

The God who flourishes

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[0 : 00] So as has been customary the last few years, we spent sort of the summer looking at like summer psalms. And one of the things you'll notice perhaps in many of the psalms, the way the psalms work is that, and including this one, is how the writers of the psalm often they look back at what's gone before in order to look forward at the future that lies ahead.

They look back at what God has done in the past in order to look future at what lies ahead. And that's true of all of us, isn't it? We often like to look back in life. We like to reminisce. That's what we call it. We think about past life events. We have that sense, don't we, that sense of nostalgia. That nostalgia is where we get the stories of our lives, you might say. There's those key moments in all of our lives where, doesn't it just feel like it happened yesterday? You might even say, can you believe it's five years ago since that happened? Where has the time gone?

And as we get older, those times just seem to get longer. Graduating from university, getting married, having children. We have fond memories of particular places, sporting events, nights out. [1 : 18] And when we look back on those moments, they bring a smile, don't they, on our faces. As we have that sense of nostalgia, of reminiscing with the people, perhaps, that you experienced it with.

However, with nostalgia, there's kind of a dual emotion thing goes on. Because you do have that smile, reminiscent of the happy time. But there can be another emotion that can crop up. There's the happiness. But it can also be coupled with this kind of strange sort of sadness. Because that moment has gone. It's gone and you can't go back there and relive it. You think of, you know, parents with grown-up kids. Look back, even if they're still young, you look back at the photos and think, Oh, you remember when they were so wee? Look at them now. Halfway through primary school. Soon to start secondary school. Some of, some, you know, finishing secondary school. Leaving home. One day having families themselves. [2 : 23] This psalm, this psalm. It's not about looking back, wishing that those days, the glory days, we might call them. Not pining or attempting to recreate them.

But looking at what God has done in your life and celebrating it. And more than that, not just looking at the things in our individual experiences, because we have those, which we've talked about. But looking back at what God has done, not just for you as an individual, but what he's done for his people. How he's acted decisively. And celebrating what he has done. Praying and praising with our past.

Looking what he's done. And looking and thinking about how that influences how you look to the future. How you look, how you think about your present and your future in mind and celebrating it. Looking back at what he's done. You see, this is the key. Is when you look back at what God has done. In history, for the church. But in your own life as an individual as well.

[3 : 27] It gives you faith for the future ahead. Because what God has done, his works we might call them. You see, they demonstrate who he is. They demonstrate his character.

What he's like. And what that means for your future. And as we do that. As we look at that. The psalm pushes us to respond. It pushes us to respond.

Before we jump into it though. There is something that I want to draw our attention to. It's worth pointing out, you see, the heading of the psalm. You see that? The heading of the psalm. Always important. A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day. It's a song for the Sabbath. Now, as New Testament believers. We don't meet on the Sabbath.

That's the Jewish custom. They meet on a Saturday. We meet on a Sunday. The reason we do that is the first day of the week. In light of the resurrection day. Every Sunday is actually a pointer to the

resurrection.

[4 : 23] We meet on resurrection Sunday. The first day of the week. Nevertheless, there is continuity from the principle of the Sabbath. To how we approach the Lord's day.

The day we meet with God's people is a day of rest. For each of us as God's people to worship the living God. You remember that in the Ten Commandments. After Sabbath, the Lord says to Moses, Remember the Sabbath.

Remember the day of rest. It's a command for us and it's good for us. But actually, as Christians, as we meet together because of the resurrection, what we see is it actually elevates the idea of Sabbath rest.

Because it reminds us that the rest we all long for is not just one day a week, but the eternal Sabbath rest that comes through Jesus. It comes from the forever rest that we're promised through him, that we have that forever rest in him.

Eternal Sabbath rest, which has been bought for us, won for us, at the cross, and secured through Jesus' rising from the dead, defeating death and sin. It is a victory that enables us to enjoy the fullness of rest.

[5 : 31] The fullness of Sabbath in the very presence of God. And so, it's a really important heading, isn't it? Because if we don't meet on the Sabbath, but we meet in the continuity of the Sabbath, the resurrection Sunday, it's entirely right that when we meet together, we remind ourselves of this psalm.

Because this psalm, this song, is named to be sung on the day of rest. It's actually for this very purpose of meeting together, the day of rest that God has given to us.

You see, so when we read this psalm, what God's really saying is this song, this psalm typifies the type of song I want you to sing when you meet together.

This is the type of song I want you to praise. Is this, what's contained within it, should be the fuel for our Sunday worship and praise. Because it's a song for the Sabbath.

And so, my real hope for us, as we go through this, is that we have an understanding of what the Lord desires when we sing to Him. Of what the Lord thinks should bring us joy in Him.

[6 : 43] Of how, when we meet on the Lord's day, one of the things that we should always be doing is looking back. And about what's gone before. In order to look forward with faith about the future that God has for us that lies ahead.

That is what, one of the purposes of meeting is that as we worship Him, as we lift His name, as we lift the name of Jesus, we're encouraged to look back in order to live in light of what is coming.

The first point then, that we're going to have, is the thing that comes up. One of the things, what does God want for us on, as we meet together? Well, He wants us to be full of joy.

To be full of joy. And the first thing I want us to see is that this psalm is characterized by joy, if you like. When I say joy, I don't mean like ecstatic, like jumping around.

What I mean is an emotive response. And it's an emotive response founded on something real. Something concrete. It's not just like a fluffy, nice kind of warm feeling.

[7 : 52] But it has solid foundations to it that go deep. You see what He says? It's all joy. We see kind of words that are connected to joy, even in these first few verses.

First three verses, verse one. It is good. It's good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praise to your name. Verse two. It's good to declare the love of the Lord, proclaiming your love in the morning. It's good to do that. It's good to make music. These are responses that originate from thinking about the goodness of the Lord. Something real, something concrete.

Verse four. For you have made, for you make me glad by your deeds. You have made me glad. And how do we get it? You made me glad by your deeds.

I sing at what your hands have done. It is meditating and thinking on what the Lord does. What He's done. What has gone before in history.

[8 : 57] And the response to the memory of the Lord's works is thankfulness. You make me glad.

I sing for joy at what you've done. How great are your works. It is thankfulness. Singing, making music, declaring truth about the living God. When we meet together, when we meet together, our focus should be, shouldn't it?

And it is. Our focus is on what the Lord has done for us. And what He continues to do for us. For us together. And for us personally.

We think about our own salvation. We think even in your own history. Each one of us can look back at the faithfulness of God in our own lives.

When we had prayers answered. When we think of what our life was like before we turned to Christ. We look at our life now. We think how God has got us through hard times.

[9 : 59] These are the deeds of the Lord. These are what He's done for us. Verse 1. It is good. It is good. It's good to meet together on each resurrection Sunday.

To look back at what God has done. And it reminds us. It reminds us that what we're doing here this morning. Gathering here full of thanks, praise, declaring truth, singing.

God's word says that this meeting now is good. It's good. You know, this right now. This is the best thing that you could be doing with your Sunday morning today.

Right now. We said it is good to meet together to praise the Lord. And we should, I think we should remind ourselves that. Tell yourself, you know, it's good that I'm here.

It is good that you're here. You can tell one another, it's good that you're here. Because when we do, when we're here, it is good. It is good to be here to remind ourselves of what God has done.

[11 : 09] Now then. That doesn't always mean that we always feel like that, does it? It doesn't always, it doesn't always, perhaps there's some days when we don't feel particularly.

We don't feel, we'd rather, you know, you go through trials and turbulence in life. And it can be hard, you know, you just, it feels like you're going through the mill.

It's alright for you to say, just be joyful. It's good to be here. I think, how much of a difference would it make to hear, I'm really thankful that you're here today?

I'm really thankful that you're here. That can make a difference that, I'm really thankful that you're here. Coming to be together.

It is good that you're here to meet with the body of Christ, to worship the living God. It is good. You've made the best choice on this Sunday morning in coming to worship the living God.

[12 : 14] And so, that's the first thing. It's good to be here. To be full of joy as we worship. Now these first few verses we might say we've looked at, they're kind of more of a general outlook regarding our response to the Lord's works.

In the rest of the psalm, it's more of a specific focus on particular aspects of God's work that the psalmist hones in on. And we see it kind of comes in in two halves.

We're going to look at them separately. The first, the heart of the first one, I think you might say, it comes in verse 8. You see that?

Verse 8. But you, Lord, are forever exalted. But you, Lord, another way we might say are on high forever. You, Lord, are forever exalted.

What we're saying here is that the Lord is on his throne on high. That's not a temporary arrangement. There's not going to be a deal when someone else is there.

[13 : 18] But the Lord is on his throne is eternal. It is a forever throne. The Lord always has been and always will be on his throne forever.

However, the question we have, why is it that the psalmist wants to hone in that? For my money, I'm well aware that we can all know that that's true and you know it as well as I do.

However, does it always feel that way? Does it always feel like the living God is on his throne in charge of everything that we see in our world?

We know that that's true, but it doesn't feel like that. I think it feels like verse 7 is more true.

That the wicked spring up like grass and all evil do is flourish. I think that that's how it feels, especially in our world. It can feel if we look at our world, if we watch the news, if we hear the difficulty that people go through, that somehow evil has the upper hand.

[14 : 32] You just watch, there's the constant feed of the Middle East. This week, if we've seen the pictures, the news, the starvation in Gaza, and I'm not making any political statements there.

It's just, it's a true fact, isn't it, that there is starvation in Gaza. There's corruption in government. There's corruption in companies.

Maybe in our neighbourhoods, we hear of, just the other week, of a family feud of families not talking to one another. Hatred between people.

There's so much, if I was to go through the things, even just in this year, of the brutality, the hostility, and the evil in our world, it would be overwhelming.

In fact, there's times when, for myself, I just, I have to go a few days without watching the news, because it's too horrific. And so it can appear to us that those are the things that are growing and

flourishing.

[15:40] And that's what it says, isn't it? It feels that the wicked are springing up like grass, and that the evildoers are flourishing. On big scales, but even, perhaps our thoughts turn to individuals who might seem to have escaped justice.

Muhammad al-Fayed. No retribution. There's other names you could probably throw into the hat. I think he typifies verse 7, doesn't he? Wicked and flourished in his life.

World leaders that allow our brothers and sisters in Christ to be persecuted, whilst they live lives of complete security and happiness. Where is the justice? Justice.

Yet this psalm gives us hope. The difference, and I'm in no way minimising that suffering. It is brutal. It is awful. I'm in no way minimising it.

We should weep. Yet what we see here is that the position will be reversed. As Jesus says, those who finish last will be first, and the first last.

[16:50] The Lord is on high forever. Verse 7. The end. What do we read? They will be destroyed forever. Verse 9.

All evildoers will be scattered. Enemies will perish. We long for injustices to cease. We long for that. But praise God, it will happen.

The Lord is on high forever. He is forever exalted, and so we don't despair. But actually, what we're told here is that when we meet together on the Sabbath, we should remind ourselves of the Lord's justice and sing about it.

We should sing and make music about the Lord's justice. That there will be a day when all the wrongs will be made right, when the reign of the King will come, and so we rejoice in anticipation of that day.

We can do that, and we should do it, and we're told to do it, and we have a song to do it with. So there's a specific work of the Lord. Praise the Lord for his justice.

[18:02] When we meet together. I said it came in two halves. The second thing that we're told to sing about in the Lord's works is the flourishing of God's people.

The flourishing of God's people. And we see the contrast. You've got the contrast here between the wicked and the righteous. You see, both flourish. You notice that?

Both flourish, but in totally different ways. The enemies of God, we read, all evil doers flourish. It seems like all evil doers flourish. In their earthly life, in this life, the evil doers flourish.

But the righteous flourish spiritually, and it is not always seen. The enemies of God flourish in a spirit, earthly sense. The righteous God's people flourish spiritually.

You might notice how some of the language here, it's a return of, it's a sort of a return here of the language of Psalm 1. Psalm 1 talks about the people of God like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season.

[19:11] Its leaf does not wither, in all that he does he prospers. And we've got a return of that metaphor, that picture language. That the idea of God's people, the righteous, as trees, planted in God's house.

God's house. Now, of course, in the temple, there was no physical trees. But it is picture language. How God's people grow and flourish in him is like a tree that grows.

Big contrast with the enemies, all connected with this plant metaphor. You see, what does it say? We have a plant, the wicked are like grass, but grass withers.

Grass withers. Here, here today, and gone tomorrow. But the righteous, verse 12, flourish like a palm tree, grow like a cedar of Lebanon.

Just to give you an idea, those trees mentioned, they grow to about 100 feet tall. The cedar's diameter is about six foot. Not just any tree, but the strongest, most stable tree around.

[20:23] You see what God is saying, that the righteous, you see, God's people have stability in him. They have roots that go down in him and they prosper.

You see, there's lots of things to say here. You see how the plant begins. Notice how the righteous are cared for by the Lord.

They're planted by the living God. Sown by him. Planted deep. Now, I've got an illustration here. And I've used this illustration far too often. But I'm going to tell it again because it's the best one I've got. So a while back, this is now a while back, I was walking in one of the parks in Glasgow with Heidi, my eldest girl.

We found a conker and she held the conker. I showed her the tree that it came from and explained that if you planted the conker in the ground, it would grow into the tree like that one.

[21 : 36] And the look she gave me was, she looked at me like I was crazy. She took hold of the conker, she looked at it, she looked at me and then she just went, silly dad.

And you can almost see the point, can't you? It is actually, if you don't know the way that things grow, you look at a conker, you look at a horse chestnut tree and you think, how?

It is amazing that a conker grows to be that size. It takes years, but eventually that is what will happen. It is what happens.

Here is something that you probably thought I was going to say. People are a little bit like conkers. You see, if a conker is not planted, what happens to it?

It is picked up off the ground by a child, put on the end of a piece of string and repeatedly beaten until it is completely destroyed. Those conkers get all the glory, don't they?

[22 : 42] They get all the glory. In fact, when I was growing up, the more conkers you'd beat, it got like a name. Like if you beat 10 conkers, you were called a 10 upper. And you used to paint it in like gold and try to make it harder and put it in the oven.

Do all sorts to try and make it like stronger. Those conkers get all the glory in this life. No child picks up a conker and starts thinking, oh, I wonder what happened to those conkers that I left behind. No child thinks about the conkers that they left behind. But if one of those conkers, those left behind conkers, is planted in the ground, if it's left over the winter and manages to be under the ground, it is a different ballgame.

Now it doesn't become a tree overnight, but watered, nurtured, right soil, right environment, it will grow. If you get planted by the Lord, you just watch.

Fed by his living word and the power of his Holy Spirit. You won't grow very quickly overnight. It takes a lifetime.

[23 : 56] Till you're fully grown. Full of winters and summers, hard times and good. But through it all, Jesus transforms you and you will grow in him.

That little sapling believer, ensuring it gets the right light and water at the right temperature, plants, ensuring that the flourishing is not like the wicked do in the world, but you will grow in the courts of God, in the knowledge of his love, being soaked in his word, being near to him, being loved, being part of a church family that cares and nurtures and grows you to be mighty and strong.

The last, there's one more difference. See what we read about the righteous. Verse 14.

And here's something unexpected. They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green. These plants bear fruit.

You think of a palm tree bearing delicious dates, hanging low to be enjoyed. They bear fruit. And not just now, but they continue to do so. That's what we read here, that people, God's people, even produce fruit in old age.

[25 : 15] That is not like the way that our world thinks about people who grow old. Is it? In a worldly sense, as you get older, productivity does go down.

Just naturally, physically, when you get to old age, you can't do as much as you used to be able to. But worship and growing as a follower of Jesus is a lifelong endeavour.

It's not just a young man's game. No, far from it. Those at their spiritual peak are those who've walked with the Lord the longest. You could be spiritually fresh and bursting with life and wisdom and godliness, never too old to be used by the Lord.

The most spiritually fit there are those who've been walking with him longest. You've had longer to grow. Whose roots have grown the deepest and whose fruit is the most mature.

This is what the Lord does. This is what the Lord does. This is his works. This is what we're to praise God for on the Sabbath. As we meet as church, this is what is good.

[26 : 27] This is what we're to sing about. This is what we're to praise the living God about. That the Lord is on high, that justice will come, but that he plants the righteous.

You know what's beautiful here as well? Beautiful detail. Is that the enemies of God, the ones that deserve to be perished, to be scattered, what happens when you scatter seed?

It ends up in soil. And it grows. You see, as the enemies of God are scattered, some of them actually become seed that grows.

That's us, isn't it? Because there was a time when we were enemies of the living God, when we had hostility towards him, when our God was our belly, when we navel-gazed and only thought about

ourselves and we lived to our own desires.

You know, it's a miracle that we're actually here. It's a miracle that we've actually growing, that we have been planted by God and we're now the righteous, that we can declare, verse 15, the Lord is upright, he's my rock.

[27 : 46] That we know there's no unrighteousness in him, no wickedness. That is a miracle. And it happened because, at some point, he planted you.

That is why we're here. That is a work that we should sing about all every week, about what he's done for each of us and what he's done in you.

And it's all to him. It always points to him because you can't plant yourself. And so, as we come in for landing, let's remember it's good to be here.

There is nothing better than you could be doing right now than meeting with God and his people. Nothing better. Let's remember his works. Let meditate on them and let joy in the Lord.

It doesn't mean that your circumstances have to be good. Jesus, Paul and Jesus, both at times, what do we hear? They were sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

[28 : 47] It requires us to fixate on the good news of the gospel that he punishes sin, that Jesus has taken our punishment, that his history, that helps us to look forward and that the forward is a beautiful future because you've been taken and planted by the Lord to be like a palm tree, a cedar that bears fruit right even into old age.

We look back, we reminisce at what God has done and it's worth singing about. It's worth singing about. We spoke about singing a few weeks ago from Isaiah.

It's good to remind us, isn't it, that this is a song. We're told to sing songs like this and it reminds us that we will never stop singing.

We will never stop singing about the Lord's works, never. When we meet together, we're joining with the chorus of heaven. We know that because right at the end of the Bible, God, even when heaven is, the picture of heaven is still of a people singing.

They sing, what do we read? Revelation 15, they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, the song of the Lamb and what do they sing? Well, it's just like what we're told to sing here. Great and amazing are your deeds, your works, what you've done.

[30 : 08] In other words, how great is your justice? How great is the fact that you take people who are hostile to you and you turn them into palm trees and cedars that they bear fruit into old age.

How amazing are your deeds, O Lord God almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship you for your righteous acts have been revealed. All the singing will be looking back at what God has done and praising him for who he is forevermore.

And we will never get tired of singing about it because our Sabbath will climax with the eternal forever rest that will be a singing people, a praising people that sing and declare his amazing works forevermore.

And so we should anticipate that day and I hope and I pray that it will give us confidence to face each day with faith because we're headed to where the Sabbath points us.

[31 : 12] Eternal rest with Jesus. Let me pray. Almighty God, it is astounding what you've done.

It is astounding that it is a miracle that we're here. It is a miracle what you've done for your people, the body of Christ, the church, that you're creating a body of people to be with you forever.

But it's astounding what you've done for us as individuals where we think of where we were and where we're now. That we were your enemies but you took us, you planted us, you give us deep roots and that we're growing.

And I just pray that you would empower us by your grace to live and work for your praise and glory. We need your help.

We can't do it alone and so I thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit at work in each of us. And so I pray that you'd bless us this day and forevermore. We ask for this in the name of Christ.

[32 : 12] Amen.