

Psalm 92 Sermon

At the start of Lockdown in March, I watched the Netflix documentary *The Last Dance*. If you don't know, *The Last Dance* is about the career of the basketballer Michael Jordan, and particularly about his final season – his last dance - playing for The Chicago Bulls in 1997-98. Now, I'm not a massive Basketball fan, but I absolutely loved it. It was such a fascinating documentary about a brilliant story, told perfectly. And if you know, I'm fairly prone to obsession, so I ended up mentioning it to everyone I spoke to at the time! We had Jamie's brother living with us at the time, and it became a bit of a running joke that I would mention it in any situation. If you were unlucky enough to speak to me at that time, you'd have heard me going on about it too!

Why did I go on about it so much? Because I thought it was brilliant! I wanted people to know about and enjoy it too – to share in that enjoyment with me and talk about it together! Perhaps some of you are like that? It might be an album or a film or a book or a new recipe or an author or a game or whatever. Do you ever get that enthusiastic about something that you just want to share it with anyone and everyone?! The writer CS Lewis spots the human tendency to do that, and says this about it:

“...we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment... It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with...”

When we enjoy something, we love to talk about it and share it with people! It's what we do. What is it you love to talk about? If someone spent any time with you, what would they talk about what you were passionate about? If all the words you spoke in a weekend were written down, what would be the most common thing you spoke about?

Well as we begin looking at Psalm 92, just listen to how the writer of it – we don't know who that was exactly – talks, and see if you can spot where their enthusiasm is?

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You can tell what they're enthusiastic about by what they repeat the most. And the most repeated word in this Psalm is the word LORD – the special name God's people had for their faithful, promise-keeping God. Whoever wrote this, they passionately love the Lord their God.

And they were also a fantastic poet! They wrote this poem in a way that is meant to focus your eye in on the central point right in the middle of the poem. I'm not sure I've explained that well, but hopefully we'll see what it means as we get stuck into the Psalm. As first thing the Psalmist wants to draw our attention to is...

1) It's good for God's people to praise him together v1-5 & 10-15 (repeat)

Look at how the Psalmist begins: *“It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.”*

One of the strange things about the way we use language is how it can reduce the effect of the words we use. So you often hear the word “awesome” used to describe all kinds of things from burgers to albums to weather. Which then reduces what the word awesome means when we need to use it

properly. I think we get the same sort of thing with the word “good” here in v1. It is good to praise the Lord. Well that’s nice. Yes. Good.

But it doesn’t just mean “a fine thing to do”. It means IT IS THE BEST THING WE CAN DO! It’s using the word Good the way God uses it in the creation account – it’s fantastic! It’s brilliant! It’s the closest thing to heaven we can do! The Psalmist is saying that it is the best thing for us to proclaim God’s love and his faithfulness when we come together. This Psalm was specifically written, if you look just above v1, for the Sabbath day – the day God’s people rested from all their work and focussed on praising and worshipping God together. The Psalmist is talking about how brilliant and good for us it is to praise God together. We’re not designed to be solo Christians, existing on our own – it’s better for us to praise God together!

Which is hard at the moment to hear isn’t it? We haven’t been able to meet together since March 15th. That’s 5 months ago. That’s a long time! And watching videos on Youtube and meeting on Zoom is just no decent substitute for that. And to cap it off, there’s no idea of when we WILL be able to meet together currently either – and when we do, we probably can’t do most of the things we love to do – we won’t be able to sing together or speak across family groups or hang around together – so proclaiming God’s love and faithfulness to each other is going to be very difficult to do.

And if you feel like this Psalmist, then reading this Psalm could potentially make us feel... awful! We can’t do what we have been made to do – meet together. We’re like a fish that can’t swim or an eagle that can’t fly. It **should** hurt and frustrate us. To not be able to meet together, to use the Psalmists illustration in v12-14, means we’re like a tree that hasn’t got any water and can’t produce fruit. Or to use a New Testament picture, a Christian on their own is like a hand without a body, or an eye without a head.

But that might also be a challenge for us? Because, it’s possible that some of us have actually enjoyed the change that COVID-19 has caused. Having the sermon on Youtube has meant we can watch it when we want, so we’re not inconvenienced by having to go to church on a Sunday. And, if we don’t get onto the Zoom call then we’re not going to be called out on it because people won’t notice in the same they would if we didn’t make it to a church meeting. Infact, church on a Sunday has really got in the way of other stuff we’d rather be doing on Sundays. Youtube sermons mean I can have it on in the background while I do other stuff I enjoy more.

Well – if that’s how you’re feeling, then this Psalm just won’t ring true with you. But then neither is the experience of God’s people through the whole Bible.

Infact, to push it further, v2 makes it clear that God’s people love to give over a **whole day** to praising God together with his people – saying morning and night is a poetic way of bookending the day to represent the whole day - not just the convenient bits of a day so they can get on to other activities.

The challenge for us is - is this something we’re this excited to do when we can in the future? Or will meeting together actually just get in the way of what we really want to be doing?

Meeting together as Christians is good for us. But why? In what way is it good for us? Well this Psalm says it has a personal, individual affect, AND a corporate altogether affect.

So, personally it gives us a better perspective on things. Look at v4 – when the Psalmist sings praises to God with others, what happens? *“For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands have done.”* Whatever else they’d been feeling, maybe grumpy or angry and bitter or discouraged - when they’re encouraged to think about God and who he is and what he’s done by a family of believers who are all doing it to each other – it refocuses their own personal perspective.

They're reminded of all that God has done for them, and it brings them joy and gladness. That doesn't necessarily change their situation – their life may stay pretty rubbish - but it changes them and their view of it all because it focuses their attention on God, rather than their own situation.

But it doesn't stop there - in V10, the picture of the ox's horn is the Psalmists poetic way of saying that praising God with His people re-strengthens them. And the fine oils imagery means that it refreshes him. It helps him have eyes to see and ears to hear what's **really** going on around him, v11, so he can see with certainty the ultimate defeat of his enemies – even if he doesn't ever get to see it with his physical eyes.

Being *with* God's people praising him on the Lord's day is good for us personally! The real challenge is – do we believe that? Have we made trusting the Lord into a purely personal relationship that church services get in the way of? If we really believed what this Psalmist is telling us is true, then hardly anything would ever stop us from getting to church to be with God's people praising his name!

But it isn't just good personally – it's good for all of us together! Look at v12 – the righteous (plural!) will flourish like a palm tree, like a cedar of Lebanon. Why will they do that? The Psalmist tells us in v13 – because they're planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God, together, they will flourish. This Psalm tells us that when meeting together becomes important and a priority to all of us, everyone benefits. Everyone flourishes. Everyone grows strong and healthy like those trees.

And this flourishing will keep going – these people of God will still bear fruit in old age and remain fresh and green. And they'll keep believing and declaring what they've been saying all along v15: *"The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."*

The challenge is - do we believe this? Do we believe that about the opportunities we do have to meet together as churches? Yes, some things are different now this side of the cross – the Psalmist's Sabbath day was the Saturday, and ours is a Sunday. But read through the book of Acts and see just how much the attitude of the church in that books mirrors Psalm 92. They're always together – not just on Sundays! And they love it.

Is this how we feel about meeting together as a church? Is it something we prioritise? Is it something we delight in? Is it something we invest in and allow others to invest in us? Or is it something that is an inconvenience, or that we get through to do what we really want to do with our time? If that is our attitude, then it's something this Psalm calls us to repent of. It's good for God's people to praise him together! REALLY good – for everyone. How does the way we treat our Sundays demonstrate that? It's good for God's people to praise him together.

But it's particularly good when you compare it with how this Psalm describes people who don't share this view. So let's see secondly – and more briefly – **It's not good to reject the Lord** v6,7 & 9. Repeat.

If it's good for God's people to praise him together, then the next section takes a sharp contrast with that. Just listen to these verses:

"Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed for ever. ⁹ For surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered."

You see the Psalmist looks at the world around in v4 and 5 and praises God! They look at everything around them and are blown away by the greatness and faithfulness and love of God. But they know that's not the way everyone responds when they look around. Other people look around at the world and the way it functions, and they conclude – essentially – there is no God. That it's every man for

himself. They see wicked people – people who reject God – spring up everywhere like grass, and they see evildoers - people who exploit others for their own end - flourishing – and they think that there can't be a God. There's no heaven, no hell. Everyone should just live for today. Because that's all there is.

Maybe that's the way you're thinking watching this? Perhaps you're someone that's always been sceptical about the claims of a creator God who rules over all. Your experience and your observations have made you think this world is senseless and violent. If there was a God, he left us alone a long time ago. Look at the people who succeed, and those who seem to flourish the most. If there was a God, he'd have made them fail and the GOOD people successful.

Perhaps you think life's like a game of Monopoly. Have you ever played that properly? To win at Monopoly, you have to be ruthless – buy quickly, and then fleece everyone you're playing with. I can't remember who I heard telling this story, but they were saying that they played their Nan at Monopoly when they were about 13, and she destroyed him. She took all of his money. So he made it his mission to beat her at Monopoly one day. So that summer, he played anyone and everyone he could and got better and better at the game, until at the end of the summer he played his Nan again and destroyed her. He was ruthless. And she said to him, "Well done! You've learned the first lesson – how to win at Monopoly" and he felt good. Then she said to him, "Now for the last lesson. When the game's over, whether you win or lose, the money all goes back in the box."

Which is exactly the point the Psalmist makes here. If you think that only the ruthless, unscrupulous people succeed, so the key to success is to be like them – you've missed the point. If you look around at the world and think there is no meaning and there is no lesson to learn about God from it all except that he's long gone – the Psalmist says you're stupid. That's what the word we have translated senseless means in v6 – stupid. The person writing this Psalm says that if you look around and see the world as it is and conclude that nice guys finish last, so just live as you please – then you're stupid. You've come to the most ridiculous conclusion.

Look around you – they might seem to win, but at the end of their lives, all their money goes back in the box. And then what?

Well then – it's only worse ahead. V9 – surely your enemies, Lord, (he repeats it to be clear who these people are) surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. If you've concluded there is no God, the Bible says you're not just naively wrong about it. You're an enemy of God. Infact, like this Psalm, it says there are only 2 types of people – those who love to praise him, and those who are his enemies. The question is – which are you? It goes well for those who praise him – even if that's only eventually - just read v10-15 again. It doesn't go so well for those who don't in v9.

Where are you today? Are you one of these righteous people who praise God and will flourish forever? Or are you one of his enemies, who might flourish for a bit, but will eventually be destroyed? Those are the only 2 options. There's no sitting on the fence with God. Enemy, or family.

If you're a Christian today, this life is as bad as it gets. There may well be people who oppose you and who are against you. This life might be hard, and people who hate you and what you believe might prosper and have more success/money/comfort/whatever. But if you're a Christian, this life is as bad as it gets. Ahead is only better and better and better. V10-15 are beautiful hints of what heaven and eternity are going to be like. Paul says in Romans that *"that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."* Heaven and eternity make any suffering, anything we have to give up now, completely worth it.

But this Psalm also reminds us that if you're not a Christian today, if you're an enemy of God, this life is as good as it gets. And it's a brief sneeze of time. If you're not a Christian, this life is as good as it gets – ahead is only worse. Much much worse. Because when God scatters and when God causes you to perish... well, the Bible says "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

It is not good to reject the Lord.

But why? Why is it so good for God's people to praise him together? And why is it so bad to reject the Lord? Well, right at the centre of this Psalm, the most important line of the whole Psalm tells us.

V8 – *"But you, LORD, are forever exalted."*

To exalt means to lift up. So in the famous pictures after England won the football World cup in 1966, the captain Bobby Moore is being lifted up on people's shoulders. They're exalting him – lifting him up – to show how brilliant they think he is in that moment.

But God isn't like a footballer who'll reach his peak and then fade away. He isn't like a pop star who becomes the next big thing, only to be replaced by the next big thing. He isn't even a king who rules overall well until they die and are perhaps remembered fondly. No – this God is **forever** exalted. He is always at his peak. Every day is his heyday. Nothing can better him. Nothing can rival him. Nothing can outlast him – he is forever, and he will be exalted – lifted up, celebrated for who he is for every second that he exists.

He is exalted when his people come together and praise him! When Christians gather to praise their God despite every circumstance of their life – that shows to the world around that this God is better than anything else this life can offer. Praising God is better than any hobby or activity or any other way we could be spending our time. Getting out of bed on a Sunday, or leaving our house when we're relaxed and comfortable of an afternoon, and instead of our own comfort meeting with God's people is madness to a world that doesn't know him – but it also displays to them how brilliant we think this God is. It exalts him.

But he's also exalted when he judges his enemies. He is exalted when he scatters and makes perish those who oppose him and reject him – when people who think they're fine without him have proved to them how wrong they are.

But, what kind of God has any right to judge at all? What kind of God deserves to be praised by his people at all?

The answer is a God came to earth in the person of his Son Jesus. The God who taught and demonstrated, again and again, how faithful and loving God is towards people who don't deserve it. Who taught again and again how God's enemies will seem to triumph, but will not last. And then a God who was exalted. Who was lifted up. But not how we expect.

He hung, lifted up above the crowd, naked and despised on a Roman cross, condemned as a criminal and sentenced to a rebel's death. And there he took the full weight of judgement for evildoers and his enemies, praying for their forgiveness even as they killed him.

Jesus was lifted up, exalted. He was raised up and there he took all of the punishment we deserve for our own rebellion, for our own wickedness, for our own enmity with God. And he did it so that people like you and me who deserve the punishment of rebels, of enemies, the scattering this Psalm speaks about, can instead be people who sing and shout about his faithfulness and his love!

If you're not yet a Christian watching this – then can I ask you why not? What's stopping you? Come and see the truth about this God – the God who knows you deserve judgement and punishment, and instead exalts his own son by punishing him in your place. And who is loving towards you, calling you to forgiveness, and faithful to his word when he promises to forgive all of our rebellion and rejection of him. He is exalted forever. Even in his judgement. So why not be part of the group that praise him now for his infinite love and faithfulness, instead of the group who perish and are scattered?

And if you are a Christian watching this – let's remind ourselves of this. Let's encourage each other with this truth. And let's eagerly look forward to meeting with God's people to praise him together. What priority does that take for you? What could you do to encourage yourself and others to prioritise it more, when we finally are allowed to meet together? How can we exalt the Lord with others even during this time of frustration?

The results of doing that are massive – flourishing and bearing fruit right on into eternity. It is the best thing we can be doing this side of death. Psalm 92 reminds and encourages us that It is good to praise God together, and it's not good to reject the Lord – because he will be exalted forever. So why not exalt him now?