

Gladness in Your Sovereign and Steadfast Goodness

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[0 : 00] Good, let's turn to our God's Word, shall we? And Joel Taylor is going to be preaching to us a bit later in the service from Psalm 92. We've sung a version of that this afternoon already, so please do turn your Bibles to Psalm 92.

And if you have a visitor Bible in front of you, we have plenty of Bibles available at the side, so do take a Bible if you need. That's on page 498 in the visitor Bible.

Psalm 92. A psalm, a song for the Sabbath.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High, to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work. At the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O Lord!

[1 : 10] Your thoughts are very deep. The stupid man cannot know. The fool cannot understand this. That though the wicked sprout like grass, and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever.

But you, O Lord, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O Lord. For behold, your enemies shall perish. All evildoers shall be scattered.

But you have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox. You have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies.

My ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar of Lebanon.

They are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in your courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green.

[2 : 14] To declare that the Lord is upright, he is my rock. And there is no unrighteousness in him. Amen.

May God bless his word to us this evening. Well, good evening, everyone. If you could please have your Bibles open to Psalm 92.

And we'll spend some time looking at it together this evening. Well, here in Psalm 92, we get an overture of rejoicing.

After perhaps what is regarded to be the lowest point in the Psalter in the previous Psalms. An overture of rejoicing that sets a new tune for the rest of the Psalms in this collection.

And so, fittingly, at the start of a new year, a time associated with new beginnings. Well, this Psalm teaches us significant and fundamental truths.

[3 : 20] Truths that would help us navigate our days ahead in this new year. Because, whilst it is a new year, the changing of a calendar itself, yet the pattern of life, the pattern to life, well, it doesn't alter much in its course, does it?

And, whilst it may be good for us to be thinking ahead, to be coming up with different resolutions for the new year, perhaps. Well, the Psalmist wants us all to be crystal clear on one thing.

One thing which he bookends the Psalm with, as we see in verse 2 and verse 15. And that is to keep faithfully declaring the Lord's name, to praise him. We'll consider later on where and when that looks like exactly.

But first, let's take a closer look together and consider how and why the Psalmist exhorts us to sing and to praise the Lord for. We'll do so in three parts.

First, looking at verse 1 to verse 4, as the Psalmist introduces his exhortation, we see that God's people are to praise the Lord gladly, for his goodness is steadfast.

[4 : 31] Then, verse 5 to verse 9, God's people are to praise the Lord reverently, for his ways are mysterious and mighty. And finally, verse 10 to 15, they are to praise the Lord expectantly, knowing that his people are purposeful and they will truly prevail and prosper.

So first, look at the introduction of verse 1 to verse 4. We are to praise the Lord gladly, for his goodness is steadfast.

In other words, the Psalmist is wanting us to consider what our response of praise looks like, especially towards God's past goodness. Look with me again at the Psalm.

A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath. It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High, to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

Well, I don't know about you, but the very first thing that my eyes were drawn towards when reading over these verses were those that spoke of the Lord's character, of his steadfast love, his faithfulness, almost like buzzwords to jump in and focus on.

[5 : 53] And perhaps the next thing would be the imperatives, to give thanks, to sing praises, and to declare. But I wonder, how many of us actually paused and noticed the first three words that the Psalmist begins with?

Look at verse 1. He doesn't just say that it is fitting, expected of us to be giving thanks and praise to the Lord, though that certainly is right and true.

But that's not what he opens with. What does he say? It is good. It is for our good that we give thanks and praise to the Lord.

Why? Well, likely because the Psalmist knows clearly just how fickle and capricious our minds actually are. That by nature, we humans are easily distracted and forgetful creatures.

That our default is to base our understanding, our confidence, on the things that we can see, on the things which are tangible. Just recall the Exodus generation.

[7 : 01] The people who not only had the Lord God called, rescued, and brought out of the land of Egypt, but also went before them by day and by night, in a pillar of cloud and fire, through the way of the wilderness.

And yet, shortly after crossing the Red Sea, just after three days of wilderness wandering, with no signs of water, what did they do?

Well, they turned and grumbled against Moses, against the Lord. And again, on the 15th day of the second month, after departing from Egypt and finding no food, what did they do?

Well, Exodus 16, verse 3 tells us plainly. They cried out, Would that we have died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full.

You see, this is why it is good, as the Psalmist puts it, to be giving thanks. Because how easily we forget what we already know to be true.

[8 : 03] To give thanks means to confess. And verse 2, to declare. It also means to avow and to acknowledge. But what are we to confess and to acknowledge?

Well, the Lord's steadfast love in the morning and His faithfulness by night. These two markers of time that we see here, morning and night, well, they are often associated in the Psalms with times of prayer, times of fresh hope and expectation, as well as a reminder of God's faithfulness.

Now, surely that does not mean that God's love is only attributed in the morning and His faithfulness only shown at night. Just imagine with me the sun and the moon. We particularly associate one with the day and the other with night, don't we?

Because that's when each is most visible to us. But regardless of whether we can see them or not, in the day or the night, well, both are still always there.

The sun doesn't cease to exist just because it's night. And likewise, the moon doesn't cease to exist just because it's day. And so I think the psalmist's intention is clear in reinforcing the truth about God's goodness, that His love and His faithfulness, well, there simply is no boundary to it, no limitations.

[9 : 33] God doesn't just clock off at 5 p.m., only available to respond to us the next day at 9 a.m. No. God's goodness is constant, unchanging, steadfast.

He has no out-of-office reply. He doesn't need to take a holiday from it. He never grows tired from it. God is good all the time.

And so by confessing, by praising Him regularly, well, it reminds God's people of just who their Lord God is. That not only does He have the authority and power to save them, but also He is more than abundantly able to sustain them.

If they were to wholly put their trust in God, well, they'll come to realize again that indeed they lack nothing. But also it is only good and fitting to be proclaiming God's goodness all the time, for He is good all the time.

We see then the psalmist's instruction to do so through the employment of musical instruments in verse 3, to the music of the lute and the harp and the melody of the lyre. But what is his attitude as he sings these verses?

[10 : 55] Well, verse 4. For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work. At the works of your hands I sing for joy.

The psalmist sings this song not begrudgingly, not bitterly, but with great gladness. Now, isn't it true as well, that those we know who will and who can sing truly with gladness and rejoicing in their hearts, well, they also are the ones who consciously spend time dwelling on God's character.

They are the ones who cherish and delight His word, dwelling and meditating on it in their hearts. They are the ones who remind themselves afresh of their Heavenly Father's goodness and faithfulness.

Because, you see, that is the answer. Hearts which are tuned to the truth of God's character, hearts that remember and recognize God's goodness in the past, are the hearts that will praise and rejoice gladly.

And so, friends, if you find that your song of praise today isn't one of heartfelt gladness, but actually of concealed grumbling, well, can I encourage you to think again and consider the answer that the psalmist offers us here.

[12 : 23] Consider the Lord's gracious goodness to each and every one of us, not just in our past circumstances, but most of all in Christ, our Lord and our Savior.

Consider the work of His hands, His work of salvation for you and for me, for that's the only thing that will turn our hearts once again into a song of gladness.

But that's not all the cause for rejoicing, for we see in verse 5 to verse 9, the psalmist then draws our attentions to the ways of the Lord, namely that they are mysterious and mighty.

And so, not only are we to praise gladly, but also we are to praise reverently. Look at verse 5.

How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep. Here we see the psalmist magnify the plans and the purposes of the Lord.

[13 : 28] And how he does so is first by humbly acknowledging his own creatureliness. And I think that's something of vital importance for us to grasp, isn't it?

Because you see, God being God, well, he isn't just a bigger, larger, better version of us. He isn't just a giant version of you and me, dwelling in the sky, above and beyond the clouds.

No. Rather, God is God, because He alone is the Creator. For we are but His creatures. And so, as the psalmist confesses that many of the Lord's way are simply incomprehensible to Him, too great, too deep, well, that's okay.

In fact, that is good. Because, again, unlike us, God alone is perfect in wisdom and knowledge. Nothing comes to Him as a surprise.

He doesn't, and He cannot grow in capacity of knowledge like we do, because He is all-knowing of all things, past, present, and future.

[14 : 37] And so, being unable to grasp all of God's mysteries, well, that actually is the grounds that demonstrate and prove that He is the Lord God Himself.

If the psalmist, you and I, can square all of God's plans and purposes neatly away, well, then God wouldn't be much of a God, would He? But having magnified the plans and the purposes of the Lord, well, we see the psalmist turn to address the age-old question, one that no doubt has baffled both Christians and non-Christians alike across time.

To those who question and doubt, how is it that a good God can or should allow the wicked, the ungodly, to flourish, to prosper, if He truly is good?

How is it that the scheming, the deceptive, those who practice the sleight of hand in their dealings, who always somehow seems to be the ones getting the promotion?

Why is it that those who have little or no regard for the sanctity of human lives, who freely engage in sexual immoralities, abusing their bodies, and yet somehow are the ones successful in conceiving in the first place?

[15 : 57] Why would God, if He truly is a good God, why would He allow His faithful ones to live under the oppression of great adversaries, to be facing severe and intense persecution, with some even to the point of martyrdom?

Think of the faithful churches in India, Iran, and China at the moment, but also true of thus faithful believers throughout the ages.

I'm sure we've all heard of statements like these echoed at some point in our own lives, and perhaps we might have thought so ourselves. We think surely if we were God, well, we wouldn't do things this way.

Yet we see the psalmist's response comes as one marked with remarkable humility and discernment. Verse 6, The stupid man, which also means the brutish man, cannot know.

And the fool, who is also regarded as the arrogant, cannot understand this, that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever.

[17 : 14] The psalmist has already acknowledged that we will never fully comprehend the mysteries of God's ways, for after all, the secret things belongs to God alone. And yet, what has been revealed, what has been made known and clear for our understanding, is this, that while it is true that the wicked and the evil may now flourish, that it may appear as if the Lord isn't taking into account of their punishment, that they seem to be in the positions of having, enjoying, and squandering it all.

Yet, that by no means equates to the Lord overlooking or failing to address them in due time. Why? Because the verdict is sure and certain.

They are doomed to destruction forever. In verse 9, They shall perish. All evildoers shall be scattered. You see, the psalmist, while having us consider the mysteries of God's ways, isn't trying to stir us to doubt and to question, but instead, He's calling us to marvel at the mightiness of His ways.

He, the Lord God, who is on high forever, who yields sovereign authority as judge over all of creation, well, His throne is in the heavens. And so, even though it's hidden, unseen in the present moment, well, it by no means implies that He, in any manner, is idle or inactive.

And so, God's people are not to make a judgment of Him based on the things seen in the world. Because nothing in this world is ever constant or exempted from fluctuations. And because, as impressive as things are in this world, well, they still belong to the created order.

[19 : 05] They are not supreme. But instead, God's people are to fix their eyes on the one who sits on the eternal throne, the mysterious and mighty creator Himself.

They are to take great and grounded reassurance in His mysterious and mighty ways, knowing that He governs and rules the world in accordance with His sovereign and steadfast goodness.

No injustice endured and suffered by His people for His sake will ever be in vain. No evil will go unpunished. But the Lord God will hold them all uncomfortable in due time.

And so, in the meantime, keep praising Him reverently. But finally, looking at verse 10 to 15, how does the psalmist exhort us to praise the Lord?

Well, expectantly. And He does so by reminding us clearly that even if it may not look like or feel like it, well, the reality is that God's people are the ones who truly and ultimately will prevail and prosper.

[20 : 19] Unlike the rebellious creatures soon to be destroyed by the regal creator, what do we see in these verses? Verse 10, But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox.

You have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies. My ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. Well, earlier we've seen a picture of God's enemies being humbled and punished.

Well, here we have instead a picture of the psalmist being honored and preserved. He is refreshed, renewed, anointed with fresh oil.

And notably, He shares in the victory that is secured by the Lord God. Notice verse 9, He speaks of the Lord's enemies who shall perish. Yet here in verse 11, He now sees the downfall of His enemies.

He hears the doom of His evil assailants. So even after facing trials and tribulations brought about by His enemies, by the saving grace of the Lord, which shields with an everlasting power, well, the psalmist knows that in keeping faithful, He will emerge and He will stand triumphant on that last day.

[21 : 42] And so He goes on expounding on that by drawing a contrasting picture for us in verse 12 to 14. Unlike the wicked who sprout like grass, the righteous flourish like palm trees.

The righteous grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Now likening the righteous to this imagery, well, it surely emphasizes that those who belong to the Lord God, they are enduring and prosperous, doesn't it?

Because they may not sprout as quickly as grass do, I mean, for a second, just think of your own gardens in summertime. Just how quickly the grass grows. Annoyingly quick, in fact, as you need to cut and mow it weekly.

You notice its visible growth over a short period of time for sure, but in reality, they are frail and ephemeral in nature, soon cut and thrown out.

Yet God's people are not like grass, but trees. They may appear slow, stagnant in growth compared to grass, yet when they grow, how strong, how majestic they are in comparison.

[22 : 56] And just notice again, what kind of trees are the righteous likened to? Palm trees. Palm trees, which were renowned for flourishing even in the harshest of conditions.

and the cedar, which was regarded as the most majestic tree of the ancient world. But it's not just that. Look also, where are they planted?

Verse 13, they are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in the courts of our God. God's people are anchored in the Lord God himself.

He is the source of their vitality, their strength, and their growth. So it's no surprise then what we read in verse 14, that they still bear fruit in old age, and they are ever full of sap and green.

Because unlike what our world regards, where according to the law of nature, to become old means to become redundant, well that cannot be anything but further from the truth for those who belong to God.

[24 : 01] Because God's people are not rooted in the things of this world, which waxes and wanes, but in the eternal, unchanging God himself. And we all know that to be true, don't we?

I mean, just take a look around you today. Look at all our older saints. They may have grown a full head of white hair, or perhaps for some, lost a full head of hair, but that certainly hasn't diminished their fruitfulness.

The encouragement, the prayers, the serving, the discipling that they still do, well certainly reflects a picture of fruitfulness that we see in verse 14, doesn't it? But perhaps some of you might be wondering, the psalmist sings of having seen the downfall of his enemies, but at what point does this happen?

Does the situation, his circumstances of verse 7, somehow change by the time he sings in verse 11? Well, unlikely so. Rather, this is where we see him sing and praise expectantly, to declare that the Lord is upright, he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

The psalmist sings with great certainty and confidence, because he sings by faith, not by sight. He has numbered his days in this passing world, and he knows to look through the only perspective that truly matters, through the lens of eternity.

[25 : 32] He recognizes that there is no need to be envious of, to be coveting after the flourishments which the wicked enjoy, because they are fleeting, temporary. But because the Lord God, he is upright, he is righteous, well, he is trustworthy.

His word cannot be anything else but true. And so the psalmist has absolute certainty and confidence in all that which God had spoken and promised he will eventually bring to pass.

And so he sings of the judgment, the destruction of his enemies as if they have already taken place. He sings of this reality of what God's people are truly like, those whose dwelling place is secure in none other than the Lord God himself.

And he praises expectantly for that day to come, even in the face of his present circumstances. But having considered the how and the why, coming back to the question at the start, where and when then are we to declare the Lord's name?

To be praising him with gladness, reverence, and expectancy? Now perhaps some of you have picked up on this earlier, but this is the only psalm in the Psalter that is entitled For the Sabbath.

[26 : 53] Now what was the Sabbath? Well, it marked a day of observing the Lord's rest, but surely it wasn't just meant to be a day of idleness, of doing nothing, of removing oneself to an isolated environment of peace and quiet.

God's people weren't just to work hard diligently during the week, only to get to the Sabbath day so that they could put on their pajamas, grab a nice cup of juice, fermented milk, whatever their hot chocolate equivalent was back then, and stay in bed.

No. Rather, the Sabbath day was a day that was to be kept holy. Exodus 20, verse 8. It was to be intentionally set aside with the emphasis of a gathered worship of God's people.

They were to put aside all other distractions, all other preoccupations, and to meditate on the divine. And so, it wouldn't be surprising if we found out that God's people, they actually sang the song regularly back then on the Sabbath day, as per the inscription, as they gathered to worship the Lord God, to remind one another of their utter dependence on their covenant God.

And what about us today? Well, we may not observe the Sabbath, as Israel did in the Old Testament, but we too intentionally set aside a day to gather and worship the Lord, don't we?

[28 : 13] What we refer to as the Lord's day instead. And we all know how significant, how great our corporate worship is in terms of how we declare the Lord's name.

Because it's not just whoever's up here preaching that is declaring the Lord's name. No. But each and every Lord's day, as we come together, as we encourage one another to keep continuing and striving in our walk of faith on this side of eternity, well, we are together declaring the Lord's name.

As we all grow in our trust and our delight in God, well, we are declaring the Lord's name together. And so, as just as ancient Israel did on the Sabbath, well, praising and declaring the Lord's name is significantly something that we all do together as one body of Christ on the Lord's day.

At the same time, that doesn't mean that we are only restricted to declare and praise God on the Lord's day, does it? Because what is our understanding of the Sabbath from the New Testament? Well, we're told that the Sabbath rest in the Old Testament was never the full substance itself, but rather a temporary and a shadow of what was still to come.

And as we see during Jesus' earthly ministry, he taught that the Sabbath was made for men and not men for the Sabbath. He clarifies that Sabbath wasn't just about a specific day, but rather a day of enjoying the rest that comes from God himself.

[29 : 51] And so, in Matthew 11, when we see Jesus speak to the crowds, well, what does he say? Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The rest that was foreshadowed on the Sabbath day to ancient Israel, well, its substance was always pointing forwards to be fulfilled in Christ. And we know now that Christ freely offers to any who would come to him, who would believe in him, this rest.

And so, this song for the Sabbath, well, it's no longer just restricted to one particular day, but now, in Christ, we truly can live and enjoy a Sabbath day every day.

Of course, we know the full realization of that Sabbath rest is still to come, but in Christ, we already do see and feel the first waves of this coming rest, don't we?

And so, we are able to, and we ought to, praise him with gladness, reverence, and expectancy, always, every day of our lives, through each and every changing season.

[31 : 06] And we do so in our words and in our ways. As we live as salt and light in this world, as ambassadors of Christ in our workplace, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, well, we are declaring his name.

when we simply don't conform to social norms, but we stand up for justice, for righteousness, as we speak up and defend the weak, the vulnerable, the exploited, the unborn, well, we are declaring his name.

As we count all things as loss for the sake of the gospel, denying ourselves and carrying our cross to follow him daily, we are declaring his name.

And so as we draw to a close, friends, perhaps you're sitting here today and you don't know this God whose ways, while mysterious, are full of might and mercy, who gives to his people a purpose to life, who protects his own.

And perhaps you're already looking ahead at the new year and you're dreading and you're longing for rest, rest that goes beyond the physical. Well, until that final day, the consummation of Sabbath rest comes, don't miss out on the chance to respond.

[32 : 35] Don't ignore the reality that is spelt out in verse 7. But today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, but come in repentance and faith. And you can come to know and receive this rest also.

You can join in this song of gladness as you come to know of God's goodness for yourself. Because all who come to Christ and believing in him will find rest.

And those who come to him, he will never cast out. But as for you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, what do you want this new year, 2025, to be?

Do you want it to be a year of gladness or grimness? Well, the psalmist is clear in telling us just how to make it a glad one.

And that is we keep singing this song of G-R-E-A-T praise, great praise, with gladness, reverence, expectancy, always, and together.

[33 : 42] that we keep considering and contemplating on the works of his hands, tuning and retuning our hearts to the character of God. Let's not be stupid, let's not be foolish, but let's be realistic and live each day through the lens of God's eternal goodness.

Let's keep trusting the one who is utterly trustworthy, for truly, with the joy of every new year, we are celebrating the reality that we are all one step closer into entering the fullness of that Sabbath.

Let us close in prayer. Heavenly Father, how our hearts are stirred to sing with gladness and rejoicing.

by your words, for how we marvel at your mystery and majesty of your works. So, Lord, in this start of a new year, please help us daily to remember afresh of your grace and your goodness.

Help us to fix our eyes on your steadfast and your unchanging love. Help us to be wise and discerning, chasing not after the things of this world, but help tune our hearts to be declaring your glorious name as we seek to follow Christ each and every day and also as we gather weekly together to worship you.

[35 : 29] And so we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.