

Why It's Good to Go to Church Regularly

Psalm 92:1-15 & Ephesians 2:1 – 3:21

Halifax: 21 May 2017

Introduction

For the last few weeks, we have been doing a sermon series on going to church.

- Two weeks ago the sermon was entitled *What is Going to Church all About?*
- Last week, we looked at *What Happens When You Truly Meet with God in Worship.*
- Today, I want to look at *Why it is Good to Go to Church Regularly.*
 - So last week, the focus was on what happens when you worship, this week it will be more specifically about the long term benefits of faithful attendance in worship.

I want to look at two passages today—

- Ephesians chapter two and three which we already read,
- And Psalm 92 which I will read now.

Please give me your attention—that is Psalm 92.

- This is God's Word.

Psalm 92:1-15: «A Psalm. A song for the Sabbath day.» *It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; ² to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night, ³ on an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound. ⁴ For You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands. ⁵ O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. ⁶ A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this. ⁷ When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever. ⁸ But You, LORD, are on high*

forevermore. ⁹ For behold, Your enemies, O LORD, for behold, Your enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. ¹⁰ But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. ¹¹ My eye also has seen my desire on my enemies; my ears hear my desire on the wicked who rise up against me. ¹² The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³ Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴ They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, ¹⁵ to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

In previous sermons,

- I have mentioned to you that the reason the church is called the church is because we are the people in this fallen sinful world who are gathered as a worshipping assembly before the true and living God.
 - The word church means “congregation” or “assembly,” and we are given this name because it is our unique privilege to be the congregation of the Almighty Lord.
 - This is the very thing that makes us stand out from the rest of the world.
- By Jesus Christ our redeemer, we are brought to the Father.
 - This is amazing because being sinners, just like everyone else in the world, we were completely cut off from the Father.

- Toward all His creatures, God is a gracious, loving, caring, kind Master; but toward those who have corrupted themselves, He is a consuming fire.
 - To come before Him as a sinner is to be brought under His wrath and fiery indignation on account of our sin.
 - Yet, through Christ, the Son of God who became fully human (while continuing to be God), we are given access to the Father as children.
 - We, who were cut off from Him with the rest of the human race are now able to draw near to the Father through Jesus Christ.
- And my dear friends, scripture teaches us that we especially come before God when we gather for public worship with Christ our head...
 - That is, when we go to church each Sunday.
 - This is something that we, as Christians, should not want to miss!
 - In the Old Testament, the Jews drew near in a symbolic way—
 - there were glory clouds and flaming fires that consumed sacrifices, there were temples and priests and sacrifices and altars... and even in that symbolism, the Jews could not come into the holiest place but once a year, and then only the high priest.
 - But now that Christ has come as our Priest and has offered Himself for our sins, not only the Jews,
 - but also the Gentiles are able to come right into the holiest place—before the very presence of God the Father, in the assembly.

This morning I want to begin by showing you how this privilege of coming before the Father through Christ is presented to us in Ephesians 2 & 3 as something that transforms us into a holy dwelling place of God!

- Please turn to Ephesians 2-3 and walk through an overview of this passage with me.

I. Bask in the privilege to be the church of God—the assembly that is being transformed to be a holy dwelling place for God (Eph 2 & 3).

A. Ephesians 2:1-10 tells us how we who were dead in sins have been made alive...

1. We have been given living faith which unites us to Jesus Christ, and by Him we have the complete forgiveness of sin...
2. And as such, we (as God's church) are His workmanship, as verse 10 says, **created in Christ Jesus for good works.**
 - We who are sinners are now put into a completely new situation in which we are able to live lives that are pleasing to God!
 - It is all by God's grace through faith in Jesus that this is possible!
 - We are a people who are restored from ruin to live for God through Jesus.

B. In Ephesians 2:11-18, we are reminded that we were completely cut off from God until Jesus came.

1. In verse 11-12, Paul explains that while Israel was set apart from the other nations (the Gentiles) and had God's promises,
 - we Gentiles were completely cut off and without hope—dead in our sins—completely unable to come before God because of our sin.

2. But as verse 13 says, **“now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”**
 - The blood of Christ speaks of Christ as a sacrifice to atone for sins—and the wonderful news is that we can now come to God through that sacrifice!
3. In fact, Paul explains in verses 14-16 that both we who were far off from God as well as the Jews who were near, are reconciled to God **“in one body.”**
 - Instead of there being a separation between us who were cut off from God and the Jews who were near to God, the barrier is broken down because Christ has reconciled both us and the Jews to God in one body by the cross.
4. And now, as it is says in verses 17-18, He is preaching peace to us Gentiles who were far away God and to the Jews who were near.
 - The result is that both they and we now have full access to the Father!
 - By Christ, they no longer have a mere symbolic access with temples and priests representing things,
 - but both they and we have (verse 18) **access by the Spirit to the Father!**
 - That is the great privilege we have been talking about that gives the church its name...
 - We are the church (or the assembly) that gathers before the Father!
 - Jesus Himself has reconciled us to the Father, and we are His assembly—His church.

C. In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul tells us what God is doing with us as His assembly!

1. Verse 21 says that we are put together that we might grow into a holy temple in the Lord...
 - And the word translated temple that is used here is not just the word that refers to the building as a whole (*heiron*)—
 - It is *naos* which refers to the holy place.
 - As God’s assembly built upon Jesus Christ, we are actually growing into a dwelling place for God Almighty!
 - Look at verse 21 and 22 together: **in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**
 - The church in Christ Jesus is the assembly where God Almighty dwells!
2. Just think of it, you are members of the household of God in Christ!
 - You are built, as verse 20 says, upon Christ Himself.
 - And as an assembly in Him before the Father, we are growing by the Spirit.
 - The Spirit is working in us to make us a holy dwelling place for God.

D. Paul is absolutely thrilled to be chosen to declare this mystery to the Gentiles!

- He speaks about this in chapter 3...
1. Christ especially appointed him to declare the mystery (a mystery is something that can only be known through God’s revelation) that the Gentiles are included in the church.
 - He describes the mystery in 3:6 as **“that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ, through the gospel, of which I have become a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”**

2. Paul has understands how significant this is!
 - In verse 7, he calls it **preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ!**
 - In verse 10, he speaks of how celestial beings in heaven are able to see the manifold wisdom of God by looking at His dealings with the church through Christ...
 - And in verse 11, he speaks of how in Christ we have access with confidence through faith in Him...
 - There it is again—the amazing thing—we have access to God—
 - We are able to go with confidence where we could not possibly have gone, and when we do, we are transformed into a holy dwelling place.

3. Paul is so delighted with what God is doing that he prays earnestly that God would carry out this great work in the church in verses 14-21!
 - He prays that this assembly that God has called together would experience the power of God’s work in them... v. 16: **“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”**
 - The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us!
 - And he prays (vv. 18 & 19) that we would be able to **comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes all knowledge, the we might be filled with the fullness of God.**
 - We learn of God by comprehending the grand demonstration of God’s love in Christ crucified...
 - And as we more and more comprehend that love, we are transformed so that we are filled with all the fullness that God has prepared for us.
 - Do you see?
 - Paul is praying for the church—that the church would be changed as we come before God in the assembly.
 - The Spirit works and the gospel works and we are changed into a holy dwelling place for God.
 - The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us.

TRANS> This surely shows you why you ought to come church!

- If the assembly has that kind of effect on you—
 - If it is in the assembly that you deepen your knowledge of Christ in the gospel...
 - And if it is in the assembly that you are changed by the power that raised Jesus from the dead...
 - If it is here that you have true access to the Father as God’s congregation...
 - Then church is something you do not want to miss.
- Let’s turn now to Psalm 92 and consider further why it is good to come.

II. The first thing we see is that it is good and right for us to come before God to confess His name.

- A. The title of the Psalm reminds us that this is something we are to do each Sabbath Day.

- You see it there—it reads: **A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath Day.**
 - Sometimes we ignore these titles, but many consider them to be part of the inspired scripture.
- Whether that is accepted or not, the title testifies that the ancient understanding of the Jews was that this was a song for weekly worship on the Sabbath Day—
 - the day that God set apart each week for us to lay aside our regular activities and to gather in the assembly and worship Him.
 - We saw how Leviticus 23:3 calls for a holy convocation (calling together) of God’s people in their local communities for this purpose.
- And of course now, in the New Covenant, the weekly Sabbath day has been changed by Christ to the first day of the week (which we call Sunday or the Lord’s Day).
 - This song speaks about the good thing that it is for the assembly (or the church) to praise God each week.

B. Here in verse 1 & 2, we simply told that it is good to thank and praise the LORD.

1. Of course it is a good thing for us as God’s people to do this...
 - It is fitting and right that we should praise Him—it is simply something that ought to be done—that must be done for a God like Him.
 - It is entirely inappropriate that the God of the universe who has redeemed His people should not be praised and thanked.
 - This, in fact, is the most important thing that we are to do as human beings—we were made to be His worshippers.
 - It is simply a *good* thing to do.
2. And then verse 2 shows us that we should in particular declare His lovingkindness...
 - a. Actually, it says, declare (or make conspicuous) His lovingkindness in the morning and His faithfulness at night...
 - The idea here not that we do one the morning and the other at night, but that we should be praising Him all day—from morning until evening.
 - b. And the thing that we are to declare is the thing that we have seen our worship is all about...His lovingkindness and faithfulness...
 - The word *lovingkindness* refers to His covenant love—
 - His saving grace that for us in the New Testament is now revealed more fully than ever through the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - We have seen that it is the gospel that Jesus declares to us in the New Testament assembly—that is the thing that He declares to us now because He has commanded His ministers to preach it in the assembly...
 - This is what Paul called preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ that we have access to the Father through Jesus who was crucified for us—that He has reconciled us to the Father.
 - We are to talk about the **width and length and depth and height** of His love—of His lovingkindness to us in Christ and of His faithfulness in carrying out His saving work.

- That is the heart and core of our New Testament worship.
 - Jesus our risen priest declares to us that the Father has accepted His sacrifice for our sins, and He leads us in singing praise whenever we gather to worship the Father in the church.
- 3. And we are to do this with a harmonious sound...
 - In the Old Covenant, they used instruments to embellish their praises, but we are told to make melody in our hearts in the New Testament...
 - The harmony we are to have is between our voices and the strings of our heart that accompany them—Ephesians 5 says literally that we are to pluck the strings of our heart.
 - The theatrics are gone because the reality has come—the focus is on Him and the ordinances are plain and simple so as not to draw us away.

C. How glad God has made us through His work!

- Verse 4 says: **“For You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands.”**
 - How glad we are indeed to be forgiven of our sins and to know that we have triumph or victory through our risen Lord Jesus Christ.
- We know, as we saw in Ephesians 3, that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us to make us a holy dwelling place for God.
 - We have victory by the gracious hand of our God upon us.

TRANS> It is so good for us to come and give thanks and praise for this each Lord’s Day. We need to take up fresh praises each week because of what He has done.

III. Coming before Him is also good because when you do, you refresh your faith each week—week by week.

A. As you go through the week, it is easy to lose your perspective about the importance and value of God and His kingdom.

1. He is a God to be greatly feared, because, as it says in verse 5, His works are very great and His thoughts are very deep.
 - He is the creator of the universe and He is the redeemer of His people.
 - His thoughts are incomprehensible to us
 - We cannot possibly understand Him or trace out all His ways.
 - Psalm 139 speaks about how God knows our sitting down and our rising up, and how He even knows our very thoughts.
 - It speaks of how He has hedged us behind and before and how He has laid His protecting hand on us...
 - And then it says in verse 6, **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.”**
 - God is not one that we can counsel or correct—He is running the universe and He is judge of all...
 - He has revealed His salvation, and it is for us to receive it with gladness instead of disputing with Him about it—something we’d never do if we could grasp His greatness...
 - Coming before Him in worship helps us to see how great His works are and how deep His thoughts are as we look at what He has done.

2. You need a fresh perspective each week because the world has a very different perspective.
 - a. As it says in verse 6, a senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this.
 - God is not in his thoughts—he is the fool who ignores God.
 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but he completely ignores God—he lives as if the Lord is completely irrelevant.
 - b. And when you are surrounded by those who think this way, it can start to rub off on you...
 - You can lose your eternal perspective—you can start to think that God is not really very important.
 - You can turn your focus on your clothing and your status and your possessions—not as things that you thank God for...
 - but as things you actually start to live for!
 - You can start to live for empty things, thinking that this is all there is to live for.
 - You can stop laying down your life for others and start to think that it is better to live for yourself.
 - You start to become selfish, and self-centred and you start to criticise others and to resent them and become bitter...
 - In short, you stop living for Christ and His kingdom.
 - c. Like the people around you who do not know God, you can start to think that immediate success is all that matters.
 - Verse 7 in Psalm 92 explains that when the wicked man prospers—when he, as it says, springs up like grass; when he and his friends flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever!
 - They think everything is going great for them.
 - They boast about their success and even about their sin—about their immorality, their drinking, their slick maneuvers in business, their successful ventures, their revenge on their ex-spouse, all the money they made...whatever...
 - They do not realise that God has turned them over to this success to prepare them for destruction.
 - Their fortunes are making them more and more proud and more and more hardened against God—but God will humble them in the day of judgement and expose their folly!
 - They will not be given a second chance.
- B. When you come before the Lord in weekly worship, He renews your heart and your mind so that everything is brought back into a right perspective again.
1. In Psalm 73, we sing about having lost our perspective when we see the wicked prospering—they seem to have no sorrows and no troubles...
 - You start to wonder what the point of serving the LORD is...because you are looking at things in a temporal way instead of an eternal way...

- But then you come into God’s sanctuary—in the New Testament, we come before God’s face as revealed in the gospel of Christ...
 - And then we see clearly that God has set the wicked in slippery places; that they are in slippery places while we are safe in Christ!
- 2. This clear understanding about the wicked in contrast with you who have come to Christ for salvation is set forth in Psalm 92 in verse 8-11...
 - a. First, in verse 8-9, we see that though the wicked prosper, God still reigns making it certain that they will be brought down...
 - Verse 8 & 9 says: **But You, LORD, are on high forevermore. , For behold, Your enemies, O LORD, for behold, Your enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.**
 - You see the vanity of life without God...
 - b. And at the same time, as verse 10 shows, you see the privilege that belongs to you to be in the church—in the congregation of the Lord—
 - You are among those who are reconciled to Him by Christ and who have access to Him through Christ and who have the Spirit forming you into a holy dwelling place for the Father.
 - In verse 10, you say, **“But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil.”**
 - The horn was a symbol of strength, and the idea here is that as God’s church in Christ, we through Christ have been raised up in strength—
 - The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work to raise us up through Him—He is our horn and He has been raised up to glory, and we are going to follow Him there.
 - This is our destiny!
 - And in the second part of verse 10, we speak of how we have been anointed with fresh oil.
 - The oil represents the Holy Spirit who is given to us.
 - Christ was given the Spirit without measure—He is the anointed one—and He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we have an anointing.
 - He has baptised us with the Holy Spirit who abides with us and who works in us and who will remain with us forever...
 - And we also receive a fresh anointing—the Spirit’s work is refreshed in us—when we come before God in the assembly.
 - We look for God to give us fresh supplies of the Spirit of grace so that we might welcome the truth, delight in the gospel, see the glory of God, be convicted of our sins, and be enabled to turn from them to serve God with freshness.
 - If you do not come before God each week, you lose the benefit of this refreshment that our Lord has provided for us as His people.
- c. And in coming before God, you not only see your privilege, but you also see how your enemies have been defeated already...

- Verse 11 says, **My eye also has seen my desire on my enemies; my ears hear my desire on the wicked who rise up against me.**
- Satan and the foolish men of this world who do not fear God rise up against you to tear down your faith...
 - They try to convince you that you are foolish for serving God.
 - They mock and they scoff and they exclude you, and sometimes they even slander you and attack your property or your estate.
 - They do this because they know that you represent Christ and they do not want to face Christ—they are terrified of Him and they don't want to admit it—otherwise you would not bother them so much.
- But verse 11 says that you have already seen them stopped...
 - For Israel, they had seen Pharaoh and his armies destroyed, and they had seen Canaan conquered;
 - But much more for us, we have now seen Satan defeated by Christ who did not give in to his temptations, but endured the cross...
 - And now Jesus is invading Satan's kingdom—the kingdom of this world as He takes disciples from every nation.
 - We see our enemies defeated and we know that they will not be able to stand against Christ and His church.
 - They will not be able to draw us away from Christ.
 - He is our redeemer and He will keep us to the end.

TRANS> Week by week you need to come and renew your perspective by coming before the face of God with Jesus Christ leading the way.

- That is a second reason you ought to come to church each Lord's Day...
- And now I want to come to the third reason.

IV. Come before the LORD each Lord's Day because of the cumulative effect it will have on you over the years!

A. We saw in Ephesians that the LORD is at work in us to make us a dwelling place for Him...

- Remember all of those things that we saw that were related to this?
 - Eph 2:10, that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus that we might do good works.
 - Eph 2:22, that we are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit—as verse 21 puts it, that we are being fitted together that we might grow into a holy temple in the Lord.
 - Eph 3:16-19, that He is strengthening us with might through His Spirit in the inner man that we might know the love of Christ and be filled with the fullness of God.

B. Well Psalm 92:12-15 speaks of those who are part of the assembly that dwells before the face of God as bearing fruit throughout their whole lives!

1. In verse 12, the righteous will flourish like a palm tree and grow like a cedar tree.

- Palm trees are known for the great strength—they are green all year long—a single tree can produce 200 pounds of dates in a single year.
 - And cedar trees are known for their great size and for their longevity—often living beyond a thousand years.
 - Verse 14 explains that they will still bear fruit in old age...
 - They will be fresh and flourishing—not in the way the world measures prosperity—but in the way the Lord does...
 - In godliness—in loving the gospel—in knowing Christ—in loving the Father and the Son—in being filled with the Spirit.
 - In the world, the old are fit only to be thrown out—they are burned out because they can no longer enjoy the things of this world or produce those things...
 - But when the eternal fruits of the Spirit are what we seek, you see the beauty of those fruits ever increasing to the end...
 - even the ravages of age upon their bodies deepens their love of Christ, for His kingdom, and for His gospel.
2. But make no mistake about who it is that enjoys this—it is only the righteous...
- As we saw in Ephesians, no one is righteous but those who are joined to Jesus Christ—it is by Him that we are a holy temple for the LORD...
 - It is with Him and only with Him as our Saviour that we are true members of the church who truly come before the Father's face...
 - It is only as built upon Christ as our foundation that we are planted in God's holy courts where we bear fruit.
 - Yes, you can come to church without Christ in bodily way—you can show up to the assembly—
 - but there will be no true lasting fruits in old age—you will not be full of fruit and flourishing like the palm and the cedar tree.
 - As verse 13 puts it, it is only those that are planted in the house of the Lord the flourish in His courts.
 - You are not a true part of the assembly unless you are in Christ.
3. But if you are in Him...
- a. What good it will do you to be in the assembly of His people, Lord's Day after Lord's Day, over the years!
 - Your mind will be washed by His word, you will be renewed and you will be empowered to serve the Lord.
 - You will grow in your love for Christ and for His gospel—you will be filled with the fullness of God...
 - You will be flourishing and fruitful in old age.
 - b. All those years, you will be declaring, as verse 15 says, that the LORD is upright... that He is your rock and that there is no unrighteousness in Him.
 - All through the years, He has preserved you.
 - All through the years, He has fed you with spiritual food.
 - All through the years, He has delivered you from your enemies.

- All through the years, He had kept His promises.
 - There is fruit in your life, there is fruit in your household, there is fruit in the lives of those you have touched by His grace...
- c. All those years in His courts have paid off...
 - All of those Sundays that you have come before His face and worshipped Him and drunk of His Word and Spirit have filled you with fruit and new life...
 - And now, in old age, you are happier than ever because soon you will be brought before Him in glory where Jesus is.
 - You have gathered by faith, in spirit and in truth you have been before His face,
 - but now you will be with Christ before His glorious body, waiting for the resurrection of your body.
 - How glad you will be for all of those years that you have been a worshipper in God's house through Jesus Christ.
 - Oh young people, do not waste a single Sabbath Day!
 - Cherish each one of them and make the most of it.
 - All the vain things that you pursue in this world will be worthless, but the days you have spent in the house of the Lord, praising Him and growing in His grace, will be precious.
 - And all the glory will go to your faithful rock, your righteous LORD...
- **It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High!**