

The Great Works of the LORD

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[0 : 00] Well, please, do have a seat and turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 92. Psalm 92, as we continue our series through Psalm 90 to 100 this evening.

! Psalm 92, that's on page 498 in the Blue Church Bibles. Let us hear God's Word together. A psalm, a song for the Sabbath. It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High, to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre, for you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work.

At the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep. The stupid man cannot know.

The fool cannot understand this, that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever.

[1 : 30] But you, O Lord, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O Lord, for behold, your enemies shall perish.

All evildoers shall be scattered. But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox. You have poured over me fresh oil.

My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies. My ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

They are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age.

They are ever full of sap and green. To declare that the Lord is upright. He is my rock. And there is no unrighteousness in him.

[2 : 35] This is God's word. Please keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we come to it together. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our Lord stands forever.

We thank you, great God, for this everlasting word. We pray now that you would speak to us through it by your spirit, that we might long to cling to Jesus in all that we do because of what we hear this evening.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, I wonder if I gave you a blank canvas and asked you to portray for me your ideal rest.

What would it look like? Would it be cocktails on the beach? Or a good book in front of a cozy fire? Maybe a long lie and a day in pajamas? Or maybe a day full of activities that you never have time for normally? Maybe you'd want to spend time with loved ones. Maybe you'd just want a few minutes on your own with nothing to worry about.

[3 : 55] But what I want us to see in part this evening is that whatever our idea of rest, whatever we long for in rest, the Bible's idea, portrayal of rest, is far bigger and far better.

So far in our series on the Psalms, we've seen two major themes shine through the opening two Psalms of book four.

God is not bound by time, and God is not vulnerable to his enemies. For God's people, the Lord is an eternal refuge.

And this message is coming, isn't it, to a nation battered and bruised in time by its enemies. And so you can see immediately how these two Psalms together help to shift the focus of the Israelites who have experienced exile from the promised land, defeat at the hands of their enemies, to people living in very real trials.

This book opens with the glorious truth that our God is our eternal refuge. And Psalm 92 picks up on those two glorious truths that we've had introduced to us.

[5 : 27] That God is a safe refuge for his people, and God is working out his eternal purposes. And this Psalm weaves them together in what is a Psalm of praise.

Because in those two truths, we can find rest. We are not invited in this Psalm to praise God once he has fixed all our problems.

This Psalm invites us to praise God because we can rest in our eternal refuge even when present circumstances are not how we would long for them to be.

And that is why it matters that this song is one for the Sabbath. You'll see that in the superscription there, just that line at the very top of the Psalm. Many of the Psalms were clearly composed to be used in corporate worship, but only Psalm 92, only Psalm 92 is explicit in its designation that this is a Psalm for the Sabbath.

This is a song for the day of rest that looks forward to the eternal rest that we will one day enjoy in the Lord's anointed, the Son of David, Jesus Christ and Lord and Savior.

[6 : 58] to those who have experienced exile, to those who are enduring hardships, to those who really are suffering day to day.

Here we have a Psalm that points us forward to an everlasting rest by resting now in our eternal refuge.

In a way, we just kind of have one point this evening because this Psalm, it is all about praising God for His works.

We'll see over the course of the Psalm that kind of the two works, the works of God that are highlighted as worthy of praise here. But before we get there, the Psalm is to us, first of all, on the goodness of praise itself.

The praiseworthy works of the Lord. Just look there with me at verse one. It is good to give thanks to the Lord.

[8 : 04] It is good. Every Sunday we gather here, don't we, as a church family to worship God. I wonder what brings you along?

What causes you to come? I hope praising God never feels like a chore, but I'm sure it's true that we don't all always feel enthusiastic when we walk out the door on a Sunday morning.

Perhaps we simply feel like worship is something that I have to do, or at least that I should go and do. Perhaps you pull yourself out the door on a Sunday morning simply to avoid feeling guilty. But if that's been you in the past, maybe it was you an hour ago, how often, I wonder, having come to praise God, do you regret your decision?

You don't, do you? You might find it hard to go, but I'm not sure we ever get back in the car and think, should I stay at home? I've definitely had that feeling going to the cinema.

But not with worship. Because, verse 1, it is good. It is good to give thanks to the Lord.

[9 : 26] Being here is good for you. Declaring God's love and faithfulness is a balm to broken minds. Singing God's praise soothes our souls.

Giving thanks to God grants us peace. In times of trouble, what we do as we give thanks to God is pleasant for Him and profitable for us.

The very act of worship is not only right, it is good. When you sing His praise, you are doing good to yourself and your neighbor. When we praise God in prayer together, our Father in heaven is gladdened by what we are doing.

And you'll see there in those opening lines kind of a threefold instruction that captures much of what worship is. Doesn't it? Giving thanks, singing praise, declaring the goodness of God's character.

In the morning, His love. In the evening, His faithfulness. All day, from sunrise to sunset, praising the beauty of who God is. Offering praise to God is not just what He deserves, it is what we need.

[10 : 40] And the character of God alone would be reason enough to give Him our praise, but the psalmist wants to draw our attention here to God's works as the motive for our music.

Verse four there, For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work. At the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O Lord!

Your thoughts are very deep. God's works bring us joy. But that doesn't mean we can comprehend them.

We are made glad, but they are deep. I'm sure someone could explain this to me, but it's a bit like the Northern Lights. Here is something beautiful.

Something that causes joy when you see it. But ask me to explain it, and I'd be at a complete loss.

[11 : 48] The Lord's works make us glad, but they are also great and deep. It's what Paul exalts in at the end of Romans 11. He said, Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments, and how unscrutable are His ways. There is a depth to God's works that we will never be able to plumb.

There is a greatness to God's works that we will never fully scale. But what we do know is that those works are good and great. Unsearchable as they might be, they can and do bring us joy and gladness.

That is true of many, all of God's works, but the right question to ask here is what works does the psalmist have in mind?

It is good to praise the Lord for His great works, but what works of God bring us joy and gladness? We might well say, all of His works, that will be true.

[12 : 49] We might highlight His work of creation or redemption or being made in God's image or saved from our sin. Those are indeed praiseworthy works of the Lord. And we find psalms that do exactly that, but remember where this psalm is.

And where we began before verse 1. This is a psalm to be sung on the day of rest. That exiles, or those who have recently returned to a ruined Jerusalem, might look to the eternal rest, even in times when they are surrounded by enemies.

In this moment, the work of God that brings joy and gladness to His people is the assurance that God is working eternally and God is working righteously.

Righteous works in which God's enemies are defeated and His people flourish. So let's just look at those two things together.

First of all, God's enemies defeated. I don't know if you felt this when we were reading through it, verse 6 really feels like a jarring turn, doesn't it?

[14 : 08] We've had the goodness of song and praise, that the love and faithfulness of God proclaimed, the great and deep works of God considered. words. And then into this kind of majestic symphony comes verse 6 and some nails kind of screeching down the blackboards.

from the unsearchable works of the great God, we are taken now to the stupid man. It's important to understand that this stupid man here is not someone with a low IQ.

It is a man who believes God's judgment will never come because he considers his evil days long and his wicked ways prosperous.

The stupid man might very well be very knowledgeable. Indeed, he might well be successful and healthy and happy.

He could own a business, have a PhD, have a family and live a long and healthy life. But he lives as if God's judgment will never come.

[15 : 24] If we have heard the message of the last two Psalms, we know, don't we, that the days are short. Our days are short and the only refuge we truly have is in the shadow of the Almighty.

what verses 6 and 7 describe is one who lives as if, well, in ignorance of Psalm 90 and 91, who does not believe he needs the Lord's protection, who is content to prosper in his wickedness, thinking his days are long when really they are very, very short.

not. Now, the Psalms are wonderfully real about the reality of life in a wicked world.

There are times, aren't there, when the wicked really do seem to prosper and the righteous seem to suffer, when people who live in ignorance of God really do seem to be living the good life.

People get rich through unjust gain. The selfish seem to sail up the career ladder. The greedy live in mansions, the idle get a free ride.

[16 : 52] it really does look for a moment like evildoers flourish. But once more, we have the picture of grass.

It does flourish, but it does not last. When we see the evildoers flourish, remember Psalm 90, and remember it is nothing more than a moment, the blink of an eye, a matter of minutes in the eyes of the infinite God who is working to an eternal timescale.

And so when the exiles of ancient Israel, or the returned exiles, saw the Babylonians rise and dominate the ancient world, destroy the temple, and carry off their nation to a faraway land, it looked, didn't it, like the triumph of evil and the destruction of God's people.

But even in our history, Babylonians are a distant memory long forgotten, aren't they? They were there for a moment.

Where are they now? The flourishing of the wicked is real, but it is only ever for a moment. And the judgment that seemed absent in their days of abundance comes sooner than they know.

[18:23] And for the fool who does not live in light of God's eternal righteousness, that day of judgment, verse 7, will doom him to destruction forever.

Those are solemn words, aren't they? doomed to destruction forever. And yet they are here, I think, as words of comfort.

They are solemn because the fate of the wicked is so severe, and we know, don't we, that apart from God's grace, we deserve no better. But for those who God has set apart his heart upon, the end of all evil forever, is our only hope of eternal rest.

This is a psalm for the Sabbath, looking forward to the eternal Sabbath. But 80 or 90 years is long enough in a sinful world, isn't it?

Would you look forward to an eternity where evil remains? But think of the damage that sin has caused you and your body in the short years of this life.

[19:50] What would that look like forever? But there wouldn't really actually be a forever, would there? Because where there is wickedness, there is sin, and where there is sin, there is death.

And that, I think, leads us to see the goodness of these solemn verses. The destruction of evil is the destruction of death.

That is the ultimate enemy. That is the enemy that Jesus defeated once and for all on Resurrection Sunday. The day we now gather to rest and look forward to an eternal rest.

death. The sting of death is sin, but thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting? Death is an enemy, but it is one that has been defeated in Christ. Look at your life, or the life of your loved one.

[21:03] In the span of months and years and even decades, it might look sometimes like this enemy flourishes, like death has the upper hand, and we might well feel powerless. It is an enemy that has been defeated, and although it might appear to flourish like a blade of grass, it too is doomed to destruction forever.

We read at the end of Revelation that there is a day coming when death itself will be thrown into the lake of fire. The enemies of the Lord will perish, and they will no more trouble God's covenant people.

For all who are troubled by them now, their time will come, and they will never again plague the church, and it is all because of Jesus.

In verse 10 and 11, the focus shifts onto a certain individual who is, by the language used quite clearly, the Lord's anointed, the Messiah, the Son of David.

Every reference in the Old Testament to an exalted horn, I think bar one, is speaking of a king, and the one who has his horn exalted here is also the one who has oil poured over him.

[22:32] He's anointed, an anointed king. The ox, too, is imagery that we get in Deuteronomy 33, which I definitely wouldn't have guessed it, but the ox is a picture of a powerful judge.

It is the Lord's anointed who is exalted over all, and who witnesses the downfall of his enemies. praise. This is not a victory we win by our own strength, but one we partake of in the Lord's anointed, in the Messiah.

This is his victory. And so we see, don't we, the praiseworthy work of the Lord in the destruction of his enemies, and the raising up of his anointed.

And it is a work that should make us glad and sing for joy, for the Messiah has been lifted on high, over and above all of his enemies, that face a sure and certain and eternal defeat.

And so we have the hope, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in now, of an eternal rest.

[23:53] for sin and death will one day be no more, gone, forever. No more tears, no more pain, no more crying, no more sorrow, no more illness or death or disease, nothing, none of it, forever, because the enemies of the Lord will perish.

it is deep, it is unsearchable, that there are aspects of it that will leave us with questions. His ways are not our ways, but his ways are good, because he is good.

And we can be glad and joyful because of the victory over his enemies that he has won for us in Christ Jesus, to the praise of his glorious grace. praise. But there is another side of the coin here that is equally as praiseworthy.

For as God's enemies will perish, so also will his people flourish. God's people are the righteous there that we're introduced to in verse 12, 12, not because they've conducted themselves more honorably than others, but the whole reason for the exile, that shattered ancient Israel, was their determination to live in exactly the same godlessness as everyone else.

These are the ones whom God has made righteous. And the righteous, in verse 12, are first likened to a palm tree.

[25 : 41] I don't know what you picture when you think of a palm tree. We probably have in mind, don't we, something like Caribbean beaches, coconuts and sunshine. That is a very nice picture, but not quite the one the psalmist is going for.

The point of the palm tree here is to portray something that is able to grow and thrive in desolate places, desert places.

Think of what that is saying to the exiles, having returned to piles of rubble where once there was a great city. God is saying, isn't he, barren lands will not stop me from prospering my people.

Hostile environments cannot inhibit God's work in your life. Goodness will sprout forth from the most difficult of circumstances.

I think we see that, don't we, in countless places around the world today. Perhaps that the most kind of, well, one of the more prominent examples is Iran.

[26 : 56] In 1979, conversion from Islam to Christianity was outlawed, completely banned. You very really could be sent to prison if you converted to Christianity.

Christianity. And yet, over the last four or five decades, the church in Iran has exploded. Hundreds of thousands, millions of people giving their life to Jesus.

Barren land, flourishing tree. The righteous are not stunted in their growth by hostile surroundings. That is true on a national level.

It is true personally. Maybe you feel here this evening that life could hardly be more difficult. Your health is failing.

Your mind seems to wage war against your soul. Maybe your job is on the line. All while the wicked seem to prosper.

[28 : 01] that will not stop God from working in your life, from growing you. Not like the grass that will sprout up quickly but is here today and gone tomorrow, but like a tree that grows surely and steadily.

Not in a day, but over years. imperceptibly but certainly. Like a palm tree in Bauerlands and also the psalmist adds like a cedar of Lebanon.

Not only will the righteous flourish in desert lands, they will grow to be beautiful. Nothing in the ancient world compared to the cedars of Lebanon.

They were tall, they were strong, they were beautiful, they were treasured. everything that a blade of grass was not. It is a beautiful picture of what God will do for his people, but as with every tree, if you want to know where it gets its strength from, look at the ground where it is planted.

How can the righteous grow so surely in hostile lands? How can they grow so certainly into something beautiful? verse 13, they are rooted in the Lord.

[29 : 34] They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of God. Remember a reading from earlier, Wilma read those words of Jesus from John 15.

What is the difference between the fruitful who will flourish and the fruitless who are doomed to destruction forever? What is the difference?

Let me just read again from John 15, verses 4 to 6. Jesus says, Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches, whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. abides in me.

[30 : 56] This is the difference between the fruitless and the fruitful, between the evildoer who flourishes for a moment and the righteous who will flourish for eternity.

Rooted in the dwelling place of God, abiding in Jesus, the word made flesh. there is no righteousness outside of him.

Only in Christ Jesus can we be considered amongst the righteous, but in Christ Jesus we will also flourish everywhere, forever.

forever. And in Christ Jesus, the one who has defeated death itself, we can look forward to rest not only now, but always.

And that slow and steady growth is, I think, an important picture for us of what maturity looks like in the Christian life.

[31 : 58] I think we can be guilty, can't we, of mistaking kind of vigor and enthusiasm for growth and maturity.

But in this picture we have here, who are the most likely to be the most fruitful? people. It's the oldest, isn't it? Those who have been growing the longest.

Flourishing in the faith means growing surely and steadily while abiding in Christ. by no means a hard and fast rule, but if you want to see the most fruitful followers of Jesus, the best place to start looking is to those who have spent the most amount of time growing.

Bodies might fail, but the inner self is being renewed day by day. The spiritual vigour of those who abide in Christ does not tail off into retirement after 65.

It grows and grows and grows and grows so that even in old age, verse 14, even in old age the righteous are full of sap. That is richness, goodness, and they are green, fresh, bright, healthy.

[33 : 21] The flourishing righteous is not of course a promise of good physical health, nor is it by any means a promise of a long earthly life.

Look no further than Jesus. But the flourishing righteous who abide in Christ, it is a promise of sure and steady growth that will continue all the days of this life, and on, and on, and on, and on.

you will never stop growing, you will never stop flourishing, even if your body fails, so long as you abide in him. Abide in him and you will never stop bearing fruit.

fruit. I hope that is an encouragement to you if you feel the years are passing quickly by. I hope that perhaps challenges the thinking of any of us who think the most fruitful Christians are those with the most energy to burn.

The most mature Christians are those who hold tightly onto Jesus year after year. And the purpose of these evergreen trees of righteous saints is to declare God's glory.

[34 : 50] The psalm is all about the praiseworthy works of the Lord. And praising, declaring the righteousness of our rock is the most fitting place to land. Perhaps the destruction of the wicked leaves us with unanswered questions, but one thing we can not only be sure of, but can boldly declare, is that there is no unrighteousness in him.

He is upright and will only do what is just. Loving, faithful, and righteous, that is the God who works wonderfully in praiseworthy ways. That is the God who promises eternal rest for those who abide in Jesus.

We hold on to him and we will flourish. grow surely, slowly, but certainly, in order that we might declare his glory and praise his name both today and forevermore for our good and his glory.

We began, didn't we, thinking about rest because this is a psalm for the Sabbath. but I hope that we've seen by this point that the rest that the Bible promises is bigger and better than anything we can imagine because the rest the Bible promises is one we can enjoy everywhere, whatever is going on in our life because our Lord is an eternal refuge and it is one that will find fulfillment in eternity where we who abide in Christ will dwell in a rest that can never be interrupted.

That is the bigger and better promise of Psalm 92's rest. It is a rest that will never end because we are under the protection of the eternal God whose mighty works we can praise forever.

[36 : 53] So let us give thanks to the Lord for it is good and he is worthy. Let us do that now as we pray together and sing his praise.

Father, we thank you that your works are great and they are deep, that they bring us joy and they bring us gladness, that you will bring an end to evil and death, that you will cause the righteous to flourish, not those who have done anything in themselves worthy of your grace, but those who abide in Jesus.

Lord, may we hold fast to him in all the days of this life, whatever trials come our way. May we hold on to Jesus, looking to the rest that we have promised in him, that we might one day dwell forever in him with glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.