

## “The Lord Is King”

**Background Scriptures:** Psalms 9; 10 **Devotional Reading:** 1 Timothy 1:12-17

### Psalm 10:12–18 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. <sup>13</sup> Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, “He won’t call me to account”? <sup>14</sup> But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. <sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out. <sup>16</sup> The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. <sup>17</sup> You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, <sup>18</sup> defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

### LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To summarize the psalmist’s confidence in God.
- **Biblical Principle:** To know that God is a present help in a world of suffering and struggle.
- **Daily Application:** To be God’s hand and feet to advocate for the fatherless and oppressed.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Does God Listen?

Mark Twain once said, “Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.” Most of us desire to live with honor, courage, joy, and goodness most of the time. Sometimes we succeed. Twain was, as usual, probably too pessimistic, but his point stands. The human pursuit of good suffers from inconsistency. We want to be good but are surprised by the people who consistently are.

The Christian confession is that God’s pursuit of the good does not suffer in the same way. God consistently seeks the good for all creation. The search can be complicated, however, because humans are complicated. Sometimes, injustice and evil seem to prevail, and we wonder if God is. We wonder whether He hears the cries for help that vulnerable people utter.

This question carries some urgency for believers in the God of the Bible. If God is active in the world, what is that activity? Does God sit around listening to praise songs and cheering on our church growth plans or pious sermons? Or do these things sometimes offend God when they don’t result in (or from) our assistance to the poor or oppressed?

### LESSON CONTEXT

Psalms 9 and 10 were originally a single poem. It was split apart to serve separate purposes. Ancient Hebrew manuscripts count them as two psalms, while the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, counts them together as one.

The entire poem falls into four roughly equally sized sections: Psalms 9:1–10; 9:11–20; 10:1–9; and 10:10–18. Each part contributes something to the overall picture as the poem moves toward a request for God’s help in a world of suffering and struggle.

Psalms 9 and 10 form a partial acrostic as they use 17 letters of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet, successively, as the lines progress. (A complete example of using all 22 letters to form the acrostic is Psalm 37.) It is unclear whether the incomplete nature of the acrostic of Psalms 9 and 10 was deliberate.

Many digital Bibles label the titles or headings of the Psalms as “verse zero.” These headings offer additional context or insight into the psalm. Many psalms, however, lack a superscription, and Psalm 10 is one of those. However, the superscription of Psalm 9 applies to Psalm 10 as well, given the unitary nature of the two passages.

That superscription reads, “For the director of music. To the tune of ‘The Death of the Son.’ A psalm of David.” The son in question is perhaps David’s son Absalom. David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1), is credited as the writer of about half the 150 psalms.

### **Humanity’s Evil: Psalm 10:12–13**

David the psalmist wrestles with the age-old problem, “Why doesn’t God do something about the prosperity of the wicked, and the misery of the afflicted?”

The sense of this requested action is a desire for divine retribution. Such a desire implies a desire for God to assume the role of the divine warrior (as in Psalm 106:26 and Isaiah 26:11). It also can paint a picture of God’s ability to save (compare Psalm 17:7). But the two ideas are not mutually exclusive - the former can result in the latter.

The psalmist calls on God to protect the *helpless*. This request may seem strange, given that God always has complete mastery of all facts. Even so, the psalmist speaks similarly in several other passages (13:1; 9:12; 25:6; 42:9; 44:24; 74:19; 77:9). Suffering or a sense of isolation often results in a feeling of being forsaken (compare Psalms 22:1; 71:9–13; contrast Ezra 9:9), thus the cry of desperation.

### **1. Why did David complain to God? (Psalm 10:12)**

#### **What Do You Think?**

What specific request can you bring before God in prayer for those in your neighborhood or town experiencing suffering?

#### **Digging Deeper**

In what ways might God use you as an answer to these prayers?

The wicked boast that God will not investigate their sins or judge them. To *revile God* is to despise or disdain him.

What such a person says *to himself* is assumed to be above accountability. But that is never true (Genesis 9:5; Deut. 18:19; Ezekiel 3:18–20; 33:6–10; Romans 3:19).

Sinful conduct toward those in need takes the form of benign neglect (compare Deuteronomy 15:7–8; 1 John 3:17). The care of vulnerable people does not interest the wicked—only their exploitation. Their behavior shows contempt for God (Proverbs 14:31; 17:5).

The righteous person, by contrast, fears God. He or she shows this by doing good for others, even at personal risk (example: Exodus 1:17). The wicked have gotten away with their behavior for so long that they think themselves to be immune from God’s justice (contrast 2 Peter 3:9).

### **2. What do the wicked assume about God? (Psalm 10:13)**

#### **God’s Awareness: Psalm 10:14**

As the psalm draws to a close, the psalmist expresses his full confidence that God is on His throne and has everything under His control.

This verse also answers the claim in verses 8-11 that the Lord pays no attention to what the wicked are doing. Even more, God sees the trouble (outward circumstances) and grief (inward feelings) caused by the wicked as they persecute the helpless, and He will take the matter in hand. The poor and needy can safely commit themselves into the hands of the Lord (55:22; 1 Peter 5:7). Helpless people realize that God is all they have. Those who sincerely cry out to God for help will find a listening ear. Trust in God's willingness to aid defines the very heart of faith (1 Timothy 4:10).

### **3. What did the psalmist say about God's awareness? (Psalm 10:14)**

#### **What Do You Think?**

In what ways are you mindful of God's awareness of your attitudes and actions?

#### **Digging Deeper**

In consideration of this, what will you do?

### **God's Intervention: Psalm 10:15**

The psalmist requests punishment for the evildoer. He asks that the Lord will carefully investigate each wicked person's life and works, until every evil deed is exposed and judged. The psalmist also asks that their power be removed ("break the arm") as to lose strength and cease tyranny through the power of the almighty God.

### **4. What intervention or punishment did the psalmist request? (Psalm 10:15)**

### **God's Character: Psalm 10:16-18**

The psalm ends with a song of thanksgiving to the Lord, the great King. It began on a note of concern and defeat; it concludes on a note of confidence and triumph.

*The Lord is king* over the nations and peoples, whether they like it or not. The wicked boast that they will not be moved (vs. 5-7), but God has other plans for them (v. 16). He hears the prayers of the persecuted, He sees their plight, He strengthens their hearts for whatever trials He permits (Rom. 8:28), and He eventually judges those who abuse them. People of faith can depend on the God of heaven, but the self-confident and arrogant "people of the earth" have no future with the Lord. Life without the Lord is empty and vain (Psalm 49:12-20; 62:9). Christians have their citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and our names are written down in heaven (Luke 10:20). We don't belong to this world, although our ministry is in this world. God's people have been "redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:3) and have heaven as our home. The phrase "mere earthly mortals" describes not only where these unbelievers live but what they live for—the things of the earth. The *mere earthly mortals* may seem to have the upper hand today, but wait until the Lord reveals His hand!

### **5. How did the psalmist express the sovereignty of God? (Psalm 10:16-18)**

#### **What Do You Think?**

How does the knowledge that "the Lord is King for ever and ever" influence your current behavior?

## **Digging Deeper**

How does this truth give you hope? Who is an accountability partner who can help you stay focused in keeping God first?

## **CONCLUSION**

### **The God Who Helps**

People cry out to God during times of distress and count on Him to rescue them from that trouble (Psalm 30:10). We may find ourselves without any human helper in various situations as we cry out to God in our isolation and fear. We cry for help even when the distress originates in our stubbornness and sinfulness. When that happens, God sometimes turns a deaf ear to our prayers (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; Lamentations 3:8, 44). At such times, we need to examine the motives of our hearts, and Psalm 10 helps us do so.

Psalm 10 speaks of the God who helps. This image of God appears frequently in the book of Psalms and elsewhere in the Bible. It is fundamental to the understanding of God that the church inherited from ancient Israel. God is neither distant nor indifferent. His level of concern for suffering humanity far exceeds our own. His interest does not ebb and flow like some leaders today.

We may feel that God is distant when our prayers are not answered on our timetable. Such was the case with a particular Bible college professor who realized the need to make a transition in his teaching ministry. A teaching position at a different college seemed to be a good fit, but after an interview, the possibility fell through when one faculty member voted *no* for the applicant. The following year, however, the professor was called to a different position for which he was ideally suited. God's timing was perfect, but it took 20/20 hindsight to see that fact. "God's timing is perfect" is still the answer to the church's cry, "O Lord, how long?" (compare Psalms 6:3; 13:6; etc.).

The confession that God is a helper is an acknowledgment that leads to great confidence in our hearts. It comforts us during times of terror; it equips us to live holy lives. As the helper, God allows us to remember that no human abuse can ultimately destroy us or diminish the value of our lives (Psalm 118:6–7).

Such confidence does not come from a sense of pride or the idle belief in our superiority. It comes instead from an awareness that we serve a trustworthy God who aids those in need as long as we recognize our own needs and the shared needs of others. We cannot claim grace for ourselves but deny it to others. The divine helper stands ready to equip those seeking His mercy with a pure heart.

We cry out not only for our own needs but also on behalf of others who are oppressed in some way. However, we should anticipate that God may expect His help to that person to come through your hands!

## **PRAYER**

O God of the orphan, the widow, and the oppressed, attune us to the needs of Your world! Be the king of our lives and celebrate with us when the lives of our brothers and sisters flourish because of Your mercy. We humbly ask that You use us in Your work of overcoming evil. Lord, hear our humble cry! In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

God is still available to help.

## **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "**The Lord is Majestic**" and recognizes the majestic reign of our God as Lord and King. Study Psalms 47 and 93, as we honor His powerful authority over all that He created.