

April 14, 2024

THE GOODNESS OF PRAISING THE LORD

Psalm 92

(1 of 5 in a series of selected Psalms)

We are a people who value doing. When we get to the end of a day and can point back at much that we have done, we feel fulfilled. It's satisfying to point to something and say, "I did that." And perhaps that's how we think of the Christian life or the life of a local church. We like to be able to point to tasks we have done to spread evidence of gospel transformation in our community, government, or schools. We like to point to buildings that have been constructed or how much money we've given in the pursuit of seeing churches planted. And all of those things are absolutely tremendous. In fact, they're necessary elements as we faithfully live as believers and as a local church. But with our propensity to prize our doing or our accomplishments, I wonder what we think about praise.

I mean, if you think about it, we commit a significant time every week to praising and thanking God. We sing songs and pray prayers of thanks and praise to our Lord, and we do it weekly. And at the end of it, there's nothing we can point to and say, "Look at what we accomplished." There's no number we'll report on the budget, building we can point to, and possibly not even any knowledge that we'll have obtained.

And yet, the Lord, appointed an entire day under the Old Covenant every week where the people of God would have to stop their work, get to point to nothing that they've accomplished, rest, and worship. No doubt, in part, the Lord was showing them that doing and accomplishing isn't what all of life is about. It's crucial, instead, that we stop doing and trying to accomplish for a bit and marvel at, praise, and thank the God who created us, redeems us, and sustains us so that everything we do and accomplish is a gift of his grace.

It is in light of this reality that Psalm 92 was written. Its superscript reads: "A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath." That is, it was a psalm written so that it could be used in giving praise and thanks to the Lord on that day that the Lord commanded be set aside for rest and worship. Therefore, you'll not be shocked to find out that it is a psalm about why it is good to give thanks and praise to the Lord. It is a psalm that corrects us if our drive is to spend every day of our lives seeking to do and accomplish more. It tells us how good it is to pause and worship our creator and redeemer.

Now, before we dive into this psalm, I want to state that I don't think the Sabbath is a binding command in the New Testament. Almost every believer realizes that that Sabbath didn't come over precisely as it was carried out in the Old Covenant, so that Saturday is to be set aside as holy. Some believers have carried it over as a command into the New Covenant, recognizing it as a Christian Sabbath in which it is transferred from the seventh day to the first day—from Saturday till Sunday. These might then think it is sinful to pick up sticks in your yard on Sunday afternoon or even watch football. One of my good friends was ordained for ministry in a

denomination that was strictly Sabbatarian, and in his ordination exam he was asked, “Would you be willing to watch the Super Bowl and be entertained by such secular labors on a Sunday?” to which he answered, “Yes, because I believe the Christian Sabbath begins at sunset on Saturday evening so that by the Super Bowl begins, the Sabbath is over.”

I don’t think the Sabbath is a binding command in the New Covenant, whether on Saturday or Sunday. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, in Romans 14 Paul says that we have freedom to esteem one day as better than another or to esteem all days alike—no doubt making reference to the Sabbath. And when writing to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of food laws, festivals, new moons, and the Sabbath as shadows that pointed to the substance of Christ and have since faded away (Col 2:16-17).

However, while it is clear that the New Testament does not declare our picking up sticks or even watching football on a Sunday as a sinful activity, it does tell us that we should not forsake assembling together in worship of the Lord. The early church did this every Sunday, a day that they called “The Lord’s Day,” because it was on the first day of the week he rose. Therefore, they gathered each Lord’s Day to give worship—in the form of praise and thanks—to the risen and reigning king. And that’s what we’ve continued as believers for the last 2,000 years.

But my guess is that some of us have never stopped and contemplated why this gathering to praise and thank the Lord is good and worthwhile. And others of us may already feel the urge to use this time doing something else—something that will allow us at its conclusion to say, “I did that.” So, it is good for us to take some time, look at Psalm 92 this morning, and consider why it is that we praise and thank our Lord in worship. Specifically I want us to see three truths we can learn from this psalm, starting with the simple truth that it is good for Christians to praise and thank the Lord.

It is good for Christians to praise and thank the Lord

This is where our psalm begins. The very first words of the psalm tell us: “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre” (vv. 1-3). This is simply a straightforward statement, noting that it is good to: 1) give thanks to the Lord, 2) to sing praises to the Lord, 3) to declare his steadfast love and faithfulness morning and night, and 4) to utilize musical instruments to assist us in these things. That is something, the psalmist tells us, that is good to do.

Let me note a few things from this. First, this obviously does not limit our giving thanks to the Lord and praising his name in song to the gathering of the saints. This is, as noted, a Sabbath psalm, but the fact that the psalmist tells us that it is good to declare the Lord’s steadfast love in the morning and faithfulness by night is a way of saying that the Lord is continuously worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. Second, the fact that this is a Sabbath psalm and that musical instruments are identified—which not all can play—suggests that this is an especially appropriate task as the people of God gather together for worship. And, third, one of the key

realities that we're declaring praise and thanksgiving for is God's steadfast love and faithfulness. It is indeed right to praise God for his might, greatness, and power. But these realities are to some degree enjoyed by all people. When the eclipse happened this past Monday and multitudes of people gathered to see this heavenly wonder, those who say this demonstration of God's might and wisdom was by no means limited to believers. Believers and unbelievers alike enjoyed and marveled at the wisdom and might of God demonstrated in that awesome phenomenon. But the unbeliever does not know what it is like to be the recipients of the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness. They don't know what it's like to know that his affection is set us, that our Lord is committed to us, that he loves us as his children, that every promise toward us he will fulfill, and that all will work in our lives to make us conformed to the image of Jesus Christ—no matter what. The unbeliever doesn't know what it's like to be the object of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. But we do. And because of that, we should be a people who praise God.

It is fitting for us to do this. It is right for us to do this. It is good for us to do this. So, don't be someone who says, "Singing is not my thing" or "I really don't enjoy the singing and praising aspect of the service" or "I don't know why we have to employ so many instruments in worship." If we say those things, that's not altogether different than saying, "Holiness just doesn't suit me." Were one to say such a thing, we would respond, "Believers must be holy. It should characterize us." We can say the same thing about singing praises to our Lord, giving thanks to him, and praising him for his steadfast love and faithfulness as we're accompanied by musical instruments. This too characterizes the Christian, and if you feel that it is not your cup of tea, pray that the Lord will continue to shape your heart in conformity to God's Word because Psalm 92 tells us that it is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to his name.

Now, with most psalms like this, we have a statement of the good or fittingness of praising the Lord followed by a list of reasons, and Psalm 92 is no exception. Notice how verse 4 begins with the word "for." That is to say, "because." The psalmist is now going to begin telling us more of why it is good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to his name. I want to identify two. The first is that we've been shown grace that the unbeliever does not know.

We've been shown grace that the unbeliever does not know

Throughout the Bible, one of the ways that the Lord highlights his grace to undeserving people—like you and me—is by contrasting that one with another. Here's what I mean. When the Bible begins, you have Abel, not Cain, and eventually Seth, not Cain, as the line of blessing. Then you have Isaac, not Ishmael, Jacob, not Esau, and so on and so forth. Jacob's not better than Esau. That's Paul's point in Romans 9, as he takes these two brothers, who shared the same womb, and notes that before they were born or had done anything either good or bad—simply in order that God's purpose of election might continue—declared, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom 9:9-13). The blessing of the one against the other highlights God's purpose of grace. Jacob isn't deserving, any more than we are.

That's what the psalmist does in verses 4-9 of our psalm. First, he notes the personal blessings the Lord has given him, writing, "For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy." The psalmist notes that God's works make him glad and great such joy in his heart that he sings.

Now, we might counter that this isn't a particular blessing for the psalmist or the believer. After all, consider the work of the Lord in creating a beautiful sunrise or sunset. I really like to sit on my porch and watch the sun rise and the sun set. It is a magnificent work of the Lord that makes me glad and makes me want to praise the Lord. In other words, I can describe the sunrise or sunset saying precisely the same thing the psalmist says in verse 4. But, again, that's not unique to me. One might say, "Anyone can enjoy that sunrise or sunset, seeing it as the work of the Lord, and sing praises to him."

Fair. But note how the psalmist counters this point. He writes in verses 5-9, "How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep! The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed forever; but you, O LORD, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O LORD, for behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered."

The psalmist points out that the evildoer, theoretically could see the works of the Lord, in something like a sunset, and give thanks and praise to the Lord. But he doesn't. He is foolish. He is stupid. He does not understand. He has made himself an enemy of God who will face God's judgment. In the words of Paul in Romans 1, though creation screams to us about the glory of God, the unbeliever does not "honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they become futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (v. 21).

The unbeliever, in his pursuit of rebellion against his creator, is darkened in his understanding. That's why the psalmist calls him the stupid man and the fool. He does not see clearly. His mind is darkened. He does not even understand that though he may look like he is flourishing in this life, he is doomed to perish under the Lord's hand of judgment.

So note the contrast between the believer and the unbeliever. The believer looks around and sees the works of the Lord and is glad and moved to sing for joy while the unbeliever is darkened and foolish in his thinking, unable to see and thank God for his works, and believing that he is flourishing is actually awaiting the terrible day of judgment.

Brothers and sisters, one of the reasons it is good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to his name is because we were just like the evildoer described in verses 5-9. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that we were all one children of wrath like the rest of mankind, dead in our sins and following the devil and the course of this world. But by God's grace we have been saved, as a gift to us, not a result of our works. We didn't deserve this. We didn't earn it. And yet our eyes are opened to see the works of God and to be glad in them and moved in our hearts to sing for joy. So, let me say it this way: give thanks to God and sing praises to his name because you can, because he's given you the grace to have eyes opened to see clearly, minds that understand

accurately, and hearts that are moved appropriately. All of that is a gift the Lord has given you that not everyone has experienced and that no one deserves. Therefore, give thanks to the Lord and sing his praises because we've been shown grace that the unbeliever does not know. And, finally, give thanks to God and sing his praises because he not only saves us but preserves us so that we might praise him.

God not only saves us but preserves us so that we might praise him

In verses 10-11, the psalmist contrasts himself with the wicked whom he's just mentioned being scattered and ultimately perishing. He writes, "But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants." "Horn" is oftentimes used as a symbol of power, and so it may indicate that this psalm is written by a king who has been victorious over his enemies. Regardless, he's noting that though he had enemies and evil people who assailed him, they have been doomed. The Lord has put down his enemies against him and raised up the psalmist victoriously.

But just as we might say, "Well, good for him, but what does that have to do with us?" he transitions in verse 12 to generalizing what the Lord has done for him to noting that this is the way the Lord deals with all of his people. He preserves them. He writes in verses 12-14, "The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green."

He describes the righteous in pictures of thriving trees. Instead of decaying, he's giving us images of a tree growing, flourishing, being full of sap and life, even bearing fruit when it is old. These are images to suggest that God preserves the life of his people. He upholds us no matter what we go through. He strengthens us to endure and even flourish in righteousness no matter the death and decay around us.

Again, this doesn't mean that believers won't suffer. We will. In fact, it is promised to us. It is through much tribulation that we'll enter the kingdom of God. But our God will hold us fast. The wicked will perish, but the righteous will be preserved. And then note why we'll be preserved by our God. The psalmist adds in verse 15, "To declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

Do you see that? Our God enables us to persevere in life and flourish in righteousness whatever comes our way "to declare that the LORD is upright." He preserves us so that we might praise him. We praise our God because he preserves us to the end and gives us life when we only deserve death and hell.

This picture is summed up quite well by D. A. Carson in his book about his dad, Tom. He concludes the book with these words: "When he died, there were no crowds outside the hospital, no editorial comments in the papers, no announcements on television, no mention in

Parliament, no attention paid by the nation. In his hospital room there was no one by his bedside. There was only the quiet hiss of his oxygen, vainly venting because he had stopped breathing and would never need it again. But on the other side all the trumpets sounded. Dad won entrance to the only throne room that matters, not because he was a good man or a great man—he was, after all, a most ordinary pastor—but because he was a forgiven man. And he heard the voice of him whom he longed to hear saying, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord.’”¹

That is what God preserving his children looks like for all of us. And how can you hear that and not think it is good to give thanks to our God and to sing praises to his name, declaring his steadfast love in the morning and his faithfulness at night? He has shown us so much grace and will preserve us until we are safely with him. Anyone for whom that is true should be characterized by giving thanks and praise to our Father. So let us thank and praise him now as we come to the table, giving thanks for the one who lived, died, and was raised for us. Amen.

¹ D. A. Carson, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 148.