

Exposition on Psalm 10

by St. Augustine

The sermon explores the theme of God's delay and the sinner's downfall, highlighting the importance of righteousness and truth.

Scripture: Psalm 9:4

Topics: "God's Judgment", "Divine Justice"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the Psalms, delving into the deep meanings behind the verses. He discusses the consequences of sin, the anger of the Lord towards the ungodly, and the importance of God's judgment. St. Augustine also explores the themes of humility, righteousness, and the ultimate reign of the Lord over all. He emphasizes the significance of God's intervention in the lives of the poor and the orphans, highlighting the need for hope and trust in God's justice and mercy.

Transcript

Why, O Lord, says he, have You withdrawn afar off? Psalm 9:1. Then he who thus inquired, as if all on a sudden he understood, or as if he asked, though he knew, that he might teach, adds, You despise in due seasons, in tribulations: that is, You despise seasonably, and causest tribulations to inflame men's minds with longing for Your coming. For that fountain of life is sweeter to them that have much thirst. Therefore he hints the reason of the delay, saying, Whilst the ungodly vaunts himself, the poor man is inflamed Psalm 9:2. Wondrous it is and true with what earnestness of good hope the little ones are inflamed unto an upright living by comparison with sinners. In which mystery it comes to pass, that even heresies are permitted to exist; not that heretics themselves wish this, but because Divine Providence works this result from their sins, which both makes and ordains the light; but orders only the darkness, that by comparison therewith the light may be more pleasant, as by comparison with heretics the discovery of truth is more sweet. For so, by this comparison, the approved, who are known to God, are made manifest among men.

1. They are taken in their thoughts, which they think: that is, their evil thoughts become chains to them. But how become they chains? For the sinner is praised, says he, in the desires of his soul Psalm 9:3. The tongues of flatterers bind souls in sin. For there is pleasure in doing those things, in which not only is no reprover feared, but even an approver heard. And he that does unrighteous deeds is blessed. Hence are they taken in their thoughts, which they think.

2. The sinner has angered the Lord Psalm 9:4. Let no one congratulate the man that prospers in his way, to whose sins no avenger is near, and an approver is by. This is the greater anger of the Lord. For the

sinner has angered the Lord, that he should suffer these things, that is, should not suffer the scourging of correction. The sinner has angered the Lord: according to the multitude of His anger He will not search it out. Great is His anger, when He searches not out, when He as it were forgets and marks not sin, and by fraud and wickedness man attains to riches and honours: which will especially be the case in that Antichrist, who will seem to man blessed to that degree, that he will even be thought God. But how great this anger of God is, we are taught by what follows.

3. God is not in his sight, his ways are polluted in all time Psalm 9:5. He that knows what in the soul gives joy and gladness, knows how great an ill it is to be abandoned by the light of truth: since a great ill do men reckon the blindness of their bodily eyes, whereby this light is withdrawn. How great then the punishment he endures, who through the prosperous issue of his sins is brought to that pass, that God is not in his sight, and that his ways are polluted in all time, that is, his thoughts and counsels are unclean! Your judgments are taken away from his face. For the mind conscious of evil, while it seems to itself to suffer no punishment, believes that God does not judge, and so are God's judgments taken away from its face; while this very thing is great condemnation. And he shall have dominion over all his enemies. For so is it delivered, that he will overcome all kings, and alone obtain the kingdom; since too according to the Apostle, who preaches concerning him, He shall sit in the temple of God, exalting himself above all that is worshipped and that is called God. 2 Thessalonians 2:4

4. And seeing that being delivered over to the lust of his own heart, and predestinated to extreme condemnation, he is to come, by wicked arts, to that vain and empty height and rule; therefore it follows, For he has said in his heart, I shall not move from generation to generation without evil Psalm 9:6: that is, my fame and my name will not pass from this generation to the generation of posterity, unless by evil arts I acquire so lofty a principality, that posterity cannot be silent concerning it. For a mind abandoned and void of good arts, and estranged from the light of righteousness, by bad arts devises a passage for itself to a fame so lasting, as is celebrated even in posterity. And they that cannot be known for good, desire that men should speak of them even for ill, provided that their name spread far and wide. And this I think is here meant, I shall not move from generation to generation without evil. There is too another interpretation, if a mind vain and full of error supposes that it cannot come from the mortal generation to the generation of eternity, but by bad arts: which indeed was also reported of Simon, when he thought that he would gain heaven by wicked arts, and pass from the human generation to the generation divine by magic. Acts 8:9 Where then is the wonder, if that man of sin too, who is to fill up all the wickedness and ungodliness, which all false prophets have begun, and to do such great signs; that, if it were possible, he should deceive the very elect, Matthew 24:24 shall say in his heart, I shall not move from generation to generation without evil?

5. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness and deceit Psalm 9:7. For it is a great curse to seek heaven by such abominable arts, and to get together such earnings for acquiring the eternal seat. But of this cursing his mouth is full. For this desire shall not take effect, but within his mouth only will avail to destroy him, who dared promise himself such things with bitterness and deceit, that is, with anger and insidiousness, whereby he is to bring over the multitude to his side. Under his tongue is toil and grief. Nothing is more toilsome than unrighteousness and ungodliness: upon which toil follows grief; for that the toil is not only without fruit, but even unto destruction. Which toil and grief refer to that which he has said in his heart, I shall not be moved from generation to generation without evil. And therefore, under his tongue, not on his tongue, because he will devise these things in silence, and to men will speak other things, that he may appear good and just, and a son of God.

6. He lies in ambush with the rich Psalm 9:8. What rich, but those whom he will load with this world's gifts? And he is therefore said to lie in ambush with them, because he will display their false happiness to deceive men; who, when with a perverted will they desire to be such as they, and seek not the good things eternal, will fall into his snares. That in the dark he may kill the innocent. In the dark, I suppose, is said, where it is not easily understood what should be sought, or what avoided. Now to kill the innocent, is of an innocent to make one guilty.

7. His eyes look against the poor, for he is chiefly to persecute the righteous, of whom it is said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven Matthew 5:3 Psalm 9:9. He lies in wait in a secret place, as a lion in his den. By a lion in a den, he means one in whom both violence and deceit will work. For the first persecution of the Church was violent, when by proscriptions, by torments, by murders, the Christians were compelled to sacrifice: another persecution is crafty, which is now conducted by heretics of any kind and false brethren: there remains a third, which is to come by Antichrist, than which there is nothing more perilous; for it will be at once violent and crafty. Violence he will exert in empire, craft in miracles. To the violence, the word lion refers; to craft, the words in his den. And these are again repeated with a change of order. He lies in wait, he says, that he may catch the poor; this has reference to craft: but what follows, To catch the poor while he draws him, is put to the score of violence. For draws means, he brings him to himself by violence, by whatever tortures he can.

8. Again, the two which follow are the same. In his snare he will humble him, is craft Psalm 9:10. He shall decline and fall, while he shall have domination over the poor, is violence. For a snare naturally points to lying in wait: but domination most openly conveys the idea of terror. And well does he say, He will humble him in his snare. For when he shall begin to do those signs, the more wonderful they shall appear to men, the more those Saints that shall be then will be despised, and, as it were, set at nought: he, whom they shall resist by righteousness and innocence, shall seem to overcome by the marvels that he does. But he shall decline and fall, while he shall have domination over the poor; that is, while he shall inflict whatsoever punishments he will upon the servants of God that resist him.

9. But how shall he decline, and fall? For he has said in his heart, God has forgotten; He turns away His face, that He see not unto the end Psalm 9:11. This is declining, and the most wretched fall, while the mind of a man prospers as it were in its iniquities, and thinks that it is spared; when it is being blinded, and kept for an extreme and timely vengeance: of which the Psalmist now speaks: Arise, O Lord God, let Your hand be exalted Psalm 9:12: that is, let Your power be made manifest. Now he had said above, Arise, O Lord, let not man prevail, let the heathen be judged in Your sight: that is, in secret, where God alone sees. This comes to pass when the ungodly have arrived at what seems great happiness to men: over whom is placed a lawgiver, such as they had deserved to have, of whom it is said, Place a lawgiver over them, O Lord, let the heathen know that they are men. But now after that hidden punishment and vengeance it is said, Arise, O Lord God, let Your hand be exalted; not of course in secret, but now in glory most manifest. That You forget not the poor unto the end; that is, as the ungodly think, who say, God has forgotten, He turns away His face, that He should not see unto the end. Now they deny that God sees unto the end, who say that He cares not for things human and earthly, for the earth is as it were the end of things; in that it is the last element, in which men labour in most orderly sort, but they cannot see the order of their labours, which specially belongs to the hidden things of the Son. The Church then labouring in such times, like a ship in great waves and tempests, awakes the Lord as if He were sleeping, that He should command the winds, and calm should be restored. Matthew 8:24-26 He says therefore, Arise, O Lord God, let Your hand be exalted, that You forget not the poor unto the end.

10. Accordingly understanding now the manifest judgment, and in exultation at it, they say, Wherefore has the ungodly angered God? Psalm 9:13; that is, what has it profited him to do so great evil? For he said in his heart, He will not require it. Then follows, For You see toil and considerest anger, to deliver them into Your hands Psalm 9:14. This sentence looks for distinct explanation, wherein if there shall be error it becomes obscure. For thus has the ungodly said in his heart, God will not require it, as though God regarded toil and anger, to deliver them into His hands; that is, as though He feared toil and anger, and for this reason would spare them, lest their punishment be too burdensome to Him, or lest He should be disturbed by the storm of anger: as men generally act, excusing themselves of vengeance, to avoid toil or anger.

11. The poor has been left unto You. For therefore is he poor, that is, has despised all the temporal goods of this world, that You only may be his hope. You will be a helper to the orphan, that is, to him to whom his father this world, by whom he was born after the flesh, dies, and who can already say, The world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world. Galatians 6:14 For of such orphans God becomes the Father. The Lord teaches us in truth that His disciples do become orphans, to whom He says, Call no man father on earth. Matthew 23:9 Of which He first Himself gave an example in saying, Who is my mother, and who my brethren? Matthew 12:48 Whence some most mischievous heretics would assert that He had no mother; and they do not see that it follows from this, if they pay attention to these words, that neither had His disciples fathers. For as He said, Who is my mother? so He taught them, when He said, Call no man your father on earth.

12. Break the arm of the sinner and of the malicious Psalm 9:15; of him, namely, of whom it was said above, He shall have dominion over all his enemies. He called his power then, his arm; to which Christ's power is opposed, of which it is said, Arise, O Lord God, let Your hand be exalted. His fault shall be required, and he shall not be found because of it; that is he shall be judged for his sins, and himself shall perish because of his sin. After this, what wonder if there follow, The Lord shall reign for ever and world without end; ye heathen shall perish out of His earth? Psalm 9:16. He uses heathen for sinners and ungodly.

13. The Lord has heard the longing of the poor Psalm 9:17: that longing wherewith they were burning, when in the straits and tribulations of this world they desired the day of the Lord. Your ear has heard the preparation of their heart. This is the preparation of the heart, of which it is sung in another Psalm, My heart is prepared, O God, my heart is prepared: of which the Apostle says, But if we hope for what we see not, we do with patience wait for it. Romans 8:25 Now, by the ear of God, we ought, according to a general rule of interpretation, to understand not a bodily member, but the power whereby He hears; and so (not to repeat this often) by whatever members of His are mentioned, which in us are visible and bodily, must be understood powers of operation. For we must not suppose it anything bodily, in that the Lord God hears not the sound of the voice, but the preparation of the heart.

14. To judge for the orphan and the humble Psalm 9:18: that is, not for him who is conformed to this world, nor for the proud. For it is one thing to judge the orphan, another to judge for the orphan. He judges the orphan even, who condemns him; but he judges for the orphan, who delivers sentence for him. That man add not further to magnify himself upon earth. For they are men, of whom it was said, Place a lawgiver over them, O Lord: let the heathen know that they are men. But he too, who in this same passage is understood to be placed over them, will be man, of whom it is now said, That man add not further to magnify himself upon earth: namely, when the Son of Man shall come to judge for the orphan, who has put off from himself the old man, and thus, as it were, buried his father.

15. After the hidden things then of the Son, of which, in this Psalm, many things have been said, will come the manifest things of the Son, of which a little has been now said at the end of the same Psalm. But the title is given from the former, which here occupy the larger portion. Indeed, the very day of the Lord's advent may be rightly numbered among the hidden things of the Son, although the very presence of the Lord itself will be manifest. For of that day it is said, that no man knows it, neither angels, nor powers, nor the Son of man. Mark 13:32 What then so hidden, as that which is said to be hidden even to the Judge Himself, not as regards knowledge, but disclosure? But concerning the hidden things of the Son, even if any one would not wish to understand the Son of God, but of David himself, to whose name the whole Psalter is attributed, for the Psalms we know are called the Psalms of David, let him give ear to those words in which it is said to the Lord, Have mercy on us, O Son of David: Matthew 20:30 and so even in this manner let him understand the same Lord Christ, concerning whose hidden things is the inscription of this Psalm. For so likewise is it said by the Angel: God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David. Luke 1:32 Nor to this understanding of it is the sentence opposed in which the same Lord asks of the Jews, If Christ be the Son of David, how then does he in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I put Your enemies under Your feet. Matthew 22:43-44 For it was said to the unskilled, who although they looked for Christ's coming, yet expected Him as man, not as the Power and Wisdom of God. He teaches then, in that place, the most true and pure faith, that He is both the Lord of king David, in that He is the Word in the beginning, God with God, John 1:1 by which all things were made; and Son, in that He was made to him of the seed of David according to the flesh. For He does not say, Christ is not David's Son, but if you already hold that He is his Son, learn how He is his Lord: and do not hold in respect of Christ that He is the Son of Man, for so is He David's Son; Romans 1:3 and leave out that He is the Son of God, for so is He David's Lord.

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