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Psalms 9, 10

Part I

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AN UNFINISHED MEDITATION ON PSALMS 9 AND 10

PART I: "MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD"

The Annunciation and Psalm 9

Why begin the study of Psalm 9 with the words of the *Magnificat* and the story of the conception of Christ as told by Luke? Today is Annunciation Sunday. On this day, the Church celebrates a great event that makes Christmas (and, therefore, our salvation) possible. You heard the account of the Annunciation story in the Scripture reading: Gabriel comes to Nazareth and tells Mary that she has found great favor with God and that she will be the mother of the Messiah. Confused at first, she steps forward in faith, and, by consenting to the will of God, makes one of the greatest affirmations in all of Scripture:

"Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38a)

What a glorious moment! Eve, deceived and full of pride and greed, had said "no" to God and "yes" to the serpent and to herself in the garden. Finally, thousands of years and untold misery later, a woman of faith begins to undo what the woman in paradise had done. In one tremendous sentence Mary says "yes" to God in words flooded with humility and obedience.

But why does the Church celebrate the Annunciation today? We remember Mary today because March 25 is exactly nine months before December 25, the traditional date for the birth of our Lord. We tend to think of the great mystery of the Incarnation as beginning in Bethlehem. But that is not correct. For nine months our Savior was nourished and grew in the womb of Mary. Gabriel said to Mary,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

I do not want to disturb anyone, but it is important to understand this proclamation in its historical context. Graeco-Roman religion was full of stories of love affairs between the gods and mortals. Zeus/Jupiter did not always gently seduce (much less marry!) the objects of his desire. And he had many of them! Zeus was a rapist. But this is not the way of our God. The Most High sends his messenger Gabriel to the woman who will be the Mother of God and announces his plan. Mary is honored by God, and in God's plan she is given the opportunity to consent to his will.

The incarnation begins not with an act of coercion, an act of rape, but with the glorious consent of an apparently insignificant woman in an out-of-the-way village in a remote province of the Roman Empire. It is her consent, which we also can make to God every day, which gives her such great significance. We can obtain significance in the same way. In our own hearts we can say to God: "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."

The Magnificat and Psalm 9

But what about Psalm 9? What is the connection between the Annunciation and our text for this morning?

In the Gospel of Luke, Mary, now pregnant with Jesus, goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. When they greet one another, Mary's faith leads her to praise God in the words of what we today call the *Magnificat*. This psalm of praise, found in Luke 1:46-55, which we heard in the Scripture reading, contains these words:

"For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. 'And his mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear him.' He has done mighty deeds with His arm. (Luke 1:49-51a)

Mary praises God for the wonders he has done. And, among several echoes between the *Magnificat* and Psalm 9, we find in Psalm 9:1 and then again in 9:11, the chiasmic center of the psalm:

**I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart;
I will tell of all Your wonders. (Ps 9:1)**

**Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion;
Declare among the peoples His deeds. (Ps 9:11)**

The *Magnificat* is an example of how the command in Psalm 9 (i.e. to tell of God's wonders) can be fulfilled: Mary sings a song of praise to God Most High, whose Spirit has overshadowed her, who has caused her to be pregnant with our Lord and Savior. Following Mary's example, I intend this morning to join my praise to hers as I give some examples of God's wonders in my own life.

One Psalm or Two?

Before we get into the content of Psalm 9, there is an interesting, although somewhat academic, point to clear up: Is Psalm 9 a complete psalm, or, as some think, should Psalm 9 be combined with Psalm 10 into a single Psalm? The evidence supporting the notion that Psalms 9 and 10 should be read as one single poem includes¹:

- 9 and 10 together form a single acrostic poem, although the acrostic is incomplete and inconsistent
- Exist as one Psalm in the Septuagint and some Hebrew manuscripts
- No title for Psalm 10 – a bit unusual for Book I of the Psalms
- Some relatively rare vocabulary is shared between Psalms 9 and 10
- Some common themes

This variance in the manuscript traditions has led to some frustrating complexity in studying the Psalms. The Fathers of the Church all follow the tradition that is not common among Protestant Bibles, and, since I study from the fathers a lot, I often find myself confused about verse and chapter references in the Book of Psalms.² I do not, however, believe that there are any significant content issues at stake in how Psalms 9 and 10 are read.

Psalm 9:1-2 – God's Wonders, a Basis for Praise

As noted above, Psalm 9 begins with the Psalmist telling of his desire to praise God for the great things He has done. Here are his words:

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

**I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart;
I will tell of all Your wonders.
I will be glad and exult in You;
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. (Ps 9:1-2 NASB)**

I will save most of my comments on these verses until we reach verse 11, the centerpiece of Psalm 9. For now, let me point out that these verses typify how the Psalms used to be so unapproachable for me. Maybe some of you feel this way about the Psalms right now: "It's just a bunch of praise words. They are so repetitive. I don't like them, because some of them don't sound very Christian." I used to feel the same way. I would hear people talk about how wonderful the Psalms are, how nourished they felt by them, and I would try, yet again, to read them. And, yet again, I would be disappointed.

For most of my Christian life, the Psalms were a closed book for me. To be honest, I think it has something to do with age. The Psalms give voice to emotional complexity, in both joy and great sorrow, that may have a more direct appeal to adults – i.e. to people who have lived long enough to experience a bigger sampling of life's difficulties: unemployment, marital struggles, the death of friends and family, etc., are more likely to have happened to someone who is 40 than to someone who is 16. As the years go by, the range of identification points between my life and the Psalms does nothing but increase.³

When we get to verse 11 I want to share with you some of the “wonders” that I have seen God work. That, after all, appears to be the basis for why David wrote this psalm.

Psalm 9:3-6 – God Judges Enemies/Nations/the Wicked

What are the wonders performed by God that David is going to tell us about? He begins with what seems like a military victory:

**When my enemies turn back,
They stumble and perish before You.
For You have maintained my just cause;
You have sat on the throne judging righteously.
You have rebuked the nations,
You have destroyed the wicked;
You have blotted out their name forever and ever.
The enemy has come to an end in perpetual ruins,
And You have uprooted the cities;
The very memory of them has perished. (9:3-6)**

Right away we notice the parallelism of “my enemies... the nations... the wicked.” The scale of the wonder is big. God has judged and the result is utter devastation. David takes no credit for what has happened.¹

I pondered over the picture David paints of the ruin and devastation caused by God’s judgment, and I was reminded of a job I used to have. I was responsible for running some fairly large sales meetings. I was involved in site selection, agenda planning and development, creating the right environment for both serious training and motivational hoopla, coordinating the staging and set-up of computer equipment, and so on. The 3-4 months of preparation were full and demanding. But then came the meeting itself. For the three to five days of the meeting I was “on” virtually 24 hours a day. Since I was the only one who knew everything about the meeting, I was the focus of all the problems, criticisms, and occasional moments of praise. These meetings were physically and emotionally consuming.

If there was an emotional center to the meeting, it was the main ballroom. These huge rooms had to look exactly right, and had to support the business and learning purpose of the meeting. Sometimes we needed humor, sometimes extravagance. Sometimes the mood was very serious, and the setting had to suit that need precisely. I often selected the music for the ballroom personally, and needed trustworthy colleagues to make the ballroom events successful. That, after all, was where the executives presented and their egos were bound up that ballroom as well. If they tripped, I fell.

When the meetings ended, I usually stayed an extra day to make sure that tear-down and follow up items had been completed. It was during that time period that I learned a very helpful lesson. Within 24 hours, all evidence of our company having been in that hotel was gone: the signs were gone, the stage disassembled, the decorations and props thrown away or put in storage or shipped away. I would walk through the ballroom, now completely empty, and be amazed at the transition. My heart and soul had been invested in that room, and now it was simply ... empty. Not a trace remained. But at least I could remember the meeting, how the ballroom had looked, and what we had done. David describes God’s judgment as being even more destructive: “the very memory of them has perished.”

Thus it is when God judges the wicked. And notice too that David delights in God for this!

Psalm 9:7-10 – God Is Known Through Judgment

David’s delight comes from knowing that Yahweh our God is a righteous judge, and that he will always be there. Unlike those huge enemy armies, or those seemingly insurmountable problems that we confront, that are destroying us, our God will last forever. All these things will disappear, but not our God.

Clearly, then, being the object of God’s unfavorable judgment is not something to look forward to. But God’s judgment is not a negative thing. In fact, David longs for it. This is how David describes God’s judgment:

**But the LORD abides forever;
He has established His throne for judgment,
And He will judge the world in righteousness;
He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.
The LORD also will be a stronghold for the oppressed,
A stronghold in times of trouble;
And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,
For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You. (9:7-10)**

God exists as our King for the express purpose of judging us. Does that sound odd? We are so used to thinking about Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “Judge not, lest you be judged.” And, his words are true. But the kind of judgment Jesus is talking about is different than the kind of judgment David has in mind here and elsewhere in the Psalms. David is talking about a judgment that brings about ultimate justice. And, he recognizes that God alone can be this Judge. Jesus’ words warn against arrogance in judgment. Who are we to think we can be like God in our judgment? Trying to take God’s perspective as Judge is exceedingly dangerous. It is only with the light of revealed truth that we can hazard any kind of statement about God’s justice. But hazard we must, for God has called us to be agents of justice in this world.

One aspect of this justice that has become increasingly evident to me is God’s concern for the poor. I don’t just mean the poor in spirit, the bummed out and depressed. I don’t think God is particularly impressed by the psychological melodrama we often present to him in the name of spirituality. No, I think that the message of both the Old and New Testaments is the same in this regard: God cares for the poor. God has a special place in his magnificent heart for those who have been oppressed, who have lived from hand to mouth and have always faced great difficulty in obtaining the things that you and I think of as being ours by right.

I have only just begun to think about this issue with more care in the last few years. Prior to this I have simply held onto my extremely conservative economic and political views, and figured that if Adam Smith worked for me, he’ll work for the poor as well. But I am no longer satisfied with this. I don’t have the answers yet. Maybe I never will. But I know that I admire and am attracted to those who minister to the poor in a selfless, loving way. The greatest example of this is those who minister to the most oppressed class in our society: the unborn.

Psalm 9:11 – Declare the Wonders of God

In a simple verse, which sits at the chiasmic center of Psalm 9, David proclaims:

**Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion;
Declare among the peoples His deeds. (9:11)**

I need to take a moment and do that now. For I am in debt, and need to make some payments.

The last time I taught here was March 30, 2003. At that time I was still trying to figure out what to do with the fact that I had been laid off six months before in the dot-com downturn. I came before you and shared some thoughts about being unemployed and what Scripture has to say about work. I was in a tough place. My wife, Betsy, and I had begun discussing the possibility of moving away so that we could use the capital in our house to keep us afloat financially.

I don’t have time to tell this morning all the details of God’s provision for my family during those months. But I must say at least this: God rescued me. Here, on a bright Sunday morning right around this time of year, Mark Landrith put me in touch with Brad and Leslie Porter, who were doing some work at Hewlett-Packard similar to what I had been doing in my career, before being laid off. The rest, as they say, is history. But what I am now telling you is “the rest of the story” – the true story: the story of the faithfulness of God. I could go on at length in thanksgiving for the material blessings that God lavished on us at that time. For all those I simply want to say thank you to my friends, and thank you to my God.

Far beyond the material blessings, though, were the spiritual growth and deepening of my relationship with God that occurred at that time. Over and over again, I learned the truth of Psalm 9:10:

**And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,
For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.**

Time and time again, God showed me that he is my Provider, and the Provider for my family. He showed me that it is his path for me that is good, and not any other. He loves me enough to guide me on that path. Repeatedly, God comforted me, guided me, and loved me. And he gave me the eyes to see a bit of what he was doing. I can look back and know that he is always doing this. But I am so blind, dim-witted, and faithless that I do not see what he is doing, nor the love that he is constantly pouring out. But in those days he opened up my eyes just a bit, and, even though I saw as in a mirror darkly, I am still overwhelmed by the brightness and beauty of that light. This is what I want, what I must, share with you this morning. This is the wonder that God worked in my life.

As tremendous as the experience of God’s provision for my work and family needs has been, my experience is a small one. It seems big to me because my faith is so small. But think about the great wonders that God has done. In the Old Testament, I think about the Exodus and the mighty intervention of God to overturn the oppressive power of Pharaoh and the powerful Egyptian army; or the countless times God raised up a judge or prophet to guide Israel, to give them light and love and encouragement when they wandered from the truth. What would it have been like to walk with Elijah up Mount Carmel or march with Barak to Mount Tabor?

In the narrative records of the New Testament you can hardly turn a page without the story of some miraculous work of Jesus or his faithful followers. How would you have felt if a neighbor, blind since birth, came and knocked on your door to tell you, singing for joy, that he could see? Or what about watching Thomas bow before the resurrected, but still wounded, Jesus? And yet, what did Jesus tell Thomas? “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29). Jesus looks out over the reverent head of Thomas into the future and sees ... us!

Where are the wonders of God in our day? While I believe that there are still “big miracles,” I have come to appreciate miracles that are quieter: years of patient, loving, tender-hearted care for a sick parent, child or spouse without a word of complaint; the faithful walk of a single parent who, without sufficient resources or rest, lovingly, day-after-day, raises children before a God who has a special heart for the afflicted; the courageous, against-the-odds charity of those who reach out to young women who seek to destroy the babies within their bodies – loving and praying these young women back from the moral precipice on which they stand.

For me there is a continuous movement from verse 11 back to verse 10:

**And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,
For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.**

The greatest miracle of all is God’s loyal love, the driving force behind his faithfulness to us. And the most momentous of all those miracles is the one we celebrate today: the incarnation. Jesus taking human form inside of Mary, as her faith took root in the Living Word of God.

Psalm 9:12-14 – From the Gates of Death to the Gates of Zion

And yet, all is not well. Even for David, at the crescendo of confidence that has been building in the first eleven verses of this psalm, the cracks appear, and seeping out we see the first signs of misery, affliction, and toil:

**For He who requires blood remembers them;
He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.
Be gracious to me, O LORD;
See my affliction from those who hate me,
You who lift me up from the gates of death,
That I may tell of all Your praises,
That in the gates of the daughter of Zion
I may rejoice in Your salvation. (9:12-14)**

I think that 9:12 sounds strange to our ears. I don’t often think of God as one who “requires blood.” But as I dwell on this phrase, it occurred to me that every image that came to my mind from the Old Testament was one that speaks of God’s justice. For David, the very holiness and sanctity of life were bound up in blood. This is why questions of capital punishment, euthanasia, and above all, abortion, should concern us so deeply. God takes our lives very seriously, especially as symbolized in the blood that pulses through us. Let us never trivialize that. If we do, we diminish the value of the blood shed by our Lord Jesus on the cross.

And when someone God loves is being wronged or hurt, he does not forget. He did not forget Jesus on the cross. He remembers the cry of the afflicted. And if anyone was ever afflicted, it was Jesus. The theme of remembering and forgetting surfaces in this psalm and is magnified in the next. I hope to share more about this with you next week when we look at Psalm 10.

After David calls upon the Lord to be gracious to him, he reveals that he is still in trouble. There are those who hate him. Perhaps they hate him now more than before because they are deeply jealous of God’s judgment on David’s behalf.

But now we know the steps to the dance: David uses the imagery of gates, the public places of Hebrew cities, to say that when God rescued him from the point of death, it was in part so that he could tell of God’s wonders in public:

at the very gates of Zion. As a church, we imitate this in our times of body life. As a church we stand united, watching and watching for the judgment of God. We watch as someone laments at the Gates of Death, and we pray for them. We watch for the judgment of God so that that fellow-pilgrim will be lifted up by God to the Gates of the Daughter of Zion. And there, together, we rejoice in the judgment of God.

Psalm 9:15-18 – God Makes Himself Known

David now takes a closer look at God’s judgment, and the Judge:

**The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made;
In the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught.
The LORD has made Himself known;
He has executed judgment. In the work of his own hands the wicked is
snared. Higgaiion Selah.
The wicked will return to Sheol,
Even all the nations who forget God.
For the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted
perish forever. (9:15-18)**

The first truth presented in this section is one that is common to the Psalms: evil contains the seed of its own destruction. This principle works itself out unevenly in the material world of our daily lives. Scripture makes it completely clear that on this level, the wicked can long prevail. Psalm 10, among many psalms, spells this out in detail. But on the spiritual level, the principle is devastatingly straightforward. The moment sin begins, so does its judgment. And God’s judgment is always fair, suiting the offense perfectly.

David uses hunting imagery to express this truth – another common technique in the Psalms.

In ancient Israel, one method of hunting was to use nets and covered-up pits which would capture one’s prey. After setting nets and/or digging out pits, and then lightly covering them up again, a hunter would move until the prey was between him and the traps. By manipulating the fear most animals have for humans, the hunter could drive the prey toward the location of the nets and pits, trusting that when they had reached the desired location, the traps would work.

David pictures salvation and judgment in these hunting terms. The hunter is the wicked; the prey is you and me. When God judges the righteous, he snatches them up out of the pit into which they have fallen. To be rescued by God, to be snatched away from the pit is to be saved. When the wicked are judged, they fall into the pit they themselves have made.

In this very act of judgment, God makes himself known. Look at verse 16: “The Lord has made Himself known; He has executed judgment.” In the act of judgment, God makes himself known to those he judges. Occasionally we see this with our physical eyes. More commonly it takes the eyes of faith to see the judgment and revelation of God. If we adopt the perspective of the Psalms, we will yearn for God’s judgment. We will not fear it. Unless, that is, we have sinned, and see, suddenly, that the pit we have made yawns open before us.

David does not refrain from adding something that I find intriguing, something I cannot fully explain: When God judges the nations, they “return” to Sheol. What is David saying? Is the bent of evil in those who do not know God so all-pervasive that Sheol, the place of death, shadows, and, worst of all, forgetfulness of God, is natural to them? Is going to Sheol like going home? Will the eventual soft path to evil become so comfortable that it just feels natural, like so much cream put into coffee to make it smoother?

The final image in this section is another that is prevalent throughout the Psalms: remembering and forgetting. This is another aspect of God’s judgment. When God remembers you, he judges you. For the righteous, this is life; for the wicked, it is death. When God forgets you, you are undone. When God knows you, he knows all about you and is he all-present to you. For the righteous, this is life; for the wicked, it is death. When God no longer knows you, you are like chaff blown away on the wind. The promise in this section of Psalm 9 is that God does not forget the needy and the afflicted. Is that you this morning? Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount that our need and poverty are, at root, spiritual. I am not asking if you are depressed or feel bad, or if there are people around you who don’t like you. I am asking if you have become weak and needy before God. Have you come to the place where you can only be sorrowful about yourself and the suffering you bring into the lives of everyone who knows you? If so, you are moving into the remembrance of God. He will not forget you. Call out to him. In his mercy he will hear your cry; he will remember and give you hope.

Psalm 9:19-20 – We Are But Men

Having felt the glory of God's judgment on his behalf, and returning again to the turmoil of his present circumstances, David concludes this poem (if, in fact, it is the conclusion, and not just the next part of a combined Psalm 9 and Psalm 10), with a plea for God to judge. As we have seen, one of David's deepest yearnings is that God sit on His throne and deliver justice.

Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail;

Let the nations be judged before You.

Put them in fear, O LORD;

Let the nations know that they are but men. (9:19-20) Selah.

In the final line, David asks for fear to come upon the nations, and what this means primarily is that David wants God to impress upon the nations that they are "but men." It is by remembering (that key word again!) that they are "but men" that mortals will bow before God, acknowledging rightly his place as well as their own in the created order.

The word "men" that David uses has a fairly specific use in the Old Testament. It is the same word for the name *Enosh*. Except when referring to Enosh himself, the word is mostly used in Old Testament poetry, primarily in the Psalms and Job. It emphasizes man in his mortality compared to the majesty, might, and eternity of God. It is used here at the end of Psalm 9 and again at the end of Psalm 10 in similar way, reminding us that perhaps these two psalms were once a single poem.

To apply these final verses we need to turn them inward upon ourselves. It remains true that the nations who do not know God need to become afraid of God by being reminded that they are mortals. But this is true of us as well. And it is a fitting way to end our meditation on Psalm 9.

Let me tell you how God has done just this for me (Should I say "to" me?) recently. Almost exactly a year ago, my sister called me and said that my mom, who had been in poor health for several years prior to this, was doing somewhat worse. "Is she going to die?" I asked her. She initially said no, but then a few days later changed her mind. I made the necessary arrangements and flew up to Washington. I spend the next four days at my mom's bedside, watching her die. She was in hospice care, so it was a peaceful process. She was also almost completely incommunicative: not comatose, but rarely opening her eyes and almost never speaking.

On the last day of her life my sister and brother, along with some other friends and family, were all there. My sister and I read a lot of Scripture to mom, and all of us reminisced and sat there, sometimes just in silence, loving this wonderful woman who had given us all so much in her life. As the hours went by, her lungs began to fill up and her breathing came harder. For one brief moment, at the very end of her earthly life, she opened her eyes seemed to look at us. And then, death.

The hours that followed must have been a lot like the ones that had preceded her death. But it was different. It still is. My mom was a believer. It's not that I have concerns in that regard. But she was my mom. I cried by her side as we waited for her body to be taken away. Alone, and months later, I cried at her burial site in the morning before her memorial service. I had years to prepare for this time. But I was not ready. I wanted mom's wisdom and love, her leadership, advice and care. But she was gone. "Mom, can't you just talk to me for a moment? I need your help, Mom." There I was – a 51 year-old kid, crying for mommy.

Some weeks after she had died I was at work and was totally distracted by memories of those final days. I left my cube and walked a couple of times around the building, trying to go through the grief a few more steps and then return to work. I kept thinking about how futile it all is. Here I am, working away, trying to make ends meet for my family, so that..., so that... So that, what? So that I can someday lie dead on a bed while my children work to make ends meet so that they can someday lie on a bed dead while their children work to make ends meet?

I am not trying to be morbid or express any lack of faith in God's promise of life after death. It doesn't have anything to do with that. In those moments of grief I believed every single doctrine I had ever believed – maybe even more strongly. It was the futility of this earthly life that was getting to me. What am I doing here? What meaning does any of this stuff that I do have?

This is, in part I think, what David is getting at the end of Psalm 9. We are but men. We are a breath of wind compared to God. We are utterly dependent upon him, whether we are among those whom God knows or among those whom he is forgetting. God, give us eyes of faith to see ourselves, and to see you in this way. Remind us that we are but men.

Conclusion – Finding Jesus in Psalm 9

I don't want to end on this note. I don't think that's what David intended. Rather, David wrote this poem as a song of the victory of God as he sits in judgment on his throne, dealing out justice to the entire world of mortals. So I would like to end where I began: with Gabriel and Mary and the mystery of the incarnation.

God Almighty overshadows a young virgin girl in Nazareth and all of history begins, mysteriously, to work backwards. God begins his judgment of mankind by moving into history in a new and unexpected way: beginning with Mary, the treachery and faithlessness of Eve begin to lose their power. The Son who is born from that holy union grows into manhood, and in his ministry further undoes all of the curses, evil, and misery of the fall. Then he suffers, dies, and, miraculously, rises again: the greatest wonder God has ever done!

But we would be mistaken to jump too quickly to the end of the story, to the resurrection and victory. This is coming soon enough in our celebration of Easter. For at this moment, on this day of the Annunciation that the Church has celebrated for hundreds of years, we enter into the mystery of the Incarnation, the moment when God abandoned his power and took on human flesh in humility and service for us.

The final judgment will come. Psalm 9 assures us of that. But it is not here yet. All is not well yet. David knows this. Even when he sings of the mighty judgment of God upon the nations, he feels the affliction of his enemies, and remembers his need for God to make himself known through even more judgment. All will be well, but not yet. We are but men; we cannot prevail. We must descend into the dark glory of spiritual poverty, joining Jesus in the incarnation.

God gives us the chance to join in the great unraveling of evil that began with the Annunciation. We begin our participation by saying with Mary: "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."

1 For a helpful overview, see Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 19: Psalms 1-50* (Waco: Word Books), 116-117.

2 This very brief statement does no justice whatsoever to the complexities involved. Since the Hebrew verse numbering is also different than most English verse numbering, not only are the chapters (i.e. whole psalms), but the verse numbers usually at odds.

3 The turnaround for me came when in 1998 I saw how crucial the Psalms were for the early monastic communities. I decided that I needed to study the Psalms more carefully for myself and began with Psalm 1. What I found there, when I slowed down long enough to read and meditate on the Psalm carefully, was indeed a treasure.

4 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. 1* (Translated by Rev. James Anderson). Reprinted 1996 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 112-113.