

## **Series FolkSongs of Faith**

### **This Message Living In the Joy of the LORD**

#### **Scripture Psalm 92**

We have previously thought about the first two Psalms in this series. Psalm 90 stressed the futility of life in the light of man's sinfulness. It concluded with a prayer asking God to change the circumstances of His people so that they might find satisfaction in His unfailing love and asking that God would graciously extend His favor to them.

Psalm 91, which we thought about last week, was an answer to the prayer. We learned that those who love the LORD and dwell "in the shelter of the Most High" are protected from all kinds of spiritual attacks in this life, and, in addition, will not be affected when God pours out His punishment on "the wicked." At the end of Psalm 91 were seven promises which were given by God to those who love Him: "I will rescue him," "I will protect him," "I will answer him when he calls upon me," "I will be with him in times of trouble," "I will deliver him and honor him," "I will satisfy him with long life," and "I will show him salvation."

Psalm 92 is written from the standpoint of the person who is experiencing the fulfillment of those promises. Such a person praises the LORD day and night. He proclaims the loving kindness and faithfulness of the LORD with joyful singing. Verse 4 expresses the theme of the Psalm: "You, O LORD, make me glad by your deeds; I sing for joy at the works of your hands." There is a two-fold emphasis in verse 4. There is the delight of the Psalmist: "You, O LORD, make me glad" and "I sing for joy," and there is the reason for the delight — what God was doing: His "deeds," — "the works of his hands."

As we read this Psalm, you will notice that the writer does not mention the spiritual pressures and attacks which were described in Psalm 91. I'm sure he was experiencing such attacks; all of God's people do. However, the writer kept his focus, his hope and confidence, on the good things that were happening to him and that he anticipated would happen in the future. He was living out the truth of words that were later written by the Apostle Paul: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (*Romans 8:18*). Because the Psalmist loved the LORD, and dwelled under the protection of the LORD, he was able to praise the LORD.

I also want you to notice that the Psalmist has not yet experienced the complete fulfillment of the promises of God. Much of Psalm 92 is written in future tense. The Psalmist anticipates the destruction of evildoers and the exaltation of the righteous. In his day-by-day living, he is able to discern the work of the LORD on his behalf, and this gives him hope and confidence about the future, and he expresses his gratefulness with enthusiasm.

## **Read Psalm 92**

The subtitle of this Psalm indicates that it was to be read on the Sabbath day, and that is a clue to the orientation and interpretation of the Psalm. The Hebrew word “shabat” can refer to the cessation of certain activities in which someone might be engaged, but it also refers to the pleasant condition of safety, security, and stability when a person’s life is progressing without any problems which require special attention. That is exactly what God provides to those who “dwell in the shelter of the Most High.” Spiritually speaking, they are eternally secure because they dwell in the “refuge” and “fortress” of God. This is the reason the people of God have a gladness and joy that senseless, earthly-minded evildoers cannot understand.

The focus of Psalm 92 is not backward to the “shabat” which followed creation, but to a future time when God will be able to rest from His works of restoring His fallen creation. After the work of physical creation was finished, God “rested from all His work” because everything He had made was perfect, complete, and functioning exactly as He wanted. The entrance of sin and disobedience disrupted that perfect, complete, and smoothly functioning effort, and God once again became busy, this time with the process of bringing mankind back into relationship with Himself and restoring creation to its pristine glory. There is yet a future Sabbath when God’s redemptive efforts will be completed. This will occur at the end of this age, after evildoers are destroyed and those who are righteous are exalted.

The writer to the Hebrews admonished his readers about that future Sabbath. He wrote: “The promise of entering into his (God’s) rest still stands. Let us be careful that none of us be found to have fallen short of it,” and “There remains ... a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following” those who were disobedient (*Hebrews 4:1, 9, 11*).

In my opinion, the person who wrote Psalm 92 had the future Sabbath-rest of God in mind. We, as modern-day believers, must also keep the future in mind in order to keep up our hope and motivation. The certainty of that future Sabbath is the basis for our praises and worship.

*[Gratuitous note: The Hebrew commentaries declare that Psalm 92 is “a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting” (Mishnah, Tamid 7:4), so the Psalm is properly labeled.]*

Verse 1 begins with a three-fold affirmation of worship: “It is good to praise the LORD,” to make music to his name,” and “to proclaim the LORD’s love and faithfulness.” These worship actions call attention to who God is and to His character. He is “the LORD.” Whenever the word “LORD” appears in small caps, it is a translation of the Hebrew word “Yahweh.” Yahweh was the most significant name by which God identified Himself to His covenant people in the Old Testament. It was the name associated with personal relationship. This name is used seven times in this Psalm, which is logical since the Psalmist is dwelling in the shelter of Yahweh (*Psalm 91:9*) and therefore has a personal relationship with Yahweh.

In addition, Yahweh, the LORD, is identified as “the Most High” (Elyon), the God above all gods, the “possessor of heaven and earth” (*Genesis 14:19*). God is therefore both personal and transcendent at the same time.

Next, the writer tells us when to worship. We are “to proclaim his love in the morning and his faithfulness at night.” In other words, we who have a personal relationship with Yahweh, the Most High God, are to fill our days with worship. We are to proclaim His loving-kindness and His faithfulness. The followers of God understand that He, because of His love, has taken the initiative in binding them to Himself. Through His promises, they understand that “nothing will be able to separate them from the love of God” (*Romans 8:39*). Each day the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God is proven to those who are in right relationship to Him.

Next, the Psalmist describes how we are to proclaim the goodness of the LORD: “to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the harp.” I suppose in our modern era the musical instruments would be mostly keyboards and guitars. (I am personally delighted that the writer has excluded drums!) According to the Psalm writer, worship is enhanced with instrumental accompaniment. I think we would agree. Our enthusiasm should be so great that a full symphony orchestra would be required.

And what about worshippers who can't play any musical instrument? According to Scripture, they can still offer praise and thanks to God. The Apostle Paul instructed the believers in Colossae to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (*Colossians 3:16*). And even if we can't sing well, all of us are able to make a joyful noise unto the LORD!

In verses 1 through 3 the Psalmist explained the “who,” “when,” and “how” of worship. Verse 4 explains “why” the Psalmist worshiped with such enthusiasm: he recognized the “deeds” and the “works” of the LORD. The general context is the security of God's people. From Psalm 91 the writer was aware that he was protected from the spiritual attacks of evil beings. He knew that the LORD had promised him long life and salvation. He had already experienced some of the benefits promised by God and, hence, he was glad and full of joy.

In verses 5 through 15 the writer reflected on the works and thoughts of the LORD. The “works” of the LORD refer to His punishment of His wicked enemies and the exaltation of His righteous followers. The “thoughts” of the LORD refer to His purposes and objectives. From God's standpoint, these two words, “works” and “thoughts,” are essentially interchangeable. What God decides to do will be accomplished. Just as His power is beyond human comprehension, so are God's purposes and methods. These are described in the New Testament in this way:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!  
‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?  
Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to Him?’  
For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be the glory forever” (*Romans 11:33-36*).

In the Old Testament the people who are called “senseless fools” are described as morally and spiritually deficient, and are, in God’s eyes, corrupt evildoers. In some verses, fools are characterized as brute beasts who have no common sense. They are earthly minded. The Apostle Paul stated that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (*I Corinthians 2:14*). According to David in Psalm 14, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”” (*Psalm 14:1*). Such people do not know that they will be “forever destroyed.” They may “spring up like grass,” and flourish for a brief time, but they will perish.

Note the contrast in verses 9 and 10. The LORD will bring down His enemies, the evildoers, but He will exalt His people. When applied to God, the word “exalted” means that He is higher than anyone or anything else. The word indicates the LORD’s authority as the supreme Judge of everything in creation. When the word “exalted” is applied to people, it indicates how people are rewarded and blessed by God. They become victorious (exalted) over their enemies. They are lifted up to a position of honor.

The word “horn” is a common poetic way in the Bible to describe strength and honor. The imagery came from the way many large animals used their horns and antlers to attack other animals and to defend themselves against attack. Horns were symbols of power. The Psalmist used the word in an interesting way in verse 10. He said that the LORD has exalted or increased the strength and ability of His people so that they have the strength of the wild ox.

Oil has special significance in the Bible. It was used to anoint specially chosen people. For example, David was identified as Israel’s future king by being anointed. Oil was also a picture of blessing and favor.

The Psalmist knew that his situation was very different from that of evildoers. He knew that he had been chosen and exalted to a secure position with the LORD. He knew that he would be able to observe the defeat of his adversaries and hear the cries of anguish of his foes. The Psalmist is seeing and hearing this by faith. The entire Psalm is a statement of the faith of the writer. The works of the LORD had not yet been completed. None of the enemies of God had as yet been destroyed. At the time this Psalm was written, the author was anticipating what would happen in the future. He had confidence about what the LORD would do. This is the same attitude that all the followers of God should have. Believers must recognize and appreciate the fact that they have been exalted and blessed by God.

The writer had enough experience with the LORD that he had no doubts about the future. He was secure in his relationship with the LORD. He knew that nothing could happen in his earthly life to sever that relationship. He knew that the LORD would “rescue him,” “protect him,” “answer him when he called,” “be with him in times of trouble,” “deliver him and honor him,” “satisfy him with long life,” and “show him salvation” (*from Psalm 91*). The writer was experiencing the peace and contentment of dwelling “in the shelter of the Most High,” and under the faithful protection and provision and care of God’s lovingkindness. He understood the purposes and ways of God, and, as a result, he was glad and joyful. All of God’s people can be like the Psalmist. Life with God is spiritually satisfying.

Because he had already been exalted and blessed so much, and because he was experiencing the faithfulness of God, the writer knew that he, along with all other righteous people, would continue to “flourish like a palm tree, and grow like a cedar of Lebanon.” These are two poetic metaphors for health and prosperity. The date palm tree was tall, stately, and provided a desirable and nourishing fruit. It could grow in almost any arid desert-like condition. It was a symbol of endurance and steadfastness. The cedars of Lebanon were prized for all kinds of construction beams, boards, and masts for ships. Much of the wood in the temple built by Solomon was cedar wood obtained from Lebanon. In the Bible lands it was called the “king of the trees.” Trees were symbols of strength and longevity.

According to verse 13, those who are righteous will, when “planted in the house of the LORD,” flourish and bear fruit. Think about the contrast with those who are evildoers. They would be cut down and destroyed while those who live in the refuge of God could enjoy the favor of God. The unrighteous might be fruitful for a time, but their fruit is not lasting. On the other hand, the person who is planted in the house of the LORD prospers and flourishes.

For those of us in our senior years, there is something very encouraging in the words of verse 14, “They will bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green.” The actual words used in the Hebrew are not as subtle as “fresh and green.” The actual Hebrew words are “fat and full of sap.” That is the goal of the elderly believer!

And what will keep the righteous people of God “fat and full of sap?” It is the proclamation of the goodness of the LORD. No matter how old we might be, no matter if we are bedridden or in some way incapacitated, we can still testify to what we know about the LORD. We can make it known that “He is upright” in His character, and that “He is our Rock,” the One who provides spiritual stability and eternal security. We can make it known that He is the One on whom we have based our lives. We can make it known that “There is no wickedness in him,” but only goodness and holiness and righteousness.