

The Goodness of Worship in God's House, Psalm 92

Worship: The First Step to Christian Maturity

Caleb Nelson | Harvest Reformed Presbyterian Church | May 22-29, 2016

Translation

1 A Psalm; a Song for the Sabbath Day. 2 It is good to give thanks to Yahweh, and to sing to your name, Most High; 3 to declare your steadfast love by morning and your trustworthiness by night, 4 upon ten strings, upon the harp, to the lyre's music. 5 For you, Yahweh, have made me glad by Your works, and in the creations of Your hands I exult! 6 O Yahweh, how great are your works! Your thoughts are very deep. 7 The stupid man does not know, and the fool does not understand this — 8 that though the wicked sprout like grass, and all the workers of iniquity flourish, they will be destroyed forever and ever. 9 But you are on high forever, Yahweh. 10 For behold! Your enemies, Yahweh — for behold, Your enemies, Yahweh, will perish; all the workers of iniquity will be scattered. 11 But you have raised my horn like that of a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. 12 My eye has looked exultantly on my foes; my ears hear the wicked who rise up against me. 13 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree and grow great like a cedar in Lebanon. 14 Those planted in the House of Yahweh flourish in the courts of our God. 15 They still bear fruit in old age; they shall be juicy and luxuriant, 16 to declare how upright Yahweh is; He is my Rock, and there's no unrighteousness in Him.

Context:

We are at the beginning of Book 4 of the Psalter, and Moses announces the theme of these first few Psalms: Dwelling in God. Psalm 90 — God has been our dwelling place. Psalm 91 — We must dwell in the Almighty's Secret Place. Psalm 92 — We find our dwelling in God by dwelling in His House in corporate worship. Psalm 91 goes on to promise that we will see the end of the wicked, and Psalm 92 repeats that promise. But Psalm 73, at the beginning of Book 3, tells us how: It is in corporate worship that we behold the destiny of the wicked. Continuing on to Psalm 93, we see that God is established (cf. Ps. 92:8) and that His house requires and produces holiness. Then, in keeping with the theme of the temporary nature of the wicked's life, we see Ps. 94 dealing thoroughly with the theme of judgment on the wicked that's so prominent in Psalms 90-93.

Additionally, though, Ps. 92 is the first of the *Yahweh Malak* collection of Psalms that celebrates and commands corporate worship. Right through from Ps. 92 to Ps. 100, the intense focus is on the people of God worshipping God in the house of God. This section of the Psalter has more calls to worship than any other section.

Palmer Robertson calls book 4 of the Psalter the book of Maturation. In this book, Israel is in exile or in the wilderness (e.g., the opening Psalm, Psalm 90, is set during the wilderness wanderings because it's by Moses; the closing Psalms deal with the history of Israel and the book ends with a plea to be gathered from among the nations [Psalm 106:47]). Yet in this period of exile, in this time of difficulty, Israel rejoices and exults in worship because no matter the circumstances of His people, God reigns and God will destroy His enemies. We learn this best of all in worship, and that's why the

book of Maturation is centered on worship, dwelling in God's presence. We must find our home in God's house. Only then will we find the maturity needed to walk in the wilderness of this world, undaunted by the power of the wicked and secure in the Secret Place of the Most High.

Cross-References

Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forever. (Psa 133:3 NAS)

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. (Mat 15:13 KJV)

Eze 47:12 "And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

Proposition: Sabbath worship is good.

Outline

Introduction: The overall message of book IV: Dwelling in God culminates in Sabbath worship; Sabbath worship is the path to maturation and joy in exile.

- I. The Context: Book 4 of the Psalter**
 - A. Dwelling in God culminates in Sabbath worship**
 - B. Sabbath worship is the path to maturation and joy in exile**
 - C. "The Sabbath Day:" A Day to Corporately Delight in God**
 - 1. Its Origin: Creation, Gen. 2:2-3**
 - 2. Its Nature: Sacred Time, Gen. 2:3**
 - 3. Its Function: Spiritual Refreshment through Worship, Ex. 31:12-17; Lev. 23:3**
 - 4. Its Change to the First Day of the Week, John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7**
- II. The Proposition: Worship Is Good, vv. 1-3**
 - A. Worship Ascribes Glory to God**
 - 1. Verbally**
 - 2. Musically**
 - B. Worship Communes with God**
 - 1. Regularly**
 - 2. Continually [Part 1 ends here]**
- III. First Reason: It Provides an Outlet for our Joyous Triumph, v. 4**
- IV. Second Reason: The Magnitude of God's Thoughts as Seen in His Works, vv. 4-5**
- V. Third Reason: The Wicked's Temporary Flourishing Underscores God's Eternal Exaltation, vv. 6-9**
- VI. Fourth Reason: The Anointed One's Exaltation, vv. 10-11**
- VII. Fifth Reason: The Blessings that Come from Corporate Worship, vv. 12-15**
 - A. Righteousness, v. 12**

B. Flourishing Growth, v. 13

C. Fruitfulness, v. 14

D. Proclamation, v. 15

VIII. Implications

A. The Sabbath Is about Worship!

B. Sabbath Worship Corrects Our Thinking About God and the Wicked

C. Jesus the Anointed One Finds Delight in the Sabbath Day

D. The Benefits of New Covenant Corporate Worship Are even Greater than those of Old Covenant Corporate Worship!

E. We Ought to Worship Corporately, Morning and Evening, if we want to be Mature Christians!

Manuscript

As many of you know, the Psalms were divided into 5 books by the authors of Scripture. The book is not just an anthology of 150 worship poems. It is arranged in a particular order, and it moves from Psalms 1 & 2, the “gateway Psalms” that lay out the twin themes of Torah and Messiah that will dominate the rest of the book, to Psalms 145-150, which close the book in a fireworks show of praise. In between, of course, we cover a lot of territory. One pastor I really respect¹ has spent a lot of time studying the flow of the Psalms, and his conclusion is that book 1 deals with Confrontation, as David fights to establish the Kingdom. Book 2 deals with Communication, as the message of Messiah’s reign is proclaimed among the nations. Book 3 deals with Devastation, as it talks about the seeming failure of the covenant promises and the exile of Israel and Judah. The fourth book deals with Maturation. Where do you go after devastation? When everything you knew and trusted has been overrun by Babylon and destroyed, what do you do? Well, you grow up. You mature in your faith. And that’s exactly what book 4 deals with.

Go back to the first Psalm of book 4. That’s Psalm 90, and it’s written by Moses. Where was Moses when he wrote this Psalm? Either in Egypt or in the Wilderness. We know he wasn’t in the promised land. That’s the important theme. The idea is that Psalm 90 is the words of an exile. Fast forward to the last verse of the last Psalm of book 4. (Yes, I know this isn’t the last verse. But the last verse is a word of praise. It fits with the theme of worship transcending the difficulties of exile.) What does the Psalmist plead for there? “Save us, we pray, *and gather us from among the nations*” (106:47). Where was this Psalmist? He was in exile! He, and the people of God as a whole, are not in the Promised Land. They have been evicted from life there. They are out in the hard cruel world. So this literary device of *inclusio*, whereby book 4 of the psalms starts and ends with the same theme, shows that everything in the middle also deals with that theme. This book is the book about what to do in exile. This book is the book on maturing in the faith.

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 2015).

So why should you listen this morning? Because you need to grow. You need to get stronger. You need to be better equipped to live as a Christian in this anti-Christian world. What if you're not a Christian this morning; why should you listen? For information. You're here among Christians; you might as well learn what we believe maturity looks like. But more importantly, because we're talking about you. Many of the Psalms of book 4 and of the whole Psalter deal with the destiny of the wicked. That's you, if you don't believe in Jesus. So listen.

If you listen, what will you hear? What will be the main theme of this sermon? It will set out to prove that Sabbath worship is the path to maturation and joy in exile. Do you want maturity? Do you want joy? Then worship God by listening to His word.

I. The Context: Book 4 of the Psalter

We just talked a little bit about book 4 of the Psalter. But I have more to say on the theme. We know, as I just said, that the whole book deals with exile from the Promised Land because it begins and ends with that theme. But what about the interior of the book? How does it flow?

A. Dwelling in God culminates in Sabbath worship

Well, it begins its flow with the idea of dwelling in God. Moses, the rootless wanderer, not at home in Egypt, not at home in Midian, not at home in Canaan, prays to God. And how does he open his prayer? By saying that God has been our dwelling place in all generations. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. Our home is "in God," not in a mystical sense but in a metaphysical and spiritual sense. We belong in His presence. It is in Him that we find the place where we can live, the person for whom we can live, the power and life by which we live, and the plan according to which we live. We are in God in the sense that God is everywhere, and that of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. So God is our dwelling place. Ps. 91 repeats this theme. We must dwell in the Secret Place of the Most High, abiding under the Shadow of the Almighty. Take refuge in God! Then you will be satisfied with long life. Moses' complaint in Ps. 90 is that our lives are short, brought to an end by God's wrath. The response, in Ps. 91, is that the one who continues steadfastly to abide in God, even in exile, will be blessed with long life and salvation. Well, where does this theme of dwelling in God find its culmination? Right here, in Ps. 92, following on the heels of Pss. 90 & 91. When you dwell in God, what do you do? You engage in Sabbath worship. That's the message of the text. You move from dwelling in God to praising Him on the Sabbath day.

B. Sabbath worship is the path to maturation and joy in exile

Psalm 92 is not an isolated phenomenon. In fact, it is only the first of the largest unit in book 4. This is the group of Psalms from 92 to 100, all of them dealing with them of God's kingly reign and our worshipful response. Yahweh Reigns! Therefore, worship Him! That's the message of (say) Psalm 96, the centerpiece of this section. With four Psalms of Yahweh the King on either side of it, what does it say? It says to worship God because He is king. It says to worship Him corporately, calling on entire peoples and nations to do so. Thus, though only Psalm 92 mentions the Sabbath, it is the first of 9 Psalms that together celebrate corporate worship and call on people everywhere to worship God with great joy.

As the core of book 4, then, what does this mean? Well, this is the book on how to deal with exile. Yet it is not morose. It is not gloomy. It is vibrant, joyous, almost raucous in its mood of praise. We conclude that the people of God in exile grow in their ability to celebrate His status as King through their corporate worship. We conclude that maturation, meaning the ability to rejoice in exile, comes through worship. Our psalm this morning highlights the fact that maturation comes specifically through Sabbath worship, though it certainly does not exclude worship on other days of the week. Moses and the other psalmists don't seem to find exile debilitating; rather, as the book progresses they seem to get stronger in faith.

C. "The Sabbath Day:" A Day to Corporately Delight in God

I've been throwing around this word "Sabbath" a lot, because it's a word that's right here in the text. As you may know, this is the only Psalm "for the Sabbath day" in the entire Psalter. That's part of why I'm spending so much time on this word "Sabbath." It's important. This Psalm provides a key insight into what the Sabbath is all about. But before we can understand what it means to mature through Sabbath worship, we need to be clear on what the Sabbath is. What is the Sabbath? Well, it cannot be summed up by saying, "It's Saturday! It's Sunday!" No. At its root, the Sabbath is a day to delight in God. It comes from the Hebrew word meaning "pause" or "rest" or "stop." The name is built on the idea that it's a day of ceasing, a "day of rest" as we call it in English. That term has become so bastardized, though, that I hesitate to use it. "Day of rest" sounds like a day when you don't do anything. But the Biblical picture is very different.

1. Its Origin: Creation, Gen. 2:2-3

Turn with me back to Genesis 2. Here we see the conclusion of the creation account. God created in six days. On the seventh, what did He do? He literally "sabbathed" on the seventh day. That's the Hebrew verb. He paused; He stopped; He rested. He blessed this day, in all its weekly recurrences. And He did it because He stopped working.

Now, why did God do this? Was it for Himself? The answer is clearly "no." Jesus tells us that the Sabbath was made for man. Therefore, God stopped on this day and blessed this day for our sakes. He did it for you and for me. In what sense? Well, as an example for us and as a blessing to us. He stopped working to show us that we should stop working. He blessed the day in order that we might be blessed in entering into its blessing.

2. Its Nature: Sacred Time, Gen. 2:3

But He did more than stop working. He did something else, something that the next verse tells us: He "hallowed" or "sanctified" the seventh day. Now, this is the only holy thing in the entire book of Genesis. Only once in this entire first book of the Bible is God mentioned as making something holy. And it is not a place or a thing, but a time — a particular day. The Sabbath day is so called because it is the day that God rested on and the day that He made holy. And, as God told Peter on another occasion, What God has made holy, do not call common!

So the Sabbath day is a day to stop working. It's a blessed day. It's a holy day. And therefore, it is a day that we profane at our own peril. If you go on to read the rest of the Old Testament, you'll find

out that holiness is dangerous. Holiness kills; it's a consuming fire. Beware how you handle God's holy day!

3. Its Function: Spiritual Refreshment through Worship, Ex. 31:12-17; Lev. 23:3

But thankfully, God has given us instructions on what His holy day is all about. Notice first of all that He calls it "His" Sabbath. It is a day that belongs to God. It is His day of rest that we imitate. Notice how you keep it: you treat it as holy. "Breaking" and "profaning" it are one and the same thing. And the basic way to profane it is to work on it. Work is the thing God abstains from on the Sabbath; work is the thing we should abstain from on the Sabbath. The Fourth Commandment clarifies that not only should we personally not work, but that we shouldn't make anyone else work. By why? Why don't we work? Well, again, because God doesn't and because God finds refreshment on the Sabbath day. What kind of refreshment is this? It is the refreshment of delighting in Himself. For us, it is the refreshment of delighting in God.

See how perfectly this ties in with Psalm 92? When you're an exile, driven away from home, how do you grow? By spending the Sabbath day delighting in God. Just as God was refreshed in Himself, so we must refresh ourselves in Him. That's the function of the day. The ceasing from work is not the goal; the ceasing from work is a means to the goal of growing in our ability to delight in God. Notice that Leviticus 23:3 commands that the Sabbath day be used for a "holy convocation," or what we call a worship service. The Sabbath was, from the beginning, about getting together to worship God! To that end, we cease from working and cease from making other people work so that they too can get together to worship God.

4. Its Change to the First Day of the Week, John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7

Well, at its origin the Sabbath was clearly the seventh day of the week. But in the New Testament, we see Jesus and the Apostles celebrating the first day, the day of resurrection, by gathering for corporate worship. Jesus met with the apostles on the Sunday of His resurrection and the next Sunday, as you can see in John 20. Paul led the Christians of Troas in a worship service on the first day of the week, apparently staying 7 days so that he could make it happen. Why did Jesus and the apostles change from the seventh day to the first day? Because the seventh day celebrating the completion of the work of creation; the first day celebrates the completion of the work of redemption.

For some intense, concentrated Biblical theology on the Sabbath day, turn to hymn #392 in your *Trinity Hymnal* (1990). Sunday is the day of creation, the day of Resurrection, the day the Spirit was given at Pentecost. Sunday is the Pisgah from which we view our promised land of Heaven. Sunday is a fitting day to fulfill the promise of the Old Covenant Saturday Sabbath!

5. Its Challenge to Us: Do You Dare Stop? Do You Trust God's Promise?

And finally, though we haven't even gotten out of the title yet, this is a fitting place for a little application. The Sabbath is a challenge to a 24/7 world. The Sabbath is God's way of saying, "Do you trust me enough to stop?" It's a challenge to our greed, to our materialism, to our focus on worldly success. It asks us to let go of striving, to take a break for a day, and to find our identity strictly in God rather than in work. It asks us to let the laundry go, to let the dishes go, to forego all non-essential

works and thoughts about our worldly business and just enjoy God. God promises that we can have a day off and that nothing bad will happen to us. It's a time of blessing, of entering into the holiness which God has given to this day. Will you do it? Will you trust God in this day?

Well, with that background in place, with that understanding that God's people mature by worshipping Him on the day He has specifically set aside for the purpose, we turn to look at Psalm 92 itself.

II. The Proposition: Worship Is Good, vv. 1-3

The key idea of this psalm, its proposition, is announced right at the beginning: it is good to worship God. All of these parallel thoughts in the first three verses are different aspects of worship. To thank God, to bless Him, to sing His praise and declare His glory — all of these are different ways of worshipping Him. If you've been paying attention to our bulletin, you know that we worship God in all these ways right here in our congregation, and that virtually all other churches on earth continue to worship God in these ways. We give thanks to Him in our prayers and in our hymns. We sing praises to Him with musical instruments and harmonious sound. We declare His covenant faithfulness and steadfast love every Sabbath morning right here in this building in word and sacrament. It is my hope that we will return in the evening to declare His truthfulness at night.

A. Worship Ascribes Glory to God

The key definition of worship is ascribing glory to God. It's telling God how glorious He is, focusing on how great He is, letting our hearts and minds and mouths think about and talk about only one thing: how wonderful God Almighty is. That's why we come together here. That's what we're trying to do.

We do this verbally, as we talk. That's why we read the Scripture, why we pray in a known language, and why I preach in a known language. We are verbally telling about God's mighty works. That's a key part of worship. Some people use the term "worship" to refer to the singing part of the service. Yes, singing is worship! But so is verbal proclamation without music. Every one of these activities described in vv. 1-3 is a element of worship; it's something that God tells us to do as part of worshipping Him.

Singing, too, is an element of worship. It's our way of beautifying the praises of God. What sounds better, me talking or all of us singing? But it's also a way of reaffirming our corporate solidarity. We worship God together. It's about harmonious sounds, as every voice blends in singing praise to God. Paul tells us to sing to one another. We are praising God, and we're doing so with and in front of each other. If we all tried to talk at once, it would be confusion. If we all tried to verbally pray or verbally preach at once, it would be chaos. Such Babel represents the antithesis of what God loves. But if we all sing together, it is supposed to sound good. Indeed, theologically it says, "Father God, we are all here together to worship you. Our united voices signal our united hearts."

B. Worship Communes with God

But here's the other thing: Worship is done in the presence of God. The psalmist opens by saying worship is good, and then he immediately starts addressing God. Why? Because God is right there. He's in God's presence, talking to Him about the act of talking to Him. We are in God's presence, and I'm preaching to God as well as to you every time I get up. I'm telling Jesus about His own word.

That's why it's my responsibility to preach accurately and faithfully: I'm standing in the presence of Almighty God. That's why you need to listen; you're sitting in the presence of Almighty God. Either way, God is here and we are getting to know Him by the very act of worship.

You get to know a human being by being together and talking together. What do you think worship is? Being with God and talking to Him. We speak to Him in prayer and in song. He speaks to us in the reading and preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the pronouncement of the greeting and benediction. Worship is not a monologue, and that would remain true even if I led every part of the service. Worship would be a monologue if it was just me standing up here talking. But the whole idea of worship, the whole reason we consider this to be important, is that God's word is available here. With all due respect, it's not too strong to say that you come every week because God's doing the talking. You worship regularly, which the Psalmist symbolizes by saying "morning and night."

Maybe you've been to hear a motivational speaker. Maybe you've even been multiple times. But I can guarantee that no one in this room goes to hear a motivational speaker every single week. Why not? Because that guy is saying his own stuff. He's giving you some good stuff that he came up with. And that's why he has to travel around and speak to different audiences every night. People who do have the same listeners every day talk about different things. They read articles. They interview guests. They talk to callers. But we don't do that here. We don't interview various personalities. I don't read opinion pieces from the *New York Times* or even the *Gillette News-Record*. Why? Because we are getting to know God. We speak to Him, and He speaks to us. In fact, brothers and sisters, corporate worship is the *climax* of communion with God. We get to know God better in this time together than we do at any other time. Yes, private prayer is extremely important. Private reading is very important. Getting alone with God is necessary — but getting together with God and His people is what moved and motivated Jesus Christ and the psalmists. And it should be what moves and motivates you. In heaven, how will we be worshipping God? Corporately.

We should worship continually. "Morning and evening" doesn't mean that "I never praise God at lunchtime." It means that in the morning, in the evening, and at every time in between you are praising God, delighting in God, mentally and verbally and musically ascribing glory to God. Obviously, it's not possible on this earth to be involved in corporate worship all the time. That's why we say that all of life is worship. But nonetheless, God offers and commands special times of worship, when we gather together to do all of these things in a heightened way.

So worship is good. Worship ascribes glory to God. Worship addresses God and listens to God. Worship *communes with God*. We will get into application of this Psalm much more next week, but for now, let me leave you with this. Do you want to be a mature Christian? Do you agree with Jesus that the Old Testament is enduring and profitable? Well, the Old Testament clearly tells us that the way to mature as a Christian is by corporate worship. The premier day for this worship is the Sabbath day, which is mentioned in the title of this Psalm and is the day God has made holy for the great work of worshipping Him. How will you keep the Sabbath? How will you use it for worship? As an exile and a sojourner in this world, how will you seek maturation in Christ?

I'll see you next Sunday. Amen. [Part 1 ends here]

But the psalm doesn't stop there. Oh no. It gives five reasons why worship is good.

III. First Reason: It Provides an Outlet for our Joyous Triumph, v. 4

The psalmist says, furthermore, that God's works made him glad, and he triumphed in those works. This is talking creation and this is talking providence. Whatever God has made, we rejoice over it. Whatever God brings to pass, we rejoice over it. The psalmist is saying here that he is so full of joy that he'll burst if he doesn't let it out. That's why it's a good thing to worship God: He can't stop himself. He can't contain his exuberance.

Do you feel this way? When you get here on Sunday morning, are you quivering with anticipation? Do you feel like you have a backlog of things that make you so glad you can hardly wait to burst into God's praises? I don't always feel that way. If you read the rest of the book you'll see that the psalmists didn't always feel that way. But objectively speaking, *should* you feel that way? Is there enough in God's works of creation and providence that you can always be overflowing with triumphant exultation in what He's done? What about His work of redemption? Does that make you full of joy? Brothers and sisters, wild horses shouldn't be able to keep you away from worship. You should, quite simply, be longing to praise God in the presence of His people more than you long to do anything else!

IV. Second Reason: The Magnitude of God's Thoughts as Seen in His Works, v. 5

But there's more. Why else is worship good? Because God's thoughts are so incredibly amazing. They are deep. O depth! That's what Paul says. That's what Augustine says. That's what the greatest theologians in the history of the church have always said. O depth! How deep are God's thoughts? How magnificent are His works? Can you see the merest bud of springtime and fail to fall down in worship? Can you see the three perfect little babies born in this congregation in April alone and not praise the perfection of God's works? Can you behold the Big Horn mountains or the providential scope of God's dealings, whereby He raises up kings and puts down kings, without standing in awe? Think about the order and beauty in the universe. Consider the case of blocks in a box designed to store them. If you shake the box, the blocks will assemble themselves into a perfect pattern. How is that possible? How can the application of random energy produce greater order? Because of the higher design of the box and the blocks. Somebody made that box so that would happen. Well, this entire universe works together like that. Instead of chaos, we have cosmos — which, if you recall, is also the Greek word for order, beauty, and adornment. What do cosmetics and the cosmos have in common? They are both beautiful. Oh depth!

All of these things combine to show why worship is a good thing. It's a good thing to ascribe glory to the one who ordered everything from the stars to the sub-atomic particles. It's a good thing to commune personally with the one who has the whole world in His hands.

V. Third Reason: The Wicked's Temporary Flourishing Underscores God's Eternal Exaltation, vv. 6-9

The psalmist goes on to articulate a third reason why worship is good: God lasts forever, and His enemies don't. If you're a non-believer, here's the part where we're talking about you. Or, more

importantly, here's the part where God is talking about you. He says that you don't get it. He says that fools look around and see the wicked prospering. They see notorious villains like Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton steps away from the White House. They see ex-KGB strongmen running Russia, and South Africa and Iraq slipping into chaos. They see morally bankrupt communist party functionaries keeping hundreds of millions of people in poverty in China. And what do they conclude? That crime pays! That being evil is a decent choice, and one that might lead to wonderful wealth and power.

If you think that, you're a fool. If you think that people with no moral compass, who sleep around and yell whenever they want to and don't even try to be good — if you think that they are prospering and doing well, think again. Their temporary exaltation is only the prelude to permanent destruction. If you think your life without God is pretty good, you're in for a huge surprise.

Why? Because God is exalted forever. He is on high forevermore. That, by the way, is the key declaration of these Psalms about God's reign. No matter what we're going through down here, no matter how bad our exile is getting, God is still exalted. He is still on high forevermore. No matter what pollution we put out here on earth, it won't reach the stars. Evil doesn't besmirch them. And the same is even more true of the exalted throne of God Himself.

Why is this a reason to worship? Because we ought to praise the one who is so exalted. We ought to contribute to that exaltation. Also, we ought to commune with the exalted one. If the President invites you to the White House, you go. If God invites you commune with Him, you come to church! That's the idea here. God is on high forevermore. God rules. God reigns. Whatever happens comes, ultimately, from Him. He is the first cause of everything that takes place, and His glory is the final cause of everything that comes to pass. He works all things after the counsel of His own will. Who has known the mind of the Lord? And who has been His counselor? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever! Amen.

And thus, this mighty God who reigns on high will scatter His enemies. We Christians are scattered among the nations. We have here no continuing city. We have no Christian commonwealth of which we can say, "My citizenship is here, firmly in the commonwealth of earth." Nope. Your citizenship is in heaven, and from it you await Christ's return to gather His people to Him. The destiny of the wicked is opposite to that. The wicked will be scattered. The wicked will be isolated from one another and from God. The wicked won't flourish for long, but God will flourish forevermore.

VI. Fourth Reason: The Anointed One's Exaltation, vv. 10-11

When a horned animal raises its horn, what is it doing? It's showing its power. It's declaring its might. It's telling you to be careful what you do, and to beware how you offend its high mightiness. The horn is a symbol of power and strength, and throughout the Bible you will see it used as such. When you hear that God has lifted someone's horn, that means He has empowered that person.

Not only has the psalmist had his horn lifted, though; he also says that he has been anointed with green oil. He has been deeply refreshed by the blessings of God. He is, in fact, claiming to be The Anointed One, in some fashion.

What am I saying? Merely this: that Jesus Christ is the true speaker of this Psalm. He is the Anointed One who triumphs in the works of His Father. He is the one who sets us an example of

worship. Look at Psalm 22, where Jesus says, “I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee.” How do we know it was Jesus saying that? Because Hebrews 2:12 tells us that these are ultimately the words of Jesus Christ Himself. Yes, this Psalm was written centuries before Jesus was born as a man. But it was not written before He existed as the Eternal Son of God! Yes, in some sense we all have an anointing and empowerment from God. But the full referent of these verses is and only can be to Jesus the Anointed One, the one whom God anointed for the task of saving a people from sin for worship.

Thus, it is Christ who triumphs over His enemies. He looks on them; He knows what they’re planning, and so He laughs. He hears them, but they do not scare Him. “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies *your footstool*.” Who’s promise is that? The Father’s. To whom did He promise it? To the one King David called Lord. To the one anointed as a priest like Melchizedek. To the one whose horn will be exalted.

Turn back with me a page to Psalm 89:19-29. What do we read here? We read about David. He is anointed as king; his horn is exalted. But does this David sound like the David described in the books of Samuel? Or does He sound like David’s greater Son? David’s dynasty ruled, in an earthly sense, for about 400 years. But this King rules forever. Indeed, I think you and I can agree that the full referent of this language is and has to be Jesus Christ.

Well, if the Anointed One of God rejoices in His exaltation, can’t we rejoice in His exaltation? Can’t we respond by praising God and communing with God? Jesus Christ loves to worship His Father. He has privileged us to be little anointed ones, to have our horns exalted in union with Him. And so, just as He loves to worship, so we should love to worship. In fact, we should love to worship *Him*. He is high and lifted up, worthy of all worship, just like the Father and the Spirit. No longer do we need to fear our enemies; Jesus knows their every move. He looks on them; He hears them; and He will triumph over them.

VII. Fifth Reason: The Blessings that Come from Corporate Worship, vv. 12-15

Well, the Psalmist goes on with more reasons that worship is good. He contrasts the destiny of the wicked with that of the righteous, and then he explains how those planted in the Lord’s house flourish. This is the first time that the Psalm has mentioned righteousness. In one sense, it seems to come out of nowhere. But in another sense, I think we can understand righteousness as the product of worship. The person who dwells with God and praises God will become this person who is righteous. In other words, the Psalm isn’t switching topics in verse 12. It isn’t talking about this new person, “the righteous man,” who hasn’t been mentioned heretofore. Not at all. Rather, it’s talking about the same old theme of worship.

A. Righteousness, v. 12

The righteous man flourishes! I’m going to go out on a limb here (which palm trees don’t have) and say that since this verse clearly parallels the next verse, it should be interpreted in light of the next verse. The righteous flourish because they are planted in God’s house. That’s what v. 13 clearly says. But I think we can extrapolate it to verse 12, thus yielding the meaning that the righteous become righteous by being planted in God’s house.

What does that mean, to be planted in the courts of God? Well, the temple was God's house. That means that God lived there, just like you live in your house. To go to the temple was to go into the presence of God, just as coming to my house means to come into my presence. The righteous person is righteous because he spent time with Jesus Christ the righteous one. The righteous person is righteous because Christ has imputed righteousness to him. The righteous person has spent time with Jesus in His house — that is, in corporate worship. You didn't go to the temple to be alone with God. No, you went to the Temple to worship God in the throng. The house of God was where the people of God assembled.

What did we see every week in the Beatitudes? That to have the character quality described, one needed to spend time with Jesus. This week we see that to be righteous, you must spend time in God's house. That's what the text is implying.

B. Flourishing Growth, v. 13

But more than righteousness, corporate worship produces flourishing growth. The wicked spring up like grass, which grows quickly and withers quickly. But God promises that the days of His people will be like the days of a tree. A tree grows slowly and withers slowly. If it's planted by a good water source, it doesn't wither at all. Go back to Psalm 1: the righteous man is like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

Remember, this fourth book of the Psalter is about maturation. How do you grow? How do you flourish like a Lebanese cedar? By being planted in the house of God. By being incorporated into the church. The temple may have had literal trees in the courtyard, but Paul talks about being grafted as a branch into the olive tree which is God's people. Jesus talks about being a branch in the vine. The Psalmist here talks about being a tree in the courtyard. It's the same image! It's talking about a vital union with the body of Christ such that His life flows into you, making you flourish. The application to church membership is obvious. The application to church attendance is obvious. Unless you abide in the courts of God, in the vine Jesus Christ, in the nourishing root and fatness of the olive tree, you will wither and die. You will not grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Your faith won't flourish in the desert of exile. You dwell in God by dwelling in the courts of God through corporate Sabbath worship!

C. Fruitfulness, v. 14

And what's the promise to those who are in this condition? What does God say about them? They will be fruitful. They will flourish forever.

What kind of fruit do you think these people who are so integrally united to Jesus by means of His church will bear? Paul calls it the fruit of the Spirit. Those who take this union seriously will bear love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, meekness, faith, and self-control. Those united to Christ will bear the fruit of righteousness.

But the psalmist tells us that it's not just union with Christ; it's union with His people. It's belonging in His house, where the body comes together to worship Him. Remember how Psalm 22 portrays Jesus singing God's praise in the midst of the congregation? Remember how Revelation portrays the worship in heaven as corporate worship? Well, the climax of our worship here on earth should be corporate. "Come, let us worship and bow down," says the psalmist in this section of book

4. It's not, "Come, let *me* worship." That would be not as great, not as awesome. Yes, you have a personal relationship with Jesus and you need to spend time with Him in private. But what's more honoring: you saying, "Thank you, Jesus," or 50,000 people shouting Hosannas?

Furthermore, being planted in God's courts is essential for continued fruitfulness. How do you abide in the vine your whole life through? By abiding in the church. By continuing to drink from the means of grace. The older people in this church are wonderful examples of what it means to be fruitful in old age. They are more full of the Spirit than ever; they are better at being what God has called them to be. Do you want to be a grace-filled old person? Then devote yourself to corporate worship.

D. Proclamation, v. 15

What happens when you are fresh and flourishing? When you're a godly person, it becomes clear to everyone that God is upright. When you are present in God's courts, here so much that you resemble a tree that's rooted to the spot, it proclaims the greatness and righteousness of God! Do you want it to be obvious from your lifestyle that God is upright? Do you want to make it clear by what you do that you think God is absolutely trustworthy? Do you want to show that God is totally free from the taint of any and all unrighteousness? Then worship Him. Glorifying God is a benefit of corporate worship.

All of these benefits are reasons that worship is good. It is good to worship because it gives us righteousness, growth, and fruitfulness. It helps us to proclaim the uprightness of God Himself! That is extremely good. That's a great reason to commune with God. Notice, too, that one of the rewards of ascribing honor to God is that you get to proclaim how honorable He is! Ascribing glory to God means letting the world know just how wonderful He really is.

VIII. Implications

Well, what can we take away this morning? What should we have learned from this Psalm?

A. The Sabbath Is about Worship!

Well, a Psalm for the Sabbath day begins a group of Psalms that are all about worship. Why is that? Because the Sabbath is all about worship! Leviticus 23:3 tells us that the Sabbath was a day for a "holy convocation"--that is, a day for exactly what we're doing right now. It is a day to gather together to worship God in holiness.

That means that the Sabbath is not about catching up from the week. It's not about physical rest from the cares of the week. It's not about giving you time to finish your taxes or your laundry. The Sabbath is about worship! It's about ascribing glory to God and about communing with God. Now, if a day is about something, doesn't it make sense that the whole day should be given over to that thing? Who among us think that Christmas can be properly celebrated in an hour and half? No, the whole day is given over to celebrating the birth of Jesus. In the same way, if the Sabbath is about worship — and it is, as the text signals in every way — then surely the whole of the Sabbath ought to be given over to worship. Flesh and blood cannot endure 24 solid hours of corporate worship. But we can at least worship God corporately morning and evening, and privately and in our families in between.

B. Sabbath Worship Corrects Our Thinking About God and the Wicked

Have you ever participated in a little hate festival, where you and your buddies sit around and discuss the demerits of so-and-so? If you haven't, please come see me afterwards. I want to know your secret!

For the rest of us, you'll know what I'm talking about because you've done it more than once. Some co-worker, some weird family member, some political personality or even some strange pastor — it's downright fun to sit and discuss how many ways he's a total loss as a human being, how none of his actions make sense, how everything he does is totally irrational. Well, what's your attitude toward the person you've maligned after you participate in one of those sessions? Do you feel better disposed toward him? Of course not.

Brothers and sisters, a tear-down session is the opposite of worship. A tear-down session is about reducing someone in your mind. Worship, though, builds up God in your mind. It changes how you think about Him. Further, worship is the opposite of the tear-down session in that a tear-down session is done in the victim's absence. Worship is done in God's presence. Worship is something you do *with God!* That explains its power to correct our thinking.

Everything that comes in the door is a catechism. It's teaching you something about the kind of world in which you live. Those TV shows you watch? They portray a particular worldview. Those people you work with? They explain reality in a certain way that may not be correct. Those books you read? They assume certain things are true and valid, and they downgrade the importance of others.

The postmoderns talk about hegemonic discourse. That's a fancy Greek and Latin term for a way of talking that exerts power. (A "hegemon" in Greek is a ruler.) Well, the hegemonic discourse in our society says what? You can tell me. You know its talking points by heart. We came from monkeys. We exist to fulfill ourselves. Discrimination and inequality are evil; everyone should be able to do what feels right, so long as he or she or it doesn't discriminate against any minorities or disadvantaged groups. We must protect animals and the environment from ourselves. And so on. As Christians, we radically question every premise of this hegemonic discourse. We disagree profoundly with it. And yet, since we hear it all day every day, we are in danger of believing it.

But the Sabbath is an antidote to that. It corrects materialistic thinking, because it shows that we can trust God to provide for our needs. We can stop working and enjoy a day with Him. The Sabbath, and especially corporate worship, shows us the destiny of the wicked. "When I pondered to understand this [the prosperity of the wicked], It was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end" (Psa 73:16-17 NAS). When will we begin to understand the destiny of the wicked? In corporate worship.

C. Jesus the Anointed One Finds Delight in the Sabbath Day

Well, Jesus loves the Sabbath. He speaks in this Psalm, praising God on the Sabbath, declaring how great the Lord is! He too understands the destiny of the wicked based on what He sees and hears on the Sabbath day.

If Jesus does it, don't you think you should do it? If He sings this song for the Sabbath day, shouldn't we do so as well?

D. The Benefits of New Covenant Corporate Worship Are even Greater than those of Old Covenant Corporate Worship!

Well, this is what the New Testament says. The Old Covenant way of approaching God is comparatively inglorious. It could even be called a ministry of death in contrast to the glorious

ministry of life that New Covenant worship leaders have. That's Paul's whole argument in 2 Corinthians 3. And since this is the case, whatever grace and benefits came to God's people through corporate worship when this Psalm was written, we understand that far more will come to us through our worship today. We have access to Jesus! We have fellowship with God! We have the opportunity to hear from Him and speak to Him and ascribe to Him glory! Everything that the Psalmists here says worship did in his day is more so in our day.

E. We Ought to Worship Corporately, Morning and Evening, if we want to be Mature Christians!

So, in the sector of the Psalter that deals with maturation, we see worship commended in the highest possible terms. Worship is Good. Worship matures us. Do you want that maturity? Do you want that blessing? Do you want to be ready to cope with the challenges of exile? Then be here, in the house of God, praising God, growing into the mature believer He has called you to be. Evening worship isn't foolproof. It's not a way of manipulating God. But it is a way of responding to God's offer, of partaking of the grace and joy that He gives to everyone who sincerely worships Him. Worshipping morning and evening on Sunday isn't too much to ask or too much to give. In fact, it's only right. It's what you were created for. Amen.