

The Church's Seniors

Psalm 71:1-24

Halifax: 5 August 2018, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

In our sermon series on *The Christian in Every Stage of Life*, we have come today to *The Church's Seniors*.

- But I want you to know that this is not the final stage. We will be looking at death and the resurrection as well.

As I was working on this, it dawned on me that according to the scriptures, I am probably in this senior category myself.

- My wife and I are past the age to have children, we are grandparents, and we are more and more becoming the oldest living generation in our families as we each have one parent and many aunts and uncles now in the grave.
- That is probably a pretty good way of assessing when you enter the time of old age.

Our society sometimes has had an artificial age when we are eligible for retirement, but old age has more to do with our stage of life than it does an arbitrary year for retirement.

- We have an increasing number of us in our congregation who are reaching this stage, and we have been blessed to have some who are further along among us as well.

Today, as we did with other stages, we want to look at:

- the beauty of those in the church who are in this stage of life,
- at the sins that hinder that beauty,
- and then at how we ought to treat those who are in this stage.

For our Scripture reading, I have selected Psalm 71, a Psalm about old age.

- Please listen as I read it to you now.
- This is the Word of God and calls for your reverent attention.

Psalm 71:1-24: In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame. ² Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me. ³ Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You *are* my rock and my fortress. ⁴ Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. ⁵ For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You *are* my trust from my youth. ⁶ By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise *shall be* continually of You. ⁷ I have become as a wonder to many, but You *are* my strong refuge. ⁸ Let my mouth be filled *with* Your praise *and with* Your glory all the day. ⁹ Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not

forsake me when my strength fails. ¹⁰ For my enemies speak against me; and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, ¹¹ saying, "God has forsaken him; pursue and take him, for *there is* none to deliver *him*." ¹² O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! ¹³ Let them be confounded *and* consumed who are adversaries of my life; let them be covered *with* reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt. ¹⁴ But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more. ¹⁵ My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness *and* Your salvation all the day, for I do not know *their* limits. ¹⁶ I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only. ¹⁷ O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this *day* I declare Your wondrous works. ¹⁸ Now also when *I am* old and gray-

headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to *this* generation, Your power to everyone *who* is to come. ¹⁹ Also Your righteousness, O God, *is* very high, You who have done great things; O God, who *is* like You? ²⁰ *You*, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. ²¹ You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on

every side. ²² Also with the lute I will praise you—and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul, which You have redeemed. ²⁴ My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought to shame who seek my hurt.”

May the LORD bless the reading of His Holy and infallible word.

In this series, one of the things we are looking at is the beauty of those Christ has redeemed at each stage of life.

- It is the beauty that we pray for and aspire to have by the grace of God working in us.
- Certainly, we are all sinners and we have a long way to go yet, but the grace of God does do a powerful work in those who seek Him with their whole heart.
 - And this is especially so as the years multiply.
 - Because grace abounds, fruitfulness abounds.

So I want to begin this morning by looking at:

I. The beauty of a faithful Christian senior.

A. Old age is the time of his best.

- For years and years, Christ has been at work, refining, purifying, and sanctifying by His Spirit—and Christ is so very faithful and so very able to work in us.
- 1. A godly senior has cultivated a hope and trust in God.
 - This is a note that sounds through this whole Psalm.
 - a. It starts out with this note of confident trust in the LORD:
 - **Ps 71:1-3: In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame. ² Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me. ³ Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You *are* my rock and my fortress.**
 - The godly senior knows better than anyone that in the LORD he has protection—that God is a sure a rock and a fortress...
 - He has seen it time and again.
 - He has been in the place of doubting, only to see in the end that God was protecting him the whole time.
 - b. He can speak, as in verse 5 & 6, of God upholding him from his mother’s womb—even before he could discern it...
 - He can see how God used the hard times—even abuse—to prepare him to receive the gospel...
 - He can see how Christ protected him and drew him through various experiences and exposure to the gospel...

- for some from his earliest days—for some in bits and bites along the way until his faith was settled.
- Now he has gratitude and strong hope—cultivated hope.
- c. Indeed, in verse 14, he says, “I will hope continually”
 - He is sure of God for the future.
 - He has learned that He can be trusted and that He will always be true.
- 2. And therefore, the second thing that the godly senior has cultivated is true praise and thanksgiving.
 - a. As the godly senior spends time meditating on God’s word,
 - looking at God’s beauty revealed in Christ
 - Seeing more and more of the depths of His love and righteousness...
 - Seeing more and more His sovereign power and unsearchable glory...
 - Grasping the marvels of His mercy and grace...
 - praise and thanksgiving begin to flow more freely and more naturally—not in a way of duty that “oh, I ought to praise Him.”
 - It is true that we ought to, but it becomes praise and thanksgiving that flows out of his heart in a more spontaneous way.
 - b. You can see this note of praise flowing through this Psalm along with the note of trust and hope...
 - In verse 6, after speaking of God’s faithfulness to him since birth, he says, **“My praise (my song) shall be continually of you.”**
 - In verse 14, he says, **“And I will praise you yet more and more.”**
 - He knows that as he goes on, he will keep on seeing more and more of God’s faithfulness and beauty, and that this will lead to more praise.
 - It is something to look forward to.
 - After anticipating the resurrection in verse 19-21, he anticipates that the greatest praise of all will come forth!
 - In verse 22-23, he says: **Also with the lute I will praise you—and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul, which You have redeemed.**
 - The older he gets, the more he has to praise God about—because he knows Him and sees more of His glory.
- 3. And the third thing that the godly senior has cultivated is fruitful ministry.
 - a. He is able to encourage the younger generations to trust in God and to hope in His mercy—he is able to assure them that God will bring them through.
 - As I get older, I am delighted again and again to see how faithfully God was working for years in people when I could not see it.
 - All the things that were confused and hard and seemingly senseless, start to come together to make them fruitful.
 - Sometimes, it is even brokenness that comes after many years of sin—that leads to a beautiful embracing of Christ.

- I get to see how God was at work that whole time and it is just plain exciting.
- b. The godly senior wants to tell others what he has seen of God...
 - As verse 15 says: **“My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know *their* limits.”**
 - And as verse 17 and 18 say, that senior wants to make God known to the next generation: **O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this *day* I declare Your wondrous works. ¹⁸ Now also when *I am* old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to *this* generation, Your power to everyone *who* is to come.”**
 - He wants to assure others that they can safely trust in God...that He will never fail them—to say, “don’t you see how faithful God is? Don’t you see that you can fully trust Him?”
 - As verse 24 says: **My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long;**

TRANS> You see how hope and trust in God, praise to Him, and ministry to others goes hand in hand for the godly senior.

B. But what about the hardships of aging!

1. There are many—many that are referred to in this Psalm either directly or indirectly...
 - There is mention of failing strength in verse 9—and of ungodly persons seeking to take advantage of the aged believer in his weakness in verse 10...
 - It is a very difficult thing in old age that you sense your body decaying and wasting away—you are losing, perhaps your hearing, your eyesight, your vigour, your endurance.
 - Perhaps it is difficult to change a light bulb or stand up after sitting.
 - Maybe you are unable to drive and have to wait for others to take you around.
 - Food is not as good as it used to be—and sleep is not as sweet.
 - There is the loss of friends—your mother and your father, perhaps a child, your mentors are dying off, your friends start to depart...
 - perhaps even your spouse who was the companion of your youth.
 - Maybe your mind is not as sharp as it used to be, confusion is more frequent...
 - Perhaps you are experiencing pain in a variety of ways.
2. To the man or woman of the world, all of this is devastating.
 - All that they have lived for they are now losing.
 - It is all slipping away and there is nothing they can do about it—oh yes, they can put a good face on it—but the truth is—everything they have is slipping away.
 - Ecclesiastes paints the bleak picture of life under the sun ebbing away.
3. But how different it is for the godly senior!
 - a. The more difficult life becomes in this world, the more it prepares him for the next!

- More and more he rejoices, as we have seen, in his hope in God who has never let him down, whose strength has always been perfect in weakness.
- He knows that the deeper down he has been called to go in trials, the greater have been God's deliverances.
 - And now when death coming closer and closer, he knows that the resurrection is getting closer and closer—and that seeing his saviour is getting closer and closer.
 - He knows that even if he loses his mind, God will not lose His and that God will look out for him.
- Look at verse 20: **“You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth.”**
 - It is not that he expects to be free from trouble in this world—that is not how God works—
 - It is that God empties him and breaks him to lift him up to greater and greater heights of blessing.
 - He buries us and we turn to dust, only so that He might bring us up again from the depths of the earth!
 - Look at verse 21...
 - He expects both his greatness and his comfort to be increased, even by being brought down.
- b. Isn't it true—hasn't that happened time and time again?
 - Great and severe troubles come and they kill you, but then God raises you up to be stronger than ever.
 - I keep seeing Him do that in peoples' lives lately.
 - I keep seeing Him do it in my life.
 - I don't realise how much I need to be changed until God changes me.
 - I can't understand why things are happening the way they are—why my prayers are not seeming to be answered.
 - But after He raises me up with new life, then I can see that God was so very merciful and wise in the way He dealt with me!
 - I am His child and He was doing just what was needed.
- c. The godly senior has seen that time and time again.
 - The trials and the losses do not destroy his hope and trust and his praise and his ministry to others...
 - They only increase them.
 - I don't mean that the trials are not difficult—they are extremely difficult.
 - They are, as it says, **great and severe troubles**.
 - But the comfort through it all, as is breathed through this whole Psalm, is that God will bring us through them to greater blessing than ever.

TRANS> That is the way the LORD works in the godly as they age.

- It is a beautiful thing to look forward too—not an easy thing, but a beautiful thing.

II. But there are sins that can hinder this beautiful walk.

- I must speak against these sins.

A. But first, let me dispose of a false notion.

- Never suppose that trials are a hindrance to godliness.
 1. It is very common to think this.
 - You see a nice person who gets on well in the world, but then old age comes and they change.
 - They become bitter and cynical, or they become anxious and self-centered.
 - And you assume that it is just the effects of old age.
 2. But you must not think that way.
 - The truth is that trials bring out what is in us.
 - You should know enough about yourself to know that you don't want all that is in you to be brought out... it would not be a pretty picture.
 - But it is good in the LORD because when our wicked ways hidden within are exposed, especially to us, we can turn to Christ for more grace.
 - Trials do that, but as we walk through them with the LORD, His grace working in us, and we are transformed by them.
 - We are purged and purified—we are softened rather than hardened because the Spirit works in us.
 3. Our goal, because we are born again, is to be more godly—at all costs, so trials are welcomed in that sense.
 - Notice that in Psalm 71, the godly senior's prayer is not that he will have no trials and hardships—
 - but rather that God will cultivate greater trust, greater praise, and greater ministry to others.
 - Look, for example, at verse 18.
 - Why does he pray that God will not forsake him?
 - Does he mean that God will not forsake him by allowing any kind of suffering to come his way so that he can have peace and quiet in his senior years?
 - No. For him, God's forsaking him would mean that he is unable to reach the younger generations with what he has learned of the LORD.
 - He says: **"Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to *this* generation, Your power to everyone *who* is to come."**
 - He wants to be a senior who is a blessing to the next generation.
 - He wants to be more engaged with ministry now than ever before.
 - He has walked with God longer and he has more to say about how faithful God is and he yearns to pass it on.

TRANS> But there are many seniors who are not like that.

- It is not nice to say that, but it is all too true.
- They see retirement as a vacation from everything including serving God.
 - The senior years should be the time of your most fruitful ministry.

B. Let's look at some of the sins that need to be forsaken.

1. The first one is the very selfishness that makes a senior feel entitled to retire from Christian service.
 - We are here as Christ was, not to be served but to serve.
 - The greatest and most honourable among us is the one who serves.
 - Jesus did not attain to old age in this world, but when He was on the cross, He was busy serving—praying for God to accept His sacrifice for us, ministering to the thief on the cross, looking after His mother.
 - But a selfish senior who feels entitled to indulge himself is one who has lost a godly focus and who will not be a blessing to the church.
 - Increasingly, this is an attitude that is being cultivated.
2. Usually when selfishness is about, complaining is not far off.
 - Too often, instead of the desire we see in Psalm 71 to praise God, there is a desire to speak of how difficult things are.
 - Indeed, there may be great difficulties, and there is a place for sharing these with your friends who will help you bear your burdens.
 - But it is much more important and much better for you and for everyone else if you turn your eyes upon the LORD and praise Him and thank Him and speak about Him to others.
- But what if you have no sense of His goodness and grace?
3. Bitterness is another destroyer of beauty in a senior.
 - There are many who look back on their past and they are seething about missed opportunities, about wrongs that were done to them, about abuse, about failure and disappointments.
 - There is anger toward parents or someone that abused you and you refuse to let it go.
 - You refuse to acknowledge that you deserve much worse than you got.
 - Not from the abuser, but from God who directed—yes *directed* the abuser.
 - The abuse we receive in this world should awaken us to the fact that we have sinned against God.
 - We have not been wronged... not by God's sovereign hand.
 - If we think we have, we certainly do not believe in hell and we certainly don't believe that it was necessary for God's Son to die on the cross if we were to be forgiven—in our minds, we don't even deserve the troubles we have had in this world.
 - But I declare to you in the name of the LORD that it was necessary for Christ to die if our sins were to be pardoned!
 - You are that bad and so am I—hell is where we belong right now!
 - It is only extreme mercy in Christ that delivers us.
 - Until you accept that, you will never be a godly person—you will become a bitter old person, seething with resentment for all the injustice you perceive that has been done to you.
 - You are a wretched one.
 - But Jesus Christ came to save wretched ones!
 - Don't dismiss that in a superficial way. He did!

- And if you come to Him, you will experience grace that will make you sweet.
 - You will look at those wrongs that were done to you as very little compared to what you have done to God and to what you deserve from His hand.
- You will have a story of the grace of God, reaching out to a sinner like you, to tell the church and the world into old age.
 - Instead of being a bitter old coot, you will be a channel of grace to all who come near you.

TRANS> I could go on listing things like indulgence, despair, depression, cynicism, self-pity, pride, laziness—and many others... that destroy the senior years.

- These are much worse than arthritis, heart disease, cancer, deafness, dementia, frailty, bereavement, poverty, and whatever else might come your way.

C. But the remedy for all sin is Jesus Christ.

1. It is never too late to turn to Him.

- You will say, “How can I cultivate godliness when I am old?”
- It is too late for me to turn to God now—most of my life is over—what can I do?

2. I will tell you.

- You can do what every godly senior does... you can trust your Saviour, you can praise your Saviour, and you can tell others of His grace and mercy.
 - There is plenty for you to do, and it is not some super work.
 - It is a walk with your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
 - You will know Him well enough if you turn to Him.
 - You can tell how you were hard and how you resisted Him, but how His grace would not let you go.
 - That will be as useful as the testimony of those who were kept by His grace from their mother’s womb.
 - It will give hope to others in the body of Christ.
 - Let go of your own self and come to Christ for forgiveness—casting yourself on Him for Him to save you.
 - That will be enough.
 - He will do the saving.

TRANS> What a beautiful part of the body of Christ seniors are when they repent!

- But now we need to turn to another subject...

III. How should the church treat her seniors?

A. First, she should honour them, simply because of their age.

- God’s law has this to say to us in Leviticus 19:32: **You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.**

1. You see that honour is to be shown just because the man is old.

- This is not a merit thing... it is simply to show respect to all old people because they are made in the image of God.
 - We are not to look at them as something to cast off with contempt.

2. Sadly, our society shows our ungodliness in the way we treat seniors.
 - Some ungodly societies worship the aged and make idols of them when they die, looking to them for protection.
 - This is not the right form of honour because it misses what their honour is... not that they are gods, but the image of God.
 - If you honour someone for something that they are not, you actually dishonour them.
 - If I honour my child for doing well in school when he has not done well at all, it is no real honour—it is a lie.
 - Our society, however, fails to honour the aged because we are so materialistic and so uninterested in wisdom that we see nothing to value in seniors.
 - When a person gets old in a materialistic world, everything is slipping away that they (and our society) hold dear.
 - They have done their time, and now they are ready to be cast off...get them out of the way... even hasten to send them to the grave... for they don't have much reason to live and we don't have much reason for them to live beyond sentiment.
 - You can see how it is entirely different when you look at godliness and wisdom.
 - For then, a godly older person has more to offer than anyone!
 - And because of this potential, we are to honour them all.
 - We honour them because they are in the place of those who ought to be wise and godly...
 - It is similar to wives submitting to their husbands, not necessarily because their husband is honourable, but because he is in the place of authority that God has given him.
3. Note well that showing honour is visible.
 - Here it speaks of rising up before them... standing to greet them... to welcome them... rather than staying seated before them.
 - If your honour is only in your heart, then you don't have any honour for others.
 - Our society is at war with visible expressions of honour for one reason—because we are at war with showing honour to anyone.
 - We don't want to use titles or to step aside to let a person go through or to wait for them to pass through a door.
 - And why is that?
 - It is because we are at war with God and we do not want to show true honour to Him.
 - Showing honour to our superiors is a way of showing that all honour derives from God, but we want God to be like the boy next door...
 - we don't want to show respect... even though the Bible tells us to.

B. Secondly, we should, in the church, serve together with seniors.

1. The social engineers of the late 19th century wanted to try to create model citizens.
 - They decided that the best way to have a society without factions that would submit to government was to break up the family.

- We began to divide everyone up according to age—to have them identify with their age group instead of with their families.
 - Then the schools and the politicians could train them up according to the ideals of the state because they would no longer be identified with their families.
 - It was very foolish of them, but many churches started to follow the world's model and divide up the family in the same way at church.
 - Sunday school, which at first was a way of reaching poor children with the gospel, was brought into the church and children were separated into young peoples' groups and seniors had their groups.
 - Some churches even have separate worship services.
 - The result was that we lost the pattern that God established for the church in which the old and the young minister together.
2. In Titus 2, you have the old men and the old women teaching the younger men and younger women some things...
 - Not in a classroom, but simply by being together and serving together.
 - Here is a scene where an older woman shows a younger woman how to change a diaper or how to make soup broth from chicken bones.
 - As they spend time together, talking and working, they are a blessing to each other.
 - In First John, the young men are described as being strong and the old men as knowing God the Father.
 - The benefits are obvious—the young men have vigour to work and the old men have wisdom to know how things ought to be done.
 - Together they make a powerful team!
 3. We need to do a lot of thinking about how to rectify the fragmentation we have.
 - One way is to invite parents to live with us in their senior years and for parents to go.
 - Another is to start talking more to each other.
 - And let the younger folks visit the elderly and help them out with things and let them help you out.
 - They have much to give if only we believed that today.
 - They have wisdom and insight that younger people just don't have yet.
- C. Finally we should thank God for godly seniors in the church.
1. It is His grace alone that has kept them in His kingdom all these years—and that has brought them into the kingdom in the first place.
 - His very preservation through hard times, despite their sins, is something to thank God for.
 - They often have stories to tell of how they have seen Him work over the years in themselves and in others.
 2. Give thanks for the firm trust they have in God.
 - If they are godly, they have seen God's unfailing righteousness as the godly old man says in Psalm 71.

- They have seen many fall away, but they have seen that God preserves all of His elect in marvellous ways.
 - Give thanks that when something bad comes along, the younger folks will think the sky is falling,
 - but the senior's anchor is in God's unfailing promises as the one who has, as Psalm 71:3 says, given commandment to save us.
3. It is God's grace that has made them beautiful and trusting and full of hope in the midst of their trials.
- Let the whole church join with our seniors in giving the glory of God:
 - **Psalm 71:22-24: Also with the lute I will praise you—and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul, which You have redeemed. ²⁴ My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought to shame who seek my hurt.**