

Communion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 September 2024

Preacher: Jerome Peirson

[0:00] It's going to be our consideration for this evening and I've got three thoughts for tonight.! Three thoughts. Firstly, a desire for God's presence in the wilderness.

! So here in this psalm, we see David in some straits in a time of difficulty.

As the superscription says, he's in the wilderness of Judah. He's in a dry and weary land. And it's just consulting various study Bibles and a couple of commentaries.

It would seem that there's some uncertainty as to exactly what the context is here. We know that David was often on the run from King Saul. And we read in parts of Samuel that he was being hunted like a partridge.

But in verse 11 of this psalm, we see that he addresses himself as the king. So some have suggested as he's addressing himself as the king that it's more likely that he was on the run from his son Absalom.

[1:25] You recall that awful rebellion of his son Absalom and him hunting David. So he's in real straits in the wilderness. And this is a time of difficulty for him.

And he starts off this psalm with the words, Oh God, you are my God. And here we see the word God here is the name of God, Elohim.

The word for God we see in the beginning of the Bible in Genesis. The word that denotes power and strength and majesty.

But you notice God says, Oh God, my God. This is his God, his covenant God. A God who is personal and a God who is relational.

The covenant God is there for David in the time of temptation, in the time of dryness, in the time of thirst, in the time of hunger.

[2:33] And often, this meal that we come to this evening, the Lord's Supper, communion, it can be a meal that's in the midst of our own wildernesses.

Our own times of dryness. Our own times of temptation. Our own times of spiritual neediness. And I think it's fair to say, as we as Christians, regardless of our spiritual state this evening, we are in a sense in a spiritual wilderness in this nation, aren't we?

We're surrounded by challenges and difficulties. Particularly in a city like Brighton, we look around and see so much unbelief. Secularism.

Anti-Christian views and sentiments. Worldliness. And then we only have to look within. And we can see our own shortcomings, our own sins.

Our own needs. The temptations and struggles around us. And then we have an enemy tempting us in the wilderness of our sojourn, in our pilgrimage as Christians.

[3:49] So I think this psalm would have much to say to us. And I want us just for a couple of moments as part of this first point just to think about this whole matter of the wilderness.

This theme, this picture of the wilderness comes up in several places in the scriptures. You consider the Old Testament and the people of God as they came out of slavery in Egypt.

They were wandering for 40 years in a wilderness. Fast forward to the New Testament and you think of the forerunner, John the Baptist. The one who was the forerunner who, if you like, was an echo of the prophet Elijah, went out into the wilderness preaching.

The Judean wilderness. Incidentally, thinking of Israel in the wilderness, we've been looking at Acts recently. Acts chapter 7.

Stephen calls Israel the congregation, the ecclesia, the church in the wilderness. You think of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[4:58] He spent 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness. But the Bible says much of wilderness for us as the people of God, as the church. You think of Isaiah 35.

It speaks of how God transforms a wilderness. He transforms it into a place of dryness. A place of barrenness.

And turns it into a place of fruitfulness. Isaiah says the wilderness. The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad.

Isaiah 35.1. The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.

Here what we see is the reversal of the curse. And as we come to the Lord's Supper, to communion, in a sense, what we are celebrating, what we are considering is this reversal of the curse in our lives.

[6:03] This is now in part being fulfilled in us as Christ's people. It will be fulfilled in full when Christ returns.

And we see that cosmic reversal of the curse. But right now we are in a wilderness, but there's a transformation in our own wildernesses. In that work that Christ has done on the cross for us.

And we celebrate, don't we, this curse reversal in communion. You think of Hosea, the prophet Hosea in Hosea 2.14. Similarly, the wilderness is a place where God's people, well, somewhat differently, God's people are allured into the wilderness.

They're brought into the wilderness. Hosea says, therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her vineyards and make the valley of Achor a door of hope.

So here, the people of God, the church of the old covenant are allured into the wilderness. It's a picture of restoration, a picture of renewal. And the vineyards are signifying that restoration into the land of promise.

[7:19] And then fast forward to the end of the scriptures in Revelation 12.6. We read of this woman, this mysterious woman taken into the wilderness for protection and nourishment.

And I know there's some debate and discussion about who this woman actually is. People take different views on how to interpret Revelation. But I think most interpreters would agree the woman signifies the people of God, us.

The woman gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But a child was caught up to God and to his throne.

And the woman fled to the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

So it's in the wilderness that we as the church are in, isn't it? A spiritual wilderness. And it's here we become acutely aware of our need.

[8:21] And it's here where we earnestly seek our Savior. The psalmist David says that my soul thirsts for you.

When one thinks of thirst, this is something that's all-consuming, isn't it? We all know what it's like to be thirsty. It's a significant need, isn't it? It's an all-consuming need.

My flesh faints for you. It speaks of extremity. Blessed is he who hungers and thirsts. I wonder what state you've come to communion this evening.

And we come to the one who is the source of living water for us. The one that gives us living water in a dry and weary land.

Verse 2 says, So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary. To look upon is to behold, to perceive. It's more than just a momentary glance.

[9:22] This is something profound. This is the activity of faith. To look upon him in the sanctuary. Sanctuary is the set-apart place.

The place of holiness. The sanctified space. And as we come to communion, we consider. And we set our minds on. And we behold. And we perceive the one who is set apart.

Who is sanctified. Who is altogether other. Yet is human. Who is like us. Without sin. We're looking to Christ in the house of God.

Christ is our sanctuary. And as we read about the sanctuary and the temple and the tabernacle. All these types and shadows. They point to Christ. And here we behold.

As David did. His power and glory. And we've been thinking, haven't we, on Sunday mornings about God's attributes. And David speaks of beholding the power and glory of his God.

[10:27] And we see a very practical application of meditating upon the attributes of God.

God. I remember in my early Christian walk. I was going through a particularly difficult time. Very dark time. I'd read about God's sovereignty.

I'd cognitively understood as much as I felt I could. As much as one can. In the limited capacities God's given me.

But it wasn't until I was struck by those real difficulties in my life. It wasn't until that knowledge went from being head knowledge to experiential knowledge.

That I really had to trust and lean in on the sovereignty of God. In the dark time. In the depression. In the worry. In the fear. In the fear. And I.

[11:25] Brothers and sisters. The reason we want to be reflecting upon the attributes of God. Is because there's something profoundly practical and experiential about that. It's one thing to know our God.

Up here. But it's another thing to live our lives. Knowing our God. That knowledge that is experiential. And it gives us strength. It gives us. It gives us backbone.

It gives us an ability to fight in the days of difficulty and darkness. But in the times of trial.

We have to be honest. It's not always easy to see the power and glory of God. Is it? Often in the times of trial. We think. God where are you? But here we see in David.

A man after God's own heart. In the desert. In the wilderness. He's not on the mountaintop. He's not in church on a Sunday morning. Enjoying all the blessings here. He's not in a place of prosperity.

[12:26] He's in a place of profound need. But he can know the power and the glory of his God. In a dry and weary land. And isn't it great?

Our God comes to us in the times of difficulty. In the times of need. We read also of the loving kindness.

And the steadfast love. Of our God. If you look on. In verse 3. This is that lovely Hebrew word. Chesed. I don't know if I've pronounced that correctly. But it speaks of God's mercy. His loving kindness. His goodness. I'm not sure if there's an exact interpretation or translation for the Hebrew word.

Some have called it. The ESV translates it. Steadfast love. Covenant love. And David describes this as better than life itself.

[13:24] This covenant loyalty and love is better than life for David. And this is him thinking of God. Not just in terms of power and glory.

And the transcendence and majesty. Although that is who God is. But he's thinking of him in terms of his goodness. And his dealings with him. In the time of trial. And it leads him to praise in the middle of difficulties.

Trials. Being pressured. Being squeezed. And I think there's something for us here. In our times of pressure. In our times of trial. When we're squeezed.

When we're busy. Where we're in this place. We can call on our covenant Lord. And we can praise him in the wilderness of our lives. Because here in the meal.

Don't we see that perfect picture. Of God's covenant faithfulness to us. In pictorial forms. Here in the elements. It's a visible depiction.

[14:25] Of God's covenant faithfulness to us. Is Christ's love to you better than life? It's a challenging question.

It's something I pondered as I looked at this psalm. You think of all that life has to offer us. Family. Loved ones. Friendships. Food. Holidays. Material possessions.

Whatever it is for you. Sports. Wives. Husbands. But is Christ. The preeminent desire for you. David says in your name.

I will lift up my hands. This picture of religious worship. The name of God. It speaks of his renown. It speaks of his character.

It speaks of his memorial. His attributes. Worship and praise. It's just a default for David. The next consideration is a soul that is satisfied in the wilderness.

[15:26] I mentioned Matthew 5 earlier in the beatitude. Blessed is he who hungers and thirsts. I didn't mention the second part of that. For his soul will be satisfied. And here with David we have a picture of the satisfied soul.

This feast in the wilderness. Fat and rich food. If you look in verse 5. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food.

The Bible speaks much of feasting. It's a picture, isn't it, of spiritual things. It's a picture of that communion with God. That we will ultimately be fulfilled in glory.

But it's a lovely picture, isn't it, of spiritual satisfaction. That we can have in our God. We live in an age of dissatisfaction, I think. I think it's fair to say.

We have so much, don't we? We're so materially privileged and blessed in many ways. But I think I see this in my own heart. I see it in my children. And I'm sure many of you see it in your own hearts as well.

[16:31] This kind of always wanting more. This dissatisfaction. We have things at the click of a button now, don't we? But nothing satisfies like Christ. Nothing has that everlasting satisfaction.

The things of the world, they just don't fill and nourish us. And many of us have sadly tried that out, haven't we? We've wandered. We've tried the things of the world.

And we've just felt nothing but dissatisfaction. And emptiness and loneliness. We think of sin. Sin satisfies, doesn't it, for a short period of time. There's that instant hit of sin.

But it leaves us emaciated. It leaves us hungry. It leaves us empty. I think many of us will know that yearning and wanting that one has when you've been sinning.

But this picture of a feast is all over the scriptures. It's beautifully depicted in Isaiah 25.6, where Isaiah says, On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food, full of marrow, of aged wine, well refined.

[17:40] And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is over all peoples. That is over all peoples.

So Isaiah here, he's speaking to the people of God in the old covenant. But I think this has a much, you know, future fulfillment that would include us as well. This covering of death that is fulfilled in Christ.

And as we come to communion, this is a rich feast, isn't it? Spiritually speaking, it depicts that satisfaction that we have in Christ, that fullness. And a satisfied soul seeks to meditate, seeks to remember, seeks to pray and have communion with his or her God.

In the secret places, David speaks about on his bed at night. You think of those nights when you're struggling with insomnia, maybe you're worried about something. I'm sure David had much to worry about, being hunted.

But what does he do? He's meditating. And this word for meditate in the Hebrew literally means to mutter. And we, as we come to communion, like David, we can say, God is our help.

[18:59] It's a wonderful thing to think God is our help. Nothing in this world can truly and ultimately help us. Even in the times of sickness, we, of course, we honor the means that are used.

Doctors, medical professionals, medicine, what have you. And we are grateful to God for those things. But ultimately, it is God that we give the praise and the glory for healing us. It's he that helps us.

He is our help. And we find that place of protection, that place of provision, that comfort under the shadow of God's wings, don't we? It's a beautiful picture. It made me think of, I can't remember where it is in the Gospels, where Christ says, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I long to bring you in under my wings.

There's a picture similar to this. Well, we've been thinking about emotions in the evenings. Haven't we? Daniel's been helpfully talking about emotions in the Bible.

We've been thinking about the emotional life of Christ. We see in this psalm, the key note, the impulse of David is one of joy and rejoicing. Did you notice that?

[20:05] It seems incongruous to his circumstances. It seems at odds with his circumstances. But he's showing such joy. This is what the Holy Spirit does.

This is faith, isn't it? God doesn't promise to give us the most favorable circumstances. And actually, often our lives are in the midst of struggle, a desert, a wilderness. But we can know a joy that is deep and profound. And we see here a satisfied soul clings to God. I don't know what the NIV says, but in the ESV it says clings to God.

The authorised version says follow hard after God. It's that stabilising and strengthening hand of God that we cling to.

And I was thinking this whole matter of clinging. The word apparently means to cling, to hold tight, to really kind of grab and hold on to.

[21:07] And I remember sometimes in church, I'd be out there, we'd be having tea and coffee, and I'd feel someone clinging to my leg. And more often than not, it would be Gracie. Sometimes it would be Duncan, actually. But they'd cling on for dear life, wouldn't they?

And that's a lovely picture of faith, isn't it? Clinging. Are we clinging to our God? Sometimes it is just for dear life, isn't it? We're clinging on. Yeah.

We don't come to communion because we have necessarily, some of us may do. We don't come because of the measure of assurance we have. We come in faith. And sometimes faith can be a small thing.

It can be a weak thing. But we come in faith. Because faith is just the instrument. It's the object of faith that really counts, that really matters. And we cling.

It's a lovely picture. And his right hand, the hand of strength, upholds David. And this is, again, depicting God's power and strength.

[22:06] Thinking of his providence in one of the catechisms, I think it's Heidelberg says, By his hand, he upholds and governs heaven and earth and all creatures by his fatherly hand.

It's worth thinking, isn't it, for a moment. God upholds all things. All times. Every moment of every day, you are being sustained and upheld by God.

And that's a great thing to meditate upon. It's not a sophisticated picture, is it, this picture of clinging?

There's something quite earthy about it. It means to cleave, yeah, to cling, to stick. Apparently, it means it's a habit. And I'm sure for David, it was a habit.

Is it our habit? It's a habit, particularly in those times, in the wilderness, our wilderness. And my third thought is a king that rejoices in the wilderness. A king that rejoices in the wilderness.

[23:10] And before we come to the king, we've got these, should I say, somewhat uncomfortable bits of the psalm.

But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth. They shall be given over to the power of the sword. I don't know about you, but when I read these parts of the psalm, there's something in me that finds them a little bit uncomfortable.

I've got albums at home of psalms put to music. And quite often, sometimes, they will leave out these difficult bits at the end.

And I think they're really important. They're the imprecatory parts of the psalms, where David or the psalmist is speaking of revenge, speaking of vengeance.

And the picture is very much warfare and violence. And in our modern lives, that can feel quite different to what we know. And it's, you know, it's very easy just to equate these with David's specific situation.

[24:16] Does it really speak to us? Is it really significant for us as we come to communion? Well, yes, it is. The cross was in the midst of real warfare, wasn't it? Spiritual warfare.

And David had real enemies as a public person. He was, remember David, who does he point to? He points to Christ. And David's surrounded by enemies as Christ was surrounded by enemies. And we, as God's people, maybe if we don't feel it individually, but certainly corporately as the church, we have enemies. Sometimes we don't necessarily know that because we don't always say all that can be said in certain situations because we're fearful of upsetting people.

But I'm sure if we were very upfront about what we believe, we'd soon realize we do have enemies. But we remember behind the human enemies, there's the spiritual enemy.

[25:17] There are spiritual forces against the people of God and against the church. There were then with David, the seed of the serpent. And there were with Christ.

And there are with us. Think of Psalm 10. Phil quoted Psalm 10 earlier on. The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.

But when we read these parts of the, these imprecatory parts of the Psalms, it's helpful to think of other parts of the scriptures. We're thinking of, I think of Isaiah 54, 17.

That these enemies, they will not have the final say. What we're reading here is God in his providence, in his time, will put them down. And they will cease to be a threat to us.

Isaiah 54, 17 says, Or Isaiah 58, it says, I wonder if you notice, as I read that out, a kind of echo or a familiar kind of motif that we hear in Romans 8.

[26:42] Who is against us? Who can truly succeed? Indeed. The mouths of liars are shut. And the father of liars' mouth is shut through Christ's work.

Yes, we have enemies. But those enemies cannot rob us of that ultimate joy. In the midst of those enemies, we have a great king fighting for us.

And this is where I want to end. We have a great king who fights for us. So in this context, we see the king rejoicing in God.

Now, no doubt, David is speaking of himself. But as we always need to do as we come to the Psalms, the immediate person involved here is David.

But it points to the great king, the greater than David, Christ. And the Psalms often speak of this messianic king.

[27:38] And verse 11 says, the king shall rejoice in God. Again, we see this emotional aspect of our king. Our saviour rejoices in his God.

And Phil was very helpfully speaking of the Trinity this morning. And it may not be a direct way of exegeting this text. But I couldn't help thinking of that lovely intratritarian rejoicing between Christ and the Father.

The Father and the Son. It's a delighting and a rejoicing. But Christ wants to share his joy with us. John 15, 10 and 11.

We have a rejoicing king who wants to share his joy with us.

And then, just to end, all who swear by him shall exalt. Now, whether here it means to swear by the king or by God, I'm not entirely sure.

[28:50] But I think ultimately it doesn't matter. Because our king is ultimately Jesus. So we do swear by him and we swear by the Father.

As we come to communion, in a sense, there's something of swearing, isn't there? There's something of an oath. We don't really think much of oaths these days, do we, of swearing? It seems quite archaic. It doesn't seem really in step with our modern life. But I think here, in a sense, we're swearing an allegiance to our king, aren't we? We're saying, like David, oh God, you are my God.

And this is a covenant meal. And an aspect of covenant is oath-making and swearing. And we think of that Old Testament motif, I will be your God and you will be my people.

That's happening here, isn't it? We're saying, like David, oh God, you're my God. It's the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of God being our God and us being his people.

[29:58] Now, I learned this quite recently, but apparently in classic Latin, the word sacramentum, we're taking part in a sacrament. The word sacramentum means, in its most simple form, to be sacred, to be set apart, to be sacred.

But I learned recently it can be used as a technical term for a military oath of allegiance. A military oath of allegiance.

So, what we're doing tonight, this is our oath of allegiance to our king. The one that we exalt in. The one that we rejoice in. And as we exalt and rejoice in the supper, we look to his faithfulness and his commitment to us.

And the assurance of his love and the seals of his forgiveness that are an outward tasting of an inward blessing that we have.

So, let's eat and drink in remembrance of our great saviour. Amen. Amen.