

Exposition on Psalm 9

by St. Augustine

The sermon explores the themes of the hidden things of the Son, the Lord's judgment, and the importance of hope in the Lord and the knowledge of His Name.

Scripture: John 8:36

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Faith Salvation"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the hidden things of the Son, emphasizing the distinction between the manifest and hidden judgments of God, where the pain and trials in life serve as a purification or warning for conversion. He delves into the concept of two advents of the Lord, one past and one future, highlighting the importance of faith and belief in Jesus for salvation. St. Augustine also discusses the ultimate judgment where all will confess Jesus as the assigner of rewards and punishments, and the need to surrender to God's will to find refuge and hope in Him.

Transcript

1. The inscription of this Psalm is, To the end for the hidden things of the Son, a Psalm of David himself. As to the hidden things of the Son there may be a question: but since he has not added whose, the very only-begotten Son of God should be understood. For where a Psalm has been inscribed of the son of David, When, he says, he fled from the face of Absalom his son; although his name even was mentioned, and therefore there could be no obscurity as to whom it was spoken of: yet it is not merely said, from the face of son Absalom; but his is added. But here both because his is not added, and much is said of the Gentiles, it cannot properly be taken of Absalom. 2 Samuel xv For the war which that abandoned one waged with his father, no way relates to the Gentiles, since there the people of Israel only were divided against themselves. This Psalm is then sung for the hidden things of the only-begotten Son of God. For the Lord Himself too, when, without addition, He uses the word Son, would have Himself, the Only-begotten to be understood; as where He says, If the Son shall make you free, then shall you be free indeed. John 8:36 For He said not, the Son of God; but in saying merely, Son, He gives us to understand whose Son it is. Which form of expression nothing admits of, save His excellency of whom we so speak, that, though we name Him not, He can be understood. For so we say, it rains, clears up, thunders, and such like expressions; and we do not add who does it all; for that the excellency of the doer spontaneously presents itself to all men's minds, and does not want words. What then are the hidden things of the Son? By which expression we must first understand that there are some things of the Son manifest, from which those are distinguished which are called hidden. Wherefore since we believe two advents of the Lord, one

past, which the Jews understood not: the other future, which we both hope for; and since the one which the Jews understood not, profited the Gentiles; For the hidden things of the Son is not unsuitably understood to be spoken of this advent, in which blindness in part is happened to Israel, that the fullness of the Gentiles might come in. Romans 11:25

For notice of two judgments is conveyed to us throughout the Scriptures, if any one will give heed to them, one hidden, the other manifest. The hidden one is passing now, of which the Apostle Peter says, The time has come that judgment should begin from the house of the Lord. 1 Peter 4:17 The hidden judgment accordingly is the pain, by which now each man is either exercised to purification, or warned to conversion, or if he despise the calling and discipline of God, is blinded unto damnation. But the manifest judgment is that in which the Lord, at His coming, will judge the quick and the dead, all men confessing that it is He by whom both rewards shall be assigned to the good, and punishments to the evil. But then that confession will avail, not to the remedy of evils, but to the accumulation of damnation. Of these two judgments, the one hidden, the other manifest, the Lord seems to me to have spoken, where He says, Whoso believes in Me has passed from death unto life, and shall not come into judgment; John 5:24 into the manifest judgment, that is. For that which passes from death unto life by means of some affliction, whereby He scourges every son whom He receives, Hebrews 12:6 is the hidden judgment. But whoso believes not, says He, has been judged already: John 3:18 that is, by this hidden judgment has been already prepared for that manifest one. These two judgments we read of also in Wisdom, whence it is written, Therefore unto them, as to children without the use of reason, You gave a judgment to mock them; But they that have not been corrected by this judgment have felt a judgment worthy of God. Wisdom 12:25-26 Whoso then are not corrected by this hidden judgment of God, shall most worthily be punished by that manifest one....

2. I will confess unto You, O Lord, with my whole heart Psalm 9:1. He does not, with a whole heart, confess unto God, who doubts of His Providence in any particular: but he who sees already the hidden things of the wisdom of God, how great is His invisible reward, who says, We rejoice in tribulations; Romans 5:3 and how all torments, which are inflicted on the body, are either for the exercising of those that are converted to God, or for warning that they be converted, or for just preparation of the obdurate unto their last damnation: and so now all things are referred to the governance of Divine Providence, which fools think done as it were by chance and at random, and without any Divine ordering. I will tell all Your marvels. He tells all God's marvels, who sees them performed not only openly on the body, but invisibly indeed too in the soul, but far more sublimely and excellently. For men earthly, and led wholly by the eye, marvel more that the dead Lazarus rose again in the body, than that Paul the persecutor rose again in soul. But since the visible miracle calls the soul to the light, but the invisible enlightens the soul that comes when called, he tells all God's marvels, who, by believing the visible, passes on to the understanding of the invisible.

3. I will be glad and exult in You Psalm 9:2. Not any more in this world, not in pleasure of bodily dalliance, not in relish of palate and tongue, not in sweetness of perfumes, not in joyousness of passing sounds, not in the variously coloured forms of figure, not in vanities of men's praise, not in wedlock and perishable offspring, not in superfluity of temporal wealth, not in this world's getting, whether it extend over place and space, or be prolonged in time's succession: but, I will be glad and exult in You, namely, in the hidden things of the Son, where the light of Your countenance has been stamped on us, O Lord: for, You will hide them, says he, in the hiding place of Your countenance. He then will be glad and exult in You, who tells all Your marvels. And He will tell all Your marvels (since it is now spoken of prophetically), who came not to

do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. John 6:38

4. For now the Person of the Lord begins to appear speaking in this Psalm. For it follows, I will sing to Your Name, O Most High, in turning mine enemy behind. His enemy then, where was he turned back? Was it when it was said to him, Get behind, Satan? Matthew 16:23 For then he who by tempting desired to put himself before, was turned behind, by failing in deceiving Him who was tempted, and by availing nothing against Him. For earthly men are behind: but the heavenly man is preferred before, although he came after. For the first man is of the earth, earthy: the second Man is from heaven, heavenly. 1 Corinthians 15:47 But from this stock he came by whom it was said, He who comes after me is preferred before me. John 1:15 And the Apostle forgets those things that are behind, and reaches forth unto those things that are before. Philippians 3:13 The enemy, therefore, was turned behind, after that he could not deceive the heavenly Man being tempted; and he turned himself to earthy men, where he can have dominion....For in truth the devil is turned behind, even in the persecution of the righteous, and he, much more to their advantage, is a persecutor, than if he went before as a leader and a prince. We must sing then to the Name of the Most High in turning the enemy behind: since we ought to choose rather to fly from him as a persecutor, than to follow him as a leader. For we have whither we may fly and hide ourselves in the hidden things of the Son; seeing that the Lord has been made a refuge for us.

5. They will be weakened, and perish from Your face Psalm 9:3. Who will be weakened and perish, but the unrighteous and ungodly? They will be weakened, while they shall avail nothing; and they shall perish, because the ungodly will not be; from the face of God, that is, from the knowledge of God, as he perished who said, But now I live not, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20 But why will the ungodly be weakened and perish from your face? Because, he says, You have made my judgment, and my cause: that is, the judgment in which I seemed to be judged, You have made mine; and the cause in which men condemned me just and innocent, You have made mine. For such things served Him for our deliverance: as sailors too call the wind theirs, which they take advantage of for prosperous sailing.

6. You sat on the throne Who judgest equity Psalm 9:4. Whether the Son say this to the Father, who said also, You could have no power against Me, except it were given you from above, John 19:11 referring this very thing, that the Judge of men was judged for men's advantage, to the Father's equity and His own hidden things: or whether man say to God, You sat on the throne Who judgest equity, giving the name of God's throne to his soul, so that his body may perhaps be the earth, which is called God's footstool: Isaiah 66:1 for God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself: 2 Corinthians 5:19 or whether the soul of the Church, perfect now and without spot and wrinkle, Ephesians 5:27 worthy, that is, of the hidden things of the Son, in that the King has brought her into His chamber, Song of Songs 1:4 say to her spouse, You sat upon the throne Who judgest equity, in that You have risen from the dead, and ascended up into heaven, and sittest at the right hand of the Father: whichsoever, I say, of those opinions, whereunto this verse may be referred, is preferred, it transgresses not the rule of faith.

7. You have rebuked the heathen, and the ungodly has perished Psalm 9:5. We take this to be more suitably said to the Lord Jesus Christ, than said by Him. For who else has rebuked the heathen, and the ungodly perished, save He, who after that He ascended up into heaven, sent the Holy Ghost, that, filled by Him, the Apostles should preach the word of God with boldness, and freely reprove men's sins? At which rebuke the ungodly perished; because the ungodly was justified and was made godly.

You have effaced their name for the world, and for the world's world. The name of the ungodly has been effaced. For they are not called ungodly who believe in the true God. Now their name is effaced for the

world, that is, as long as the course of the temporal world endures. And for the world's world. What is the world's world, but that whose image and shadow, as it were, this world possesses? For the change of seasons succeeding one another, while the moon is on the wane, and again on the increase, while the sun each year returns to his quarter, while spring, or summer, or autumn, or winter passes away only to return, is in some sort an imitation of eternity.

But this world's world is that which abides in immutable eternity. As a verse in the mind, and a verse in the voice, the former is understood, the latter heard; and the former fashions the latter; and hence the former works in art and abides, the latter sounds in the air and passes away. So the fashion of this changeable world is defined by that world unchangeable which is called the world's world. And hence the one abides in the art, that is, in the Wisdom and Power of God: but the other is made to pass in the governance of creation.

If after all it be not a repetition, so that after it was said for the world, lest it should be understood of this world that passes away, it were added for the world's world. For in the Greek copies it is thus, ἰμὰ¼ῖ, ἱ,,ά½,ἱ½ ἰ±á¼°áz ¶ἱ½ἰ±, ἰᵒἱ±á½¶ ἰμὰ¼ῖ, ἱ,,ά½,ἱ½ ἰ±á¼°áz ¶ἱ½ἰ± ἱ,,ἰáz| ἰ±á¼°áz ¶ἱ½ἰáz, Which the Latins have for the most rendered, not, for the world, and for the world's world; but, for ever, and for the world's world, that in the words for the world's world. the, words for ever, should be explained.

The name, then, of the ungodly You have effaced for ever, for from henceforth the ungodly shall never be. And if their name be not prolonged unto this world, much less unto the world's world. 8. The swords of the enemy have failed at the end Psalm 9:6. Not enemies in the plural, but this enemy in the singular. Now what enemy's swords have failed but the devil's? Now these are understood to be various erroneous opinions, whereby as with swords he destroys souls. In overcoming these swords, and in bringing them to failure, that sword is employed, of which it is said in the seventh Psalm, If you be not converted, He will brandish His sword.

And perhaps this is the end, against which the swords of the enemy fail; since up to it they are of some avail. Now it works secretly, but in the last judgment it will be brandished openly. By it the cities are destroyed. For so it follows, The swords of the enemy have failed at the end: and You have destroyed the cities. Cities indeed wherein the devil rules, where crafty and deceitful counsels hold, as it were, the place of a court, on which supremacy attend as officers and ministers the services of all the members, the eyes for curiosity, the ears for lasciviousness, or for whatsoever else is gladly listened to that bears on evil, the hands for rapine or any other violence or pollution soever, and all the other members after this manner serving the tyrannical supremacy, that is, perverse counsels.

Of this city the commonalty, as it were, are all soft affections and disturbing emotions of the mind, stirring up daily seditions in a man. So then where a king, where a court, where ministers, where commonalty are found, there is a city. Now again would such things be in bad cities, unless they were first in individual men, who are, as it were, the elements and seeds of cities. These cities He destroys, when on the prince being shut out thence, of whom it was said, The prince of this world has been cast out, John 12:31 these kingdoms are wasted by the word of truth, evil counsels are laid to sleep, vile affections tamed, the ministries of the members and senses taken captive, and transferred to the service of righteousness and good works: that as the Apostle says, Sin should no more reign in our mortal body, Romans 6:12 and so forth.

Then is the soul at peace, and the man is disposed to receive rest and blessedness. Their memorial has perished with uproar: with the uproar, that is, of the ungodly. But it is said, with uproar, either because when ungodliness is overturned, there is uproar made: for none passes to the highest place, where there is the deepest silence, but he who with much uproar shall first have warred with his own vices: or with uproar, is said, that the memory of the ungodly should perish in the perishing even of the very uproar, in which ungodliness riots.

9. And the Lord abides for ever Psalm 9:7. Wherefore then have the heathen raged, and the people imagined vain things against the Lord, and against His anointed: for the Lord abides for ever. He has prepared His seat in judgment, and He shall judge the world in equity. He prepared His seat when He was judged. For by that patience Man purchased heaven, and God in Man profited believers. And this is the Son's hidden judgment. But seeing He is also to come openly and in the sight of all to judge the quick and the dead, He has prepared His seat in the hidden judgment: and He shall also openly judge the world in equity: that is, He shall distribute gifts proportioned to desert, setting the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on His left. Matthew 25:33 He shall judge the people with justice Psalm 9:8. This is the same as was said above, He shall judge the world in equity. Not as men judge who see not the heart, by whom very often worse men are acquitted than are condemned: but in equity and with justice shall the Lord judge, conscience bearing witness, and thoughts accusing, or else excusing. Romans 2:15

10. And the Lord has become a refuge to the poor Psalm 9:9. Whatsoever be the persecutions of that enemy, who has been turned behind, what harm shall he do to them whose refuge the Lord has become? But this will be, if in this world, in which that one has an office of power, they shall choose to be poor, by loving nothing which either here leaves a man while he lives and loves, or is left by him when he dies. For to such a poor man has the Lord become a refuge, an Helper in due season, in tribulation. Lo, He makes poor, for He scourges every son whom He receives. Hebrews 12:6 For what an Helper in due season is, he explained by adding in tribulation. For the soul is not turned to God, save when it is turned away from this world: nor is it more seasonably turned away from this world, except toils and pains be mingled with its trifling and hurtful and destructive pleasures.

11. And let them who know Your Name, hope in You Psalm 9:10, when they shall have ceased hoping in wealth, and in the other enticements of this world. For the soul indeed that seeks where to fix her hope, when she is torn away from this world, the knowledge of God's Name seasonably receives. For the mere Name of God has now been published everywhere: but the knowledge of the name is, when He is known whose name it is. For the name is not a name for its own sake, but for that which it signifies. Now it has been said, The Lord is His Name. Jeremiah 33:2 Wherefore whoso willingly submits himself to God as His servant, has known this name. And let them who know Your Name hope in You Psalm 9:10. Again, the Lord says to Moses, I am That I am; and You shall say to the children of Israel, I Am, has sent me. Exodus 3:14 Let them then who know Your Name, hope in You; that they may not hope in those things which flow by in time's quick revolution, having nothing but will be and has been. For what in them is future, when it arrives, straightway becomes the past; it is awaited with eagerness, it is lost with pain. But in the nature of God nothing will be, as if it were not yet; or has been, as if it were no longer: but there is only that which is, and this is eternity. Let them cease then to hope in and love things temporal, and let them apply themselves to hope eternal, who know His name who said, I am That I am; and of whom it was said, I Am has sent me. Exodus 3:14 For You have not forsaken them that seek You, O Lord. Whoso seek Him, seek no more things transient and perishable; For no man can serve two masters. Matthew 6:24

12. Sing to the Lord, who dwells in Sion Psalm 9:11, is said to them, whom the Lord forsakes not as they seek Him. He dwells in Sion, which is interpreted watching, and which bears the likeness of the Church that now is; as Jerusalem bears the likeness of the Church that is to come, that is, the city of Saints already enjoying life angelical; for Jerusalem is by interpretation the vision of peace. Now watching goes before vision, as this Church goes before that one which is promised, the city immortal and eternal. But in time it goes before, not in dignity: because more honourable is that whither we are striving to arrive, than what we practise, that we may attain to arrive; now we practise watching, that we may arrive at vision. But again this same Church which now is, unless the Lord inhabit her, the most earnest watching might run into any sort of error. And to this Church it was said, For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are: 1 Corinthians 3:17 again, that Christ may dwell in the inner man in your hearts by faith. Ephesians 3:17 It is enjoined us then, that we sing to the Lord who dwells in Sion, that with one accord we praise the Lord, the Inhabitant of the Church. Show forth His wonders among the heathen. It has both been done, and will not cease to be done.

13. For requiring their blood He has remembered Psalm 9:12. As if they, who were sent to preach the Gospel, should make answer to that injunction which has been mentioned, Show forth His wonders among the heathen, and should say, O Lord, who has believed our report? Isaiah 53:1 and again, For Your sake we are killed all the day long; the Psalmist suitably goes on to say, That Christians not without great reward of eternity will die in persecution, for requiring their blood He has remembered. But why did he choose to say, their blood? Was it, as if one of imperfect knowledge and less faith should ask, How will they show them forth, seeing that the infidelity of the heathen will rage against them; and he should be answered, For requiring their blood He has remembered, that is, the last judgment will come, in which both the glory of the slain and the punishment of the slayers shall be made manifest? But let no one suppose He has remembered to be so used, as though forgetfulness can attach to God; but since the judgment will be after a long interval, it is used in accordance with the feeling of weak men, who think God has forgotten, because He does not act so speedily as they wish. To such is said what follows also, He has not forgotten the cry of the poor: that is, He has not, as you suppose, forgotten. As if they should on hearing, He has remembered, say, Then He had forgotten; No, He has not forgotten, says the Psalmist, the cry of the poor.

14. But I ask, what is that cry of the poor, which God forgets not? Is it that cry, the words whereof are these, Pity me, O Lord, see my humiliation at the hands of my enemies? Psalm 9:13. Why then did he not say, Pity us O Lord, see our humiliation at the hands of our enemies, as if many poor were crying; but as if one, Pity me, O Lord? Is it because One intercedes for the Saints, who first for our sakes became poor, though He was rich; 2 Corinthians 8:9 and it is He who says, Who exaltest me from the gates of death Psalm 9:14, that I may declare all Your praises in the gates of the daughter of Sion? For man is exalted in Him, not that Man only which He bears, which is the Head of the Church; but whichsoever one of us also is among the other members, and is exalted from all depraved desires; which are the gates of death, for that through them is the road to death. But the joy in the fruition is at once death itself, when one gains what he has in abandoned wilfulness coveted: for coveting is the root of all evil: 1 Timothy 6:10 and therefore is the gate of death, for the widow that lives in pleasures is dead. 1 Timothy 5:6 At which pleasures we arrive through desires as it were through the gates of death. But all highest purposes are the gates of the daughter of Sion, through which we come to the vision of peace in the Holy Church....Or haply are the gates of death the bodily senses and eyes, which were opened when the man tasted of the forbidden tree, Genesis 3:7 ... and are the gates of the daughter of Sion the sacraments and beginnings of faith, which are opened to them that knock, that they may arrive at the hidden things of the Son?...

15. Then follows, I will exult for Your salvation: that is, with blessedness shall I be holden by Your salvation, which is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Power and Wisdom of God. Therefore says the Church, which is here in affliction and is saved by hope, as long as the hidden judgment of the Son is, in hope she says, I will exult for Your salvation: for now she is worn down either by the roar of violence around her, or by the errors of the heathen. The heathen are fixed in the corruption, which they made Psalm 9:15. Consider ye how punishment is reserved for the sinner, out of his own works; and how they that have wished to persecute the Church, have been fixed in that corruption, which they thought to inflict. For they were desiring to kill the body, while they themselves were dying in soul. In that snare which they hid, has their foot been taken. The hidden snare is crafty devising. The foot of the soul is well understood to be its love: which, when depraved, is called coveting or lust; but when upright, love or charity....And the Apostle says, That being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to take in. Ephesians 3:17-18 The foot then of sinners, that is, their love, is taken in the snare, which they hide: for when delight shall have followed on to deceitful dealing, when God shall have delivered them over to the lust of their heart; that delight at once binds them, that they dare not tear away their love thence and apply it to profitable objects; for when they shall make the attempt, they will be pained in heart, as if desiring to free their foot from a fetter: and giving way under this pain they refuse to withdraw from pernicious delights. In the snare then which they have hid, that is, in deceitful counsel, their foot has been taken, that is, their love, which through deceit attains to that vain joy whereby pain is purchased.

16. The Lord is known executing judgments Psalm 9:16. These are God's judgments. Not from that tranquillity of His blessedness, nor from the secret places of wisdom, wherein blessed souls are received, is the sword, or fire, or wild beast, or any such thing brought forth, whereby sinners may be tormented: but how are they tormented, and how does the Lord do judgment? In the works, he says, of his own hands has the sinner been caught.

17. Here is interposed, The song of the diapsalma Psalm 9:16: as it were the hidden joy, as far as we can imagine, of the separation which is now made, not in place, but in the affections of the heart, between sinners and the righteous, as of the grain from the chaff, as yet on the floor. And then follows, Let the sinners be turned into hell Psalm 9:17: that is, let them be given into their own hands, when they are spared, and let them be ensnared in deadly delight. All the nations that forget God. Because when they did not think good to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind. Romans 1:28

18. For there shall not be forgetfulness of the poor man to the end Psalm 9:18; who now seems to be in forgetfulness, when sinners are thought to flourish in this world's happiness, and the righteous to be in travail: but the patience, says He, of the poor shall not perish for ever. Wherefore there is need of patience now to bear with the evil, who are already separated in will, till they be also separated at the last judgment.

19. Arise, O Lord, let not man prevail Psalm 9:19. The future judgment is prayed for: but before it come, Let the heathen, says he, be judged in Your sight: that is, in secret; which is called in God's sight, with the knowledge of a few holy and righteous ones. Place a lawgiver over them, O Lord. Psalm 9:20. He seems to me to point out Antichrist: of whom the Apostle says, When the man of sin shall be revealed. 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let the heathen know that they are men. That they who will be set free by the Son of God, and belong to the Son of Man, and be sons of men, that is, new men, may serve man, that is, the old man the sinner, for that they are men.

20. And because it is believed that he is to arrive at so great a pitch of empty glory, and he will be permitted to do so great things, both against all men and against the Saints of God, that then some weak ones shall indeed think that God cares not for human affairs, the Psalmist interposing a diapsalma, adds as it were the voice of men groaning and asking why judgment is deferred.

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