Praise and proclaim.

II. David Learns About God (v.7-12)

Experience is an educator. It is part of the reality of apprenticeship. A former neighbour of ours told me how he learned to be a surgeon in the mid 1900's in Dublin by apprenticeship. His master taught and he read up afterwards. David, having been through the experience of crises, enemies and God's vindication has learned important things about God.

- God reigns over the world in sovereign control. (v.7)
- God judges righteously (the theme of Psalm 7) (v.8)
- God is a refuge in trouble (v.9)
- God does not forsake (v.10)
- God does not ignore (v.12) particularly our cries to him.

Therefore, the right response, the wise response is to trust God (v.10). In trouble, whatever that is God is sovereign, in trouble God will judge rightly, in trouble God is a refuge, in trouble God hears our prayers, in trouble I will not be abandoned. This gained knowledge, this practical experience results as before in praise and proclamation (v.11).

III. David Trusts God in Renewed Trouble (v.13-18)

Thinking again about the apprentice learning model, the trainer will want to test the apprentice and for their good. Examinations are good in that sense. The bible reassures us that, *“the Lord disciplines those he loves”* (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6) or *“God disciplines us for our good”* (Hebrews 12:10).

So, it has been my experience that sometimes difficulties are repeated, they can be even more severe, and we are meant to, then, apply the knowledge we have gained previously. Therefore, even though David has been through one test he outlines that he is now facing a new test. Whatever is going on is significant and serious as David fears for his life (v.13). He applies from his previous experience what he has learned of God to his present situation and out of that he prays for God’s mercy and salvation. God alone can rescue, and he is secure in God’s salvation (v.14). The truth of God’s justice, those who perpetrate evil deeds get caught in the consequences of their evil (v.15-16; Psalm 7). He remembers the final plight of the wicked in death and hell (v.17) and he concludes with the great hope he has in the affliction and trouble. *“the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish”* (v.18). These truths encourage us to trust God (v.10) to hope (v.18) and persevere until the justice of God is revealed. Our painful trials are purposeful and so we persevere in hope.

IV. David Prays in Confidence (v.19-20)

The implications of v.19-20 are important. David is not content to sit back, to not get involved, instead he actively prays seeking that the perpetrators of evil, human beings or authorities run by humans would be judged, stricken by terror and humbled. It is a serious prayer, is it not. Such thinking tends to overwhelm me, and our hope is that the call is not to individual prayer but to collective church-based prayer. We tackle the people, and systems of injustice together in the light and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

The early Church faced tremendous opposition from the Jewish and secular authorities, but it did not stop them from both praising and proclaiming Jesus. We read in Acts 4 of the arrest and interrogation of Peter and John. The response of the Church was to pray for God to enable the disciples to keep speaking of God and for God to act in signs and wonders. God was pleased to answer that prayer, the Holy Spirit was given, the place shook, and they all spoke the word of God boldly. The challenge is for us to pray with confidence. We are soldiers in a battle, but God has won the victory. The well known hymn “Fight the Good Fight” says this well:

*Fight the good fight with all your might.
Christ is your strength and Christ your right.
Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Your joy and crown eternally.*

*Run the straight race through God's good grace;
Lift up your eyes, and seek Christ's face.
Life with its way before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.*

*Cast care aside; lean on your guide.
God's boundless mercy will provide.*

*Trust, and your trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.*

*Faint not nor fear: God's arms are near.
He does not change, and you are dear.
Only believe, and Christ shall be
Your all in all eternally.*

That was David's experience of God in life and he wants us to learn to trust God in life.

Praise: IPH 93 What A Faithful God

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: IPH 624 Restore, O Lord

Benediction