

Praise is good for you

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[0 : 00] Look, I wonder whether you have a habit in life that you're proud of. Maybe not even proud, just, you know, that you think it's a good habit that has stood you in good stead.

I'm sure you all do because even the very simple habit of brushing your teeth, yes? Morning and evening, that's a good habit, isn't it?

And even better, the dentist will be happy if you do it after each meal. Or the habit of taking a shower or if you're a bit more luxurious, a bath, hopefully every day.

I'm pretty sure that when you were young and your mom gave you or your dad gave you pocket money, they told you to get into the habit of saving, isn't it? Put a bit aside before you go and buy your lollies or whatever.

Now, of course, as Christians, we have spiritual habits as well, don't we? Like praying, reading the Bible, coming to church. Well, today in Psalm 92, we're going to consider one further habit.

[1 : 06] And that is the habit of praising God. And you might be able to see that in your outline today. So the question for today is, are you in a habit of praising God every day?

And we see, if you look back in your Bibles, verse 1 of chapter 92 or Psalm 92, why the psalmist thinks this is a good idea. It is good to praise the Lord, he says, and make music to your name, O Most High.

So praising the Lord is actually good, good for you. And if you can do it, do it with music. But I want you to notice, before we get into verse 1, the title of the psalm.

It says, a psalm, a song for the Sabbath day. Now, we're not exactly sure the setting of this psalm. It may be that it was used in the temple, part of corporate worship, or possibly at home or individually.

But clearly, whether it's individual or collective, this psalm is written for the Sabbath. It's to be sung at a time of rest and at a place of reflection and celebration.

[2 : 19] So it's actually quite appropriate for us to be looking at it on Sunday at church. To praise the Lord Most High because he deserves it. And as we'll see very shortly, it's not just good because it's right, it's the right thing to do.

It's also good because it's beneficial. That is, it's good for us. We'll get to that in verse 4, but let us finish with the rest of the introduction, which is verses 2 and 3.

And here, there is a summary of how we are to praise the Lord. Verse 2, By proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night to the music of the ten-string lyre and the melody of the harp.

So here, there are three aspects. First, it's morning and night, possibly to coincide with the two daily sacrifices that were required at the temple.

But these sacrifices themselves were instituted to provide a perpetual memory to the Lord. And so I think what's being encouraged here is not just to pray at the morning, pray at the night two times, but rather to have continual praise through the day, morning and night, constantly bringing to mind God's character and deeds.

[3 : 40] Which brings us to the second aspect, that it is God's character that is the content of praise. And specifically here, it's His love and faithfulness.

Now again, that's not to restrict us, so that we're only to proclaim His love and His faithfulness and nothing else, but it's shorthand for God's perfect character.

And if you look at those two lines there, in Hebrew poetry, this is what is called a couplet. Love in the morning, faithfulness at night, that's a poetic way of saying, declare God's wonderful character constantly.

Love and faithfulness are a good summary of God's character. And that's why if you look at the rest of the Psalms, you will often have this refrain in the other Psalms.

For example, Psalm 136 verse 1, Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. Why? His love endures forever. God's goodness means enduring forever is another way of saying faithfulness, right?

[4 : 44] He's faithful to display His love forever. This love and faithfulness then, we'll see, is then manifested, revealed in His mighty deeds.

But although His hand works mightily on all, only some will experience it in the form of love and God's faithfulness. In the positive aspect.

Now, thirdly, in the introduction, it speaks then as the third thing to the means of praise. And we are to do it with music or stringed instruments.

So the lyre and the harp are both stringed instruments. Now again, it's not to say you can't use drums or cymbals, the trumpet or the horn.

For today, most of the band is away, so we've only got strings. Piano is the strings as well, by the way. It's the striking of the strings. But I think here the lyre and the harp is meant to suggest a certain type of mood, right?

[5 : 54] One of quiet contemplation, right? Have you heard the harp? That kind of... You're meant to get into a peaceful disposition, calm and joyous.

But music, more generally, is important in praise because we are not just to engage our minds, but our hearts. Not just our intellect, but our emotions when we praise God.

And this is exactly what the psalmist goes on to say in verse 4. For you make me glad by your deeds, O Lord. I sing for joy at what your hands have done.

And so as the psalmist considers and thinks over and sees what the Lord has done, joy and gladness bubbles, right? From within his heart.

But I have to say that the deeds that he has in mind actually will surprise you because I'm going to suggest that he's not actually thinking about God's works of creation, right?

[6 : 59] And a lot of us do that. Like we go out to the mountains or we see, look out into creation and we praise God for that. But if you look at the rest of the psalm, that is not what he focuses on, is it?

So the image is not that of the psalmist, and I'm not sure whether you're old enough to remember this, like Julie Andrews, yeah? Wandering on the top of the mountain in the sound of music, singing, The hills are alive with the sound of music, right?

That is not quite the image. Instead, look at what he focused on in verse 5. He says, How great are your works, Lord! How profound your thoughts! Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evil doers flourish, they will be destroyed forever.

But you, Lord, are forever exalted. So can you see that the psalmist is actually delighting in God's works of judgment against evil, isn't he?

His works and thoughts, that of God's, go together. The thoughts relate to God's will and plans, and they are profound, he says, because it requires wisdom to understand which senseless fools don't have.

[8 : 15] What they fail to understand is this, that though the wicked may flourish for a season, God's intended end for them is destruction. Now, when I read the word grass, I think more of weeds, right?

Untamed, unmanicured, not like the haloed turf of the MCG, you know? Immaculately curated for the Boxing Day test, which, if some of you know cricket, that was not the case this year, right?

Two-day test instead of five. Rather, this is wild grass, right? Like the weeds that you might find in your garden or your parents' garden, which grows uncontrollably, whether it's raining or shining, whether it's cold or hot, even when you don't want it to, they grow.

They're hardy, right? And you pull them out, and then you look back again in a few days, and they've grown back. Meanwhile, you know, your parents are spending all that time looking after their precious shrubs and plants.

They wilt, even when these grasses don't, right? Well, fools then don't grasp that. What they're seeing with evildoers, a bit like the grass, is that even though they might be flourishing for now, their end is nigh, right?

[9 : 40] Yes, their get-rich schemes, they seem to be working. You know, they're making their millions on the, I don't know where, property market, share market, or, you know, nowadays on Bitcoin.

You know, they bully and they scam others, and they seem to get away with it. Well, the psalmist is saying, don't envy them, but as you're praising God, remember that the Lord's love and faithfulness is on those who follow the Lord, not the wicked.

Even though the righteous may suffer for a while because of the evildoers, God will vindicate them in the end. Because the truth is, God is exalted forever.

You know, there is no time in which God has lost His power, that He's lost control, even though it may seem like He's not acting. Evil will eventually be destroyed forever.

And so He can go on to say in verse 9, For surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish. All evildoers will be scattered. And that may seem odd, because, you know, we've just proclaimed, haven't we, that God is all love and faithfulness, so how can He have any enemies?

[10 : 54] But that is to misunderstand God's love and faithfulness. Because God is first and foremost faithful to His own character and to His own word.

And so when good and evil collide, then God is going to take the side of what is right and good. That's what His faithfulness means.

It's not some blind loyalty to some people that no matter what they do, He's going to back them up. No, God is always consistent with His own righteous nature.

And so His enemies are not just people that He happens not to like, you know, and He's decided to just pick on. No, His enemies are actually those who oppose Him because they pursue wickedness.

And so we, like all the others and the psalmists, we have to make a choice, don't we? Do we love God and His righteousness?

[11 : 57] Do we choose to be on His side? Or do we end up being God's enemy because we decide we want to pursue wickedness instead? And of course, when we do decide to follow God, right, we choose righteousness, then what follows as well is sometimes God's enemies will also become our enemy.

Because what we stand for, which is right, is obnoxious to those who want to do evil. So it's not like we have enemies because we want to fight and pick a fight with others, but rather that as we stand with God and do what is right, we will sometimes find that God's enemies become our enemies as well.

But in verse 10, the psalmist takes comfort that just as God will oppose the evildoers, He will come to the rescue of those who love righteousness. He will exalt, actually, those who do.

So he keeps singing, You have exalted my horn, verse 10, Like that of a wild ox, fine oils have been poured on me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries.

My ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes. Now the parallels here are that just as God is exalted forever, now He in turn exalts the psalmist.

[13:21] Right, the ox, his horn is a symbol of His glory. That's the horn that the Lord lifts up. Fine oils are poured. That's a sign of anointing.

And right before His eyes, the foes of the psalmist are defeated. The righteous, you see, in this situation, don't have to do anything at all, do they?

Because if you look at it all, all of it is being done by the Lord. The psalmist simply, as it were, stands back and watches as God delivers His justice, as God's hand works powerfully against evildoers.

And it is even possible that some of these events that He speaks of has not yet come to pass. But because God has promised, often in the Bible, we are able to say that something that is in the future is now as good as done.

And so you can use the perfect tense or the past tense to describe things that are still in the future. And so He can sing as though God has exalted Him. And that's how we can praise God too, right?

[14:32] Because there are aspects of our own lives as Christians, of our salvation, for example, where final freedom from sin and death and suffering is still yet to come.

But because God is faithful and loving, we can treat it as though God has already promised, done what He's promised in the Lord Jesus.

Now, of course, as Christians as well, when we read these verses, the single thing that should come to our mind when it talks about the Lord's hand at work is to remember what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

So for us, proclaiming God's love and faithfulness goes hand in hand with declaring God's, or the good news of Jesus, God's salvation in His Son.

Because it's at the cross more than 2,000 years ago where the most amazing work of God was achieved. The most profound act was accomplished by God.

[15:35] Because when Jesus died, you know, and you read the Gospels, it would seem like the evil has triumphed, that the grass is flourishing, right?

Herod and the Roman soldiers, they thought they won. Certainly, they were the powerful one executing Jesus. The Pharisees and the chief high priest, well, they thought they had gotten rid of this pesky little teacher called Jesus.

And even the passers-by, right, as they looked on Jesus, they mocked Him. They called Him a loser. And yet, it's at that very moment, it's at the cross, the moment that Jesus was lifted up physically, that He was also spiritually exalted across the whole universe.

Because it's at that moment that sin and evil and the evil one, Satan, is finally, decisively defeated. Routed forever.

And so that means for us as well, those of us who worship the Lord Jesus, our enemies, and I'm not talking about those pesky humans in your life, but the enemies of sin, death, and the evil one, they too have been defeated in our lives.

[16:54] It has been done. So, the question is, are you struggling to overcome a recurring sin in your life? You know, something that you keep falling over and over and you keep trying to get up and, you know, it doesn't seem to be working.

You know, whether it's a bad temper, your lust, your greed, or your envy. We need to know that God has defeated those enemies for us through the Lord Jesus on the cross.

Now, yes, there's a process. The term for it is called sanctification where it doesn't all happen at once that we need to go through in our lives. But, because Jesus died to take away the power of Satan and sin in our lives, it is as good as done.

We will be exalted forever, as the psalmist says. And so, even though we're not perfect, sin has been defeated. And if we ever doubt that, then where we need to look, where our eyes need to look for the defeat of our enemies is the cross.

Where our ears need to be tuned to hear the rout of our enemy is in God's word because He has promised it. And all this seeing and hearing is, of course, with the eyes of faith, isn't it?

[18:17] Not physically, but spiritually believing. And so, if you're here today and you have not yet put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then please consider that. Put your faith in Him and know that all the enemies of sin and death and the devil in your life, it has been defeated because of Jesus.

Now, for those of us who have, then our habit of praising the Lord actually helps us to keep believing. when we gather in church each Sunday or through the week as we're praising God in our own time, bringing to mind the things that we praise God for is what helps us to remember God's love and faithfulness through Jesus.

It helps us to see that the troubles in our life, even though they may seem overwhelming, is not a never-ending saga that will lead to defeat, but rather is merely evil flourishing, perhaps like grass for a time.

God's defeat of wickedness will come and then it will be forever. And so, we come to the last section of this psalm then which sort of brings home this vision that we're all encouraged to live by.

Verse 12, Now here, there's another comparison, isn't it, between the wicked and the righteous and in fact there are echoes of Psalm 1.

[20:06] If you go back to Psalm 1, the righteous and the wicked are also compared like that. But here, instead of the wicked being like grass, the righteous are palm trees and cedars. I forgot to put a picture actually of what they look like, but you can imagine.

They survive in the dryers of deserts, right? They grow slowly but surely and then when they're mature, they're immovable. They are rooted.

They're majestic in vision, right? Single tree in the middle of a desert and yet they're flourishing. They're green. Now, I think this is all figurative by the way.

There are actually, as far as we know, there is no record of palms and cedars being in the Lord's temple. Mostly, it's just a big courtyard, right? But the idea here is that this flourishing of these palms and cedars are actually people flourishing in the presence of the Lord, in the house of the Lord.

Doing it together in assembly before God, praising Him but also serving Him together. And I like that sentence that comes next about bearing fruit even in old age.

[21:17] Like the cedar and the palm, they say fresh and green no matter their age. Now, when people talk about being fruitful, normally they think of their achievements, don't they?

You know, busy, busy, busy. You know, how much money am I making? How many qualifications do I have? You know, what are all the tangible success that I can put on my CV or LinkedIn profile?

But I want you to listen to some examples from the Bible as to what God thinks bearing fruit or being fruitful is all about. So, John the Baptist in chapter 3 of Luke said to this to the crowds, you brood of vipers who want you to flee from the coming wrath.

And then he says, produce fruit, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Next, Jesus in John 15 says this, I am the vine.

You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. Paul's prayer to the Philippians, he prays that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depths of insight so that they may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

[22 : 39] And then finally, in our reading today from Galatians, chapter 5, verse 22, but the fruit of the Spirit, bearing fruit, is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So the fruit here in Psalm 92 of the righteous is actually the fruit of repentance, the fruit of the Spirit, isn't it? What it's talking about are the spiritual attributes of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And when you look at it like that, the very encouraging thing is that these are fruit that does not wither even as you grow old.

I know many of you are still young and you're not really thinking about old age, but these are the very qualities, very part of you, your character, that as it blossoms and matures in your life, will not fade away even when your body does.

And I say when your body does because it will. It's not if your body does. Now one of my prayers and my desire is to actually grow old gracefully.

[23 : 59] I don't want to be a grumpy old man, right? Or an angry person filled with bitterness come the end of my days. You know those people that still hold on to hurts and grudges?

and then you go and see them. They're not nice people to be around, right? And as a pastor, you know, it's been, one of the privileges of being a pastor is that you actually get to witness a few saints enter glory in their old age.

And many of them will continue to bear fruit even in old age. The fruit of peace and joy and forbearance.

You know, they're still thinking about others, asking after them even when their own body is like aching all over. They're not anxious. They're entrusting their lives even when they die to the Lord.

Still praying for the church and the world even though they're housebound. And, you know, the description here of Psalm 92 fits them perfectly, doesn't it?

[25 : 02] They're not sinless. You know, they have bad days, they tell me. But one of the things that keeps them going is the habit of praising God. And they will do that when I'm visiting them.

So, this habit is not just the only thing that's needed for the Christian life, but it's actually a very important and essential one and particularly to start with. You know, it's just like when, I don't know how much pocket money you used to save, like 50 cents or something when you got your two or three dollars every week.

that saving of the 50 cents was never going to make you rich, was it? But, unless you started learning how to save, there is no rich person in this world that gets rich by squandering their money, right?

And so, that's the same with cultivating a habit of praise. It's not the only thing for the Christian life, there are other things too, but when you start there, you begin the journey of learning how to trust God.

It helps you to walk in light of God's promises each day because you're reminding yourself of God's goodness, His love, His faithfulness. And so, when evil and temptation come, you know to shun it.

[26:17] You know, instead, to shelter in God's righteousness. And that's why the psalmist says of these people that at the end, what they find is that God is their rock.

God is their shelter. God is their refuge. God's upright character will not let them down because in Him, there is no wickedness. God always does what's right and He will always love and be faithful and protect and fulfill His promises, including the promise to forgive us because of our faith in Jesus.

So, friends, I just want to close then with that question at the end which I started. is praising God a good habit in your life? If not, then let me encourage you to start first, of course, by putting your trust in Jesus but then forming that habit of daily having a time, having a practice, even as you're going about your life, of consciously praising God regularly.

So, as we gather on a Sunday, that will help us to do that because as we sing the songs and two or three songs or four songs each week, the words of those songs actually will get embedded in our minds, isn't it, and our soul, which you can then take into your week, right?

Then when you choose your playlist, you know, it wouldn't just be songs, I don't know, by Taylor Swift, perhaps, BTS, or if you're slightly older, you know, the Beatles or Madonna or whatever, but instead, on your playlist, you will have hymns of praise as well to help you get into the habit of praising God.

[28:05] In fact, there's a HDD St. John's playlist on Spotify, if you didn't know about that, just need to search it. I don't have Spotify, so I don't have it, but if you have Spotify, you might want to get onto that.

And then what happens is that the truth of those songs become treasured in your hearts and minds. You know them by heart. And so as you go out into the world, those words will help you to see the world in the right way.

Not to be deceived by evil or wickedness. Not to be distressed when you know wicked people are winning. To be humbled when you sin, right, because you want to confess and align your ways with God's ways.

You want to love righteousness, even as you're praising God. And then what happens is that you become like that palm and cedar, isn't it? You are flourishing even in the most challenging of circumstances, right?

If all around you is desert, you will still be flourishing and bearing fruit. You will still be green, right, and fresh because what's in you is the fruit of the Spirit blossoming into maturity, becoming second nature in you.

[29:18] And therefore, when you get to the very end, you will still be counted as one of God's righteous people that is having faith in Jesus in the house of the Lord.

So, let me encourage you to do that. Let me pray and then let's join together in making music to the Lord. Let's pray. Father, it is good to praise your name.

It is great to make music to you and your son, Jesus. You are a God of love and faithfulness, defeating evil and the devil at the cross with the precious blood of your son, Jesus.

Through him, we have victory over sin and death. Through him, we are exalted forever as sons of God. Through him, we have the fruit of the Spirit that is eternal and will remain with us even when we are old.

Father, we praise you. You are a rock. You are upright. There is no wickedness in you. May we find refuge forever in you and your son.

[30 : 25] Through Jesus' name we pray. Amen.