

January 21, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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A SONG FOR THE SABBATH Psalm 92

The title of this psalm, and the title I have chosen for the sermon, brings up an issue about which I have always been a bit confused—the question of the Sabbath for Christians. I was reared to believe that Sunday was a special day, kind of like a Sabbath on which God’s people in the Old Testament set the day aside for a certain kind of honor or recognition of God. For me it is a conscience kind of thing. I have never been able to understand why nine of the Ten Commandments are still in force, but God just kind of set number four aside.

I have friends and relatives who don’t believe that and, therefore, do not consider Sunday to be much different from Monday through Saturday.

People who do not hold Sunday to be a unique day for honoring God appeal to Paul’s argument to the Roman Christians in chapter fourteen. He concluded, *One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God (Romans 14:5-6).*

Some Christians appeal to this conclusion and interpret it to mean that no day is more important than any other day. . . except of course Christmas and Thanksgiving and New Years Day and Veterans’ Day and Martin Luther King Day and on and on the list goes of special days Christians observe along with their non-Christian co-workers in the American culture.

Briefly let’s consider Paul’s teaching in these two verses. He wrote to converted Jews and converted Gentiles. The converted Jews had been reared to believe that the many different Sabbaths of the Mosaic system were vitally important. The word Sabbath applies to every Saturday which was to be a day of complete rest according to Jewish law. But the word also applies to a number of other feasts, ceremonies, and special days that might be required for the citizens of Israel to meet for special worship. Some converted Jews still had a conscience that required them to observe these special days. That was fine.

Converted Gentiles had typically been reared to observe pagan holidays and festivals (maybe like Mardi Gras or Carnival). Like these modern festivals of debauchery, the ancient pagan festivals were something converted believers desired to abandon and forget. Other holidays were not necessarily bad, but the new believer might tend to lump them altogether. Therefore, it was good for them to follow their conscience and abandon holidays that might not even be carnal or wicked. That was fine.

In both cases, it was a matter of conscience. When Scripture is not clear, when a particular rule or precept is not stated, it is best for us to follow our consciences. Therefore, Paul’s conclusion for people who either chose to abandon special days of their past, or chose to observe special days of their past, was for them to follow their consciences. The people who observed days should not insist that other Christians do the same, and the people who abandoned special days should not expect other Christians to do the same.

That is all well and good. But what about the “first day of the week” principle? Did Paul include that day in his teaching? We know that Christ rose from the tomb on the first day of the week. We know that the apostles were gathered together breaking bread in fellowship on the first day of the week (John 20:19). We know that Paul met with the believers in Troas on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). And we know that Paul assumed that all believers in Corinth would be gathered together on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2).

But there is no direct and specific command for the Church to gather for worship on the first day of the week. Rather, it just became the norm for the Church beginning with the very day Jesus rose from the dead. Sunday became the day when Christians gathered to praise

and worship the Lord and, therefore, to that end, it became the unique day in each week.

However, while there is no command for Christians to observe Sunday as special, there is a very clear and direct command that we are not to neglect gathering for worship and teaching. We are commanded to consider how to motivate each other to love and good works, “*Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*” (Hebrews 10:25).

We should meet together, and the most commonly practiced day for that is Sunday. The details about how we are to worship and teach and encourage is a matter of conscience apart from the commands to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2) and *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God* (Colossians 3:16).

So, we have considered all of this to come to the conclusion that Psalm 92 is a good psalm for Sunday. It will draw us away from the busyness and distraction of Monday through Saturday life and help us focus on our great God who deserves our honor, our praise, and our worship. We must be willing to admit that human nature is pretty much unchanging. Therefore, we struggle with the same pull of the flesh that ancient Israelites struggle with which caused them to say, “*When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale . . . ?*” (Amos 8:5).

It is good to gather together today and, putting aside the duties of life, worship God our Creator.

It is Good to Worship the LORD (vv.1-5).

Specially, this is one of those psalms that emphasizes the expectation that God’s people will worship Him in song (vv.1-3). It begins by reminding us that worship is a good thing. *It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High* (v.1). This verse teaches that it is right, acceptable, and pleasant to express thankfulness to the LORD. It is right and pleasant to sing praises that focus on God’s character – His name. It is good to do this in our private worship as we read about God in the Bible and pray to Him.

However, this is a song to be sung on the Sabbath, which implies corporate worship. In spite of the popularity of ignoring or belittling corporate gatherings of God’s people on a particular day to praise Him together, God taught us that it is right and pleasant. Now here is a personal thought. If I truly focus on God and lift my praise to Him on a Sunday morning, rejoicing with God’s people in His greatness, wouldn’t it seem rather anti-climatic to leave that heavenly setting and mow the lawn in the afternoon?

The worship commended to us focuses on God’s steadfast love. We worship *to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night* (v.2). Worship is really not about how we feel toward God, though our emotions are certainly involved. The focus of worship is what motivates us to feel the way we do. In other words, “Why do I have joy?” Why is my heart bowed in God’s presence while at the same time my whole being delights in Him?

Our declaration of praise is about God’s steadfast love. We rejoice because we know that God’s love is unchanging, being firmly established toward me for eternity. God’s love is not based on my faithfulness but on His faithfulness. God will continue to love His children because His love is fixed upon His promises and covenants. God’s love is as sure as His Word. So we declare it morning and evening.

We are not surprised to find the psalmist mention some of the instruments that were used in Old Testament worship. They worshiped *to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre* (v.3). We take for granted the principle that we praise and worship God, telling of His unchanging love, with music. But we don’t use the instruments mentioned here. The lute, harp, and lyre were three very common Old Testament instruments. In addition to these, we find other instruments employed in worship in those days like stringed instruments such as the psaltery, sackbut, gittith. The people used percussion instruments such as the timbrel (tambourine), toph (drum), bells, cymbals, systra, and triangle. Like us, they used wind instruments (that were not like the ones we use). Their instruments were the syrinx (bagpipe or panpipe), horn, trumpet, flute, and dulcimer (pipes, not strings like modern dulcimer).

Probably these instruments played together produced a sound similar to traditional Middle Eastern music, which I prefer not to

listen to. It sounds discordant and morbid to me. We don't live in the Old Testament age. We live in the Church age. Okay, we know the early church didn't use the instruments we use.

The early Church also didn't use the instruments mentioned in the Old Testament. We know that their worship music was, "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs . . . with thankfulness to God" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Several of Paul's epistles contain fragments of hymns from the first generation of Christians – all are Christ-centered and brief, powerful proclamations of the early church's faith (Philippians 2:6-11; I Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 5:14; Colossians 1:15-20). The early Christians often adopted Scriptures for songs – such as the song celebrating the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1-18), the song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43), and Mary's song of praise (Luke 1:46-55). Because the church met in homes, music was acapella for the most part.

Even into the third and fourth centuries, some Christians would not use musical instruments in public worship. Their reason was because musical instruments were used in pagan sacrifices and the Jewish temple worship. They said that musical instruments were part of the "childish" worship in the earlier state of God's people (a view later adopted by John Calvin).

Obviously, that attitude changed in time. The sixth-century pope, Gregory I, implemented musical reforms in the Roman church which were to influence the western church for the next millennium. He gave the church the "Gregorian chant" or plainsong that was characterized by a lack of harmony and contained only the melodic line. Maybe he argued that they were "making melody in your heart." There were no strict time values in those chants, and no musical instruments were used. The effect produced had a resonant, mystical, other-worldly quality. Only men were allowed to sing; this was music for the priests and the choir, not the congregation.

Much later, somewhere between the seventh and the tenth centuries, the organ was accepted into the church's worship. This caused much debate because the organ was associated with the court ceremony of the emperor. Not everyone was ready to accept such a radical change. And just like some of the people argued, along with the organ came the ceremonial use of candles and incense.

It was left to the Reformation to restore singing to the people of the church. John Hus led the way and issued the first Protestant hymnbook in the Bohemian language. The Reformation hymns emphasized the worship of Christ rather than the medieval worship of Mary and replaced the chanting of priests and choirs in Latin with congregational singing in the language of the people. With the Reformation the congregational hymn was reborn, and it has continued as an important part of Protestant worship to our own day.

However, in the early days of the Church in New England controversy swirled on whether the congregation should sing at all. And if the congregation sang, should they sing only the psalms? There was also the debate between "usual" singing and "regular" singing. "Usual" singing was to sing only the melody of songs passed down by oral tradition. "Regular" singing involved singing by notes. The debate was that regular singing turned the congregation into singers and non-singers; that is, those who could read music and those who could not.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries church music often reflected the culture. For example, many of our well-known hymns written between 1914 and 1950, when war was the great concern, focus on the Christian soldier and spiritual warfare. A "Stand up for Jesus" theme and "Hold the Fort" came from the era of the Civil War.

Then in the 1950's and 1960's God did a miracle. From that point on there would be no change in the means, methods, and themes of worship in the Church. According to some, when this miracle happened, from that point on, everything about worship thereafter would be measured by the standard that was common in the mid-20th century.

But whatever the trend, one thing is certain for me. I still don't like Middle Eastern sounding music that might be played on a lute, a harp, and a lyre or any number of Bible instruments. I prefer to stand on the principle that regardless of what is going on in the culture, the music that is used to worship the Lord should be distinct, different from what is typical, normal, and popular in the world culture.

So what should be our motivation for worship? The reason for worship is given in verses four and five. First, I worship because God has made me glad. *For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your*

work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy (v.4). The works of God's hand make His people glad. Our first thought, when pondering the works of God's hands, is probably about Creation. Or maybe we think about the miracles recorded in Bible history. Or even God's obvious works in extra-biblical history.

But what about the works of God's hands in our lives? That He loves us and redeems us from sin is pretty significant. That He indwells us, teaches us from His Word, and leads us is praise worthy. That He promises us eternal life should make us glad.

Thinking about God's works causes us to sing for joy. Joy is a pretty obvious emotion. Some of our songs require special effort to sing with joy and gladness. For example, a song in our hymn book when I was a kid was titled "How Tedious and Tasteless the Hours" and the first line read like this:

*How tedious and tasteless the hours
When Jesus no longer I see!
Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flow'rs,
Have all lost their sweetness to me.
The midsummer sun shines but dim,*

Yes, but the rest of the song is about joy and gladness found in fellowship with Christ. It's just that the melody sounds tedious and tasteless!

Another reason we worship is because we know that God is amazing! *How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep! (v.5).* The words, "How great" reminds us that God's works are ultimately incomprehensible. That is why we continue to sing joyful songs like "How Great Thou Art," or "Amazing Grace" in spite of the fact that plenty of non-worshiping-kind of musicians have slaughtered the songs with their renditions. By the way, to conclude that God's thoughts are very deep is a bit of an understatement.

Contrast Between God and the Fool (vv.6-9).

Foolish people cannot grasp the truth about God's plan (vv.6-7). In case we don't grasp the point, the psalmist described the character of the foolish person. *The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: (v.6).* Okay, this conclusion sounds rather harsh. The

KJV translates the word *brutish*, which does not sound so harsh because we are unfamiliar with the word. The Hebrew word means to be beast-like or like a brute animal that is incapable of yielding to God. This is the person who rejects God and, therefore, rejects God's truth. Another psalmist wrote, "*I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you*" (Psalm 73:22). Or Solomon described the person in contrast to the wise. "*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid*" (Proverbs 12:1).

Such foolishness is actually the condition of every person by birth. Paul taught, *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).* People who have not experienced the new birth have only their natural ability to understand. That level of comprehension rejects the Bible because it cannot understand. God's truth is discerned through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Therefore, people outside of fellowship with God through the new birth, just don't know some very important truths.

What is it that the fool cannot know? The information that a foolish person cannot know may point back to the reason for worship: *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! (vv.4-5).* Those people have no reason or motivation for worshipping God.

Or the statement probably points ahead to verses seven and eight. That being the case, we conclude that the naturally foolish person cannot know that the wicked are doomed. Or as the psalmist put it, *That though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever (v.7).* Also, the naturally foolish person cannot know that the LORD is exalted forever. They cannot understand that *You, O LORD, are on high forever (v.8).* They know sports, fashion, Hollywood, politics, finance, the arts and everything else that is important to the passing world. But they don't know God.

Ultimately, the fool perishes (v.9). They perish because they are God's enemies. People who reject God are enemies. *For behold, your enemies, O LORD (v.9a).* What a statement! Rejection of God because of the inborn sin principle is not just an alternative choice.

Choosing to embrace a false religion is not an insignificant matter. Serving the wrong god, whether it is an invention of the creature or serving self, has serious consequences. All such people are God's enemies.

They are destined for destruction. *For behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered (v.9b)*. To be scattered is to be defeated and discomfitted. To perish is an eternal matter. Not knowing God results in not knowing current standing with God and not knowing eternal consequences. It is an eternally horrifying condition. In vivid contrast to the promise for God's enemies is the promise of God's care for His people.

God's Care for His People (vv.10-15).

God has exalted my horn (vv.10-11). This strange statement simply means that God gives His people success. We should agree with the psalmist, *But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil (v.10)*. To be exalted is to be rewarded richly by the Supreme Eternal Judge whose right it is to reward and lift up who He will.

The odd term, *my horn*, speaks of life itself. It means that God lifts up, exalts the lives of His people. It is pictured in this verse as God pouring fresh oil over us. That is a picture of the priest anointing someone for service by pouring oil on them. Here the fresh oil seems to be a continuing anointing for continued service. It is the picture of Romans 12:1-2, the living sacrifice which is our reasonable service.

Furthermore, God takes special care of His people as He allows His people to see their enemies' failure. *My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants (v.11)*. When God defeats His enemies (v.9b), He defeats my enemies. From our perspective we should not have personal enemies. We forgive; we love.

But at the same time, we cannot embrace and approve of God's enemies. In a way, we don't have a dog in the fight because we are but sheep for the slaughter (Romans 8:36). But God is our great King and we will not tolerate hatred against Him. Therefore, we agree with David who said, *"Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And*

do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies (Psalm 139:21-22).

The problem is that those who love evil and hate righteousness make themselves our enemies. They are like people who chose to be David's enemy and about whom David prayed, *Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes, and let not those wink the eye who hate me without cause (Psalm 35:19)*. We wish they were not our enemies. But they are.

That is to be expected for people who try to live righteously in this world under Satan's influence. Sometimes it is too much for Satan's children to see how God causes the righteous to flourish (vv.12-15). That flourishing is pictured as, *The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon (v.12)*. Everyone in the Old Testament was familiar with the picture. God's children should look like spiritual trees flourishing and producing fruit.

That does happen because of reality. *They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God (v.13)*. We flourish because we are planted in the presence of God. We are very near our source of nutrients.

To us who are planted in the presence of the Lord, He gives a great promise. The righteous continue to produce fruit. *They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green (v.14)*. To some it might sound strange to say that God's people are full of sap. That sounds like a harsh accusation. Because in our culture to call someone a sap is a derogatory accusation. It is to say the person is a fool or gullible person who is often taken advantage of by others. It is what Henry Bennett called Barney Fife on the Andy Griffith show because Barney convinced all of Mayberry that Henry was a jinx.

In reality, sap as it is used here speaks of the fluid, chiefly water with dissolved sugars and mineral salts, that circulates in the vascular system of a plant. Sap is the life source and vitality of a plant. And our fruit produced by that sap is worship to God. It is *to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him (v.15)*. Even in old age, God's servants are still able to produce the fruit of declaring that God is right. We share with all who will hear that God is my rock. We are not ashamed to tell the world who denies God's existence or activity that He is, He does, and all that He does is right. We call this a testimony. God does not require all of us

to be theologians. God does not make all of us theologians. God simply gives us knowledge of Himself, experience with Himself, strength and opportunity from Himself, to tell others about Himself.

We are commanded to worship God with joy and gladness. If we are enjoying fellowship with God, we don't need a command. Once there was a woman who married a churlish, rude and demanding man. He made a list of twenty rules and duties that she must keep or he would punish her. For ten miserable years the woman kept the rules to the best of her ability. Then finally, God was gracious to the woman and killed the wicked husband. In time, she found a good and kind husband. She loved being married to him. One day while she was cleaning the house, she happened to find that list from her former husband. To her amazement, she was doing all those rules and duties for her kind and loving husband. But she never thought about her work as duty or requirement.

When we love our Lord as we should, we naturally express that love in thankful, joyous praise and worship. We declare God's greatness in singing songs worthy of the Sabbath.