

A Song for the Sabbath

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[0 : 00] Well, it's a great privilege to be here with you again and to bring the word to you this evening. Would you please turn with me, if you have a Bible with you, to Psalm 92, Psalm 92, portion of which we've just sung.

Let us hear God's own word. Psalm 92, a psalm, a song for the Sabbath day. It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.

For you make me glad by your deeds, O Lord. I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O Lord! How profound are your thoughts!

The senseless man does not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever.

But you, O Lord, are exalted forever. For surely your enemies, O Lord, surely your enemies will perish, all evildoers will be scattered.

[1 : 19] You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox. Fine oils have been poured upon me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries.

My ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord.

They will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, The Lord is upright.

He is my rock. And there is no wickedness in him. So far, the reading of God's word. Well, this psalm, Psalm 92, is a rather remarkable psalm.

And it is remarkable for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most obviously, we find it remarkable for its moving imagery, for the beauty of some of its phrases.

[2 : 24] Towards the end of the psalm, particularly from verse 12 and verse 13, The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon, bearing fruit in old age, flourishing in the presence of God.

What words of beauty and splendor! What words of strength and encouragement! So it's a remarkable psalm because it is a beautiful psalm. But it is also a remarkable psalm because it is the one psalm in the Psalter that mentions the Sabbath.

That's kind of intriguing. Only one psalm in the whole Psalter mentions the Sabbath day. And it's further interesting that this psalm, Psalm 92, where we find the Sabbath mentioned, that reference comes only in the title.

Many psalms, of course, have a title. Many psalms have a title. But the title of this psalm is a psalm, a song for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a central institution in the Old Testament, connected not only to particular historical festivals for God's people, but to the regular weekly worship of God.

God, of course, had strictly charged Israel to keep the Sabbath day holy. In Genesis 2 and Exodus 20, he declared that he had grounded the holiness, the sanctity of the day in creation, following his own pattern.

- [4 : 03] Of working for six days and then resting. In Deuteronomy 5, he declared through Moses that he had also grounded the Sabbath day in his redemptive work.
- So he, through Moses, tells the people there, you shall remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty arm, a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.
- Therefore, the Lord your God commands you to keep the Sabbath day. And so, too, when the prophets warn Israel of the peril and the danger of Israel's sin, of Israel's disobedience, keeping the Sabbath is never far from view, is it?
- Isaiah 56 and Isaiah 58, we read of blessing that is promised to the people. Isaiah 56, verse 2, 58, 13, and 14.
- If you honor the Sabbath day by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking your own idle words, but if you call the Sabbath a delight, then you shall take delight in the Lord.
- [5 : 16] You shall find joy in the Lord. I will make you ride on the heights of the land and feed you with the heritage of your father Jacob. So we might think that it's somewhat surprising then, because of the great importance of the Sabbath for Israel, for the people of God of old, that this psalm is the only place where we find any reference in the Psalter to that holy day.
- And more surprising still is the apparent absence of any clear reference to the Sabbath in the body of the psalm. As we've said, it's only in the title. But I think that's important.
- I think that is a remarkable testimony that the Sabbath is never an end in itself. It's not something to talk about endlessly.
- The Sabbath is always a means to an end. It's a means to an end of time with God. It's a means to an end, a goal of thinking about God, of praising God, of being renewed in the grace of God, of fellowshiping with the people of God, of hearing that verdict pronounced that we find from the apostles in their letters, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The students are sometimes startled to encounter the great importance attached to this and to worship generally during the Reformation. When John Calvin described the problems in the church that needed to be reformed according to the word of God, he put worship at the top of the list.
- [7 : 02] He said, that belongs even ahead of the recovery of the authority of the Bible, even ahead of recovering the right doctrine of salvation. Worship is the number one issue of the Christian religion.
- But he was reminding us that God revealed himself in Scripture for a purpose, and that our salvation is not an end in itself, but it is a means to an end.
- And what is the end for which we are saved? What is the purpose for which God revealed himself in his word? It is the worship of God. And what is the worship of God?
- It is God meeting with his people. So this psalm, Psalm 92, a great psalm of praise, a great psalm of creation and redemption, of meeting with God, is particularly fitting for the Sabbath day.
- It is a gloriously God-centered psalm, isn't it? As we read it, we notice that it opens with giving thanks to God. This is a key activity of the Sabbath to praise God, to thank God, to focus on God, to thank him in prayer, to praise him in song.
- [8 : 21] These things are critical for our relationship with God. And then it closes with blessing for the people. We hear what God has done. We respond in praise and thanksgiving.

And God provides for us what we need. But at the center of this psalm, Psalm 92, we find verse 8. Another remarkable feature of this psalm, this remarkable declaration in verse 8, You, O Lord, are on high forever.

You, O Lord, are exalted forever. We might ask then, what is the center of this Sabbath song?

The psalmist tells us it is the exaltation of the Lord. Elsewhere, we read in the Psalter that God is enthroned on the praises of Israel.

And this psalm addresses God as Lord, as Yahweh, the great covenant name of God. It addresses him as the Most High so that we can know it is this God, this God who is in himself high and lifted up forever.

[9 : 34] He is pleased that we would exalt him in our hearts and minds with our praise. And what a blessing that is for us.

So how does this psalm then, this song for the Sabbath, this celebration of the Lord, teach us to worship and exalt the Lord? Well, first of all, I think this psalm teaches us that God is exalted in the destruction of the wicked.

Somewhat a startling thing to find in this psalm. We might be tempted to ask, who believes in judgment? Isn't that a little ridiculous?

A little comical. A little absurd today. But this psalm reminds us of the terrible judgment that does await those who reject the Lord.

that judgment is coming. That the holiness of God, the justice of God will be upheld. The wicked may seem to flourish for a time.

[10 : 43] Evil may seem to be exalted for a time. All we need to do is read the newspaper to see that. But the day is coming, we need to remember, when the wicked will perish everlastingly.

verses 6 and 7 of this psalm. Senseless people do not know. The force here is really the stupid one cannot know. The fool cannot understand that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever.

Or again, verse 9. For surely your enemies, O Lord, surely your enemies shall perish. all evildoers shall be scattered. So this psalm contains a solemn warning.

And when we praise God on the Sabbath for the coming judgment, we remember the importance of rejecting worldliness in order to pursue true godliness.

We remember the requirements laid out for us in God's holy law. psalm 92 here almost seems to review for us the familiar imagery of psalm 1, of the ideal of the blessed man, the blessed man who listens to the word of God, who lives the word of God, who loves the word of God, who meditates on the word of God day and night, so that his heart and his mind might be steeped, saturated in the word of God.

[12 : 20] Because he has listened to the word, he does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. He does not copy the behavior of the sinful world around him.

He does not join the mockers who scorn the truth, but he hears the word and delights in it, and the word gives him what he needs.

Psalm 1, verse 3, he is like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers, but not so the wicked.

They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

God is so the Lord will not be the righteous. We praise him, this psalm suggests, for his destruction of the wicked, where God shows himself to be holy.

[13 : 27] And not only holy, but also a great comfort to his people, because he promises that he is the judge who shall come to set all things right.

Also, secondly, we exalt God for his deliverance of the righteous, for the flourishing of the righteous. This psalm, again, like Psalm 1, compares the righteous to a healthy tree.

Verses 12 and 13, the righteous flourish like the palm tree, they grow like the cedar of Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God.

A tree that has been planted, that grows because someone else has planted the seed, and watered the seed, and tended it, and cultivated it.

The righteous are not like fleeting grass, but long lasting trees. The beauty of the palm strength of the cedar, near to God, growing in the very courts of the Lord, in his temple.

[14 : 44] And so we are meant to be planted, to be fixed and rooted in the courts of the Lord, in the house of God, near to the Lord, where he has made known his holy presence. Again, these moving, beautiful images, the palm, the cedar, spirit.

These are also remarkable testimonies to the abundance of God. And God also promises here that the righteous shall stay vital and productive even into old age.

Verse 14, they still bear fruit in old age. They still stay fresh and green. You see, it's not just that they endure.

It's not just that they withstand the difficulties of this life that would threaten the people of God. But we are given here a great picture of the splendor of the people of God like a tree, rich and plentiful, lavish, continuing to bear fruit, continuing to flourish.

And so there is a future for the people of God. The wicked sprout like grass today, but in God's time, they are gone tomorrow.

[16 : 02] But there is a future for the people of God. And that's such a comfort, isn't it? That there is a future. Something we need to remind ourselves.

We don't always feel that way, do we? We don't always feel that we have a future. We can and do know times of trouble and sorrow and anguish, distress and discouragement.

We are prone to ask in times of great sadness and difficulty, where is this stability? Where is this strength? Where is this peace and rest?

Yes, all that sounds good, but when I look around at my life, I don't see much of this. peace and peace and peace. But when that is our experience, we would do well to remember this song for the Sabbath, where we read, God is on high forever.

So when we're feeling afflicted, we're feeling like things are unstable, like things are tottering. When we're feeling puny, God says to us as his people, don't be discouraged.

[17 : 21] I have a future for you. You will flourish like a palm tree and grow like a cedar, tall with a beauty that does not fade, strong to withstand distress.

For I have planted you, don't you see, I have planted you in my house, on my property, you are mine, you are within my temple.

And because I have done this for you, you can have confidence that you will find life and hope and deliverance in me. You will not blow away like grass.

You will not wither. The source of your life will not dry up, because the source of your life is not you, but it is God himself. It is the Lord Jesus Christ given to you as the water of life.

life. So this image of the people of God as a tree, I think, is a particularly appropriate image for the Sabbath day, for us to meditate on, because it is a testimony to our Savior.

[18 : 29] So this psalm would teach us then to exalt the Lord for his destruction of the wicked, for his deliverance of the righteous, but also, thirdly, for the declaration of his character.

for the declaration of his character. The psalmist here declares the steadfast love of God in the morning, and the faithfulness of God by night, verse 2.

God has loved his own from eternity, the mystery of redemption, and will ever continue to love and care for them. And because he loves them, he is always faithful to his promises.

promises. He is completely reliable and worthy of all praise. And he has a purpose to save, to deliver, and he will not fail.

He is the God of great power, bringing all creation into being. He is the God of great authority, redeeming his people from Egypt. The God of great purpose, making men and women in his image, and renewing his law for his people at Mount Sinai.

[19 : 38] He is the God of great promise, who meets with his people, to dwell with them, to sustain them, to bring them to flourish. And he is perfectly holy in all that he does.

This psalm reminds us of the character of our God. Verse 15, the righteous will proclaim, the Lord is upright, he is my rock, and there is no wickedness.

No unrighteousness in him. God's character here is to be a great comfort for his people. We are to set before our eyes not what the changing course of the world would bring, not the calamity that we might face in this present moment, not the difficult circumstances and trials of life that are true and real and can be unrelenting and can feel unbearable.

But this psalm would tell us we are to know who our God is. He is permanent. He is steadfast in love. He is high and lifted up.

How frequently in the psalms are we called to remember who our God is and what he has done for us? I think this must be one of the hardest things for us to do.

[21 : 01] One of the hardest things we have to do is to remember the character of our God. So often this slips from our mind. So often we lose track of it.

But it's something we never outgrow needing to hear as Christians. So we're told again and again throughout all of the scripture, aren't we? Remember, do not forget.

Remember, do not forget. I am the Lord your God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and I will by no means clear the guilty.

And so we are called to confess verse 5 of our psalm. How great are your works, O Lord. How deep, how profound are your thoughts.

We are to remember again with Isaiah that the Lord's ways are higher than our ways. That God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We are called to remember and not to forget that our God is sovereign in his power and in his wisdom and in his goodness.

[22 : 25] That he has laid the foundation of the earth. earth. That he is indeed the most high enthroned forever. That he will never be cast down.

And though we may not always see the wisdom of his action, and we may not always understand his purpose, we can have this great confidence in our God that he is upright in all that he does.

He is my rock and there is no wickedness in him. We see this above all in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, don't we? How do we know that God is steadfast in his love?

What is the work of the Lord that would make us glad, that would cause us to rejoice? It is the work of the Savior. He is the blessed man of Psalm 1.

He is the righteous one who brings abundant life to his people, who suffered terribly, but in doing so came to know our suffering.

[23 : 36] And in his death, he destroyed the power of death, so that he might bring us to glory. All of this is impressed on us in this psalm.

When we see that Psalm 92, this song for the Sabbath, is set in the mouth of Israel's king. Verses 10 and 11, You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox.

Fine oils have been poured upon me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries. My ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes. And when we compare these words to Psalm 89, part of the context for understanding Psalm 92, we read in the middle of Psalm 89, similarly of David, You, O Lord, are the glory of our strength.

By your favor, our horn is exalted. I have found David, my servant. With my holy oil, I have anointed him. I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted. But then we think about Psalm 89, the end of the third book of the Psalter.

[25 : 07] And we find that it is about the people of God left wondering whether God's word is true, whether God has not forgotten his promise that David's sons will sit on David's throne.

Psalm 89, verse 49, Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David, the king? You see, there's a terrible crisis of faith there, a crisis of the apparent failure of the promises of God, a crisis of kingship.

Where is that king? Holy, exalted, powerful, who will lead the people of God in praise. You think of Deuteronomy 17.

The king is to be a guide for the people. He is to order his life in the kingdom according to the word of God. Where is that king? Well, who is that king who is to lead the praise for the people on the Sabbath day?

Who is the answer to the crisis of Psalm 89? Who is the king who brings rest to his people? Who defeats the adversary and brings peace with God?

[26 : 25] It is the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it? He is the son of David. He is the true king of Israel. He himself declared, Hebrews 10, 7, Behold, I have come to do your will, O Lord.

He alone offers perfect praise to God. He alone is Lord of the Sabbath. And this psalm would call us to draw our strength from him.

Now, it's sometimes suggested that Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, abolished the Sabbath because it was a purely Mosaic institution. But as we've seen, the Old Testament sees the Sabbath first as a command of creation.

Command which is repeated by Moses, but not instituted by Moses. There remains a holy day in the new covenant.

The Lord's day is a special day belonging to God. We think of Revelation 1.10. There are many texts we could refer to.

[27 : 39] We might preach on all of them tonight, but I think you would get weary and so would I. Psalm 1.10, at least, shows us this. And in the New Testament, the only day that is given any special attention is Sunday, the Lord's day.

The first day of the week. The day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, has made the first day, rather than the seventh day, a holy day for his own.

From the beginning of creation to Jesus, we looked forward to the rest that would come in the end. But with the coming of Jesus, rest has been won in his resurrection.

And so, as the people of God, we begin our week with rest and worship. And by doing so, we anticipate already our eternal rest, dwelling with God forever in glory.

Hebrews 3 and 4. You see, the Sabbath is a foretaste of that eternal rest. It is a day that is set apart, given to us by God for worship and for fellowship.

[28 : 54] It is a day when we can turn off the lies of the world. What is the greatest lie of the world?

This may be a difficult question. Surely one of the greatest lies of the world we find elsewhere in the Psalter. Psalm 3, verse 2. David is there complaining against enemies who would rise against him.

And he says, Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. There is no deliverance for him.

God will not deliver him. What a terrible thing it is that the world shouts at us. There is no salvation for you in God. There is no deliverance for us in God.

I think that's something we hear all the time, isn't it? The world that would mock and ridicule the people of God. That would crowd out the voice of our Lord.

[30 : 02] And so too our flesh, the sin that continues to abide within us, the doubt that often grips us. That would tell us there is no deliverance for you. And of course the temptations of the evil one.

So much so tempting us that we can wonder, is there any salvation? Is there any deliverance?

Does any of it really matter? Yes, I go to church on Sunday. Does any of it really matter? God says to us in this psalm, this song for the Sabbath, he says, the Sabbath is the day when you gather before me so that I can tell you my gospel, that I can preach to you good news.

It's news that you cannot find anywhere else. It's news that you keep forgetting. But I will keep on telling you again and again and again, because of my steadfast love, because of my faithfulness, because of my covenant promises, I declare to you, yes, there is salvation for you in me.

Yes, there is deliverance for you in my son. He is the one whom I gave for the salvation of the world. And it is his resurrection and life that you celebrate on the Sabbath day.

[31 : 40] And so isn't it wonderful then that God gave us the Sabbath as a day to rejuvenate us, to restore us, so that we might be renewed in God.

And even in this psalm here, we're reminded that God gives it to us because we are tired from the labor of our hands. We're reminded that we are freed here from the burden of our hands, from the work of our hands, from the concern, from the struggle, from the anxiety of our hands, of our six days of labor.

We are called away from our work to rest in God's work, to delight in the work of our Lord. Lord. Those of you who listen carefully will have seen that verse 2 teaches us there's to be a morning and an evening service.

Well, maybe not exactly. But it does say to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night. It is the whole day that belongs to God, is the point.

The morning belongs to the Lord. The evening belongs to the Lord. And that pattern of scripture, of morning and evening devotion to God, the whole day is His. It is a great help to us.

[33 : 04] It is a great blessing to us that we might keep the Sabbath day, that we might be refreshed by our Savior. When we know what God promises, that He says, I will meet with you.

I will give you what you need when you are weary and you are tired and you cannot bear your burdens. Where else would we go? Think of Peter.

John 6, responding to our Lord. You have the words of eternal life. Where else would we go? Where else would we go? So the Sabbath is to be for us a day when we thank God, when we praise Him, when we exalt Him for His judgment, for His destruction of the wicked, for His deliverance of the righteous, for the declaration of His character.

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder for us that we serve a high and mighty, lifted up, almighty God who is reliable, who will judge His enemies, who will prosper His people, because of who He is, because of all that the Son has done for us.

So Psalm 92 is a perfect Sabbath psalm because it helps us to worship and praise our God. may we be encouraged by this psalm.

[34 : 42] May God be pleased to make us a Sabbath people who find their rest in Christ. Amen. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we thank You for Your Word.

We pray that we would all know the blessedness of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the great King who is even now at Your right hand, working all things together for us and for our salvation.

We thank You that He will come in glory to bring us to be with You forever. Help us to know, our Father, that You are indeed on high and that in Christ, Your Son, we have a mighty Savior.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Will you please stand as we sing our final psalm here?

Psalm 93.