

Sunday, November 29, 2020

Psalm 92 (Fruit or Folly?)

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Intro

Sometimes in life it appears wickedness prospers while righteousness harms. This is nothing new. Solomon observed these things approximately 3,000 years ago:

Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

Ecclesiastes 8:14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

In other words, living according to God's Word doesn't always produce desirable results. Proverbs teaches us that living by God's instruction generally produces positive results. Like hard work generally results in having plenty. But we live in a fallen world with fallen people which means there's systemic opposition to God (1 John 5:19). So, in a fallen culture, the righteous can flounder while the wicked flourish. We might ask ourselves, is living for Jesus really worth it? Are you tempted to drift from God's Word for quick and easy results? Or are you willing to take a long view, trusting that in the end God prospers his people?

This morning we come face to face with the struggle of following a righteous Savior in a wicked world. This morning we ask:

CRUCIAL QUESTION: How can we rejoice while the wicked prosper?

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Context

The Psalmist's identity and the exact circumstance is unknown. What we do know is that Israel faced enemies who flourished, but God intervened:

My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. – 92:11

The Psalmist stimulates joy by recalling the temporary prosperity of the wicked and the enduring prosperity of the righteous

FCF: temptations to envy the wicked (maybe sin works?) and forget the blessings of being God's children

Point 1: Remember the wicked won't flourish forever (9:1-11)

Call to worship (9:1-4)

The Psalmist reasons with the congregation. Here's why you should praise God and be a thankful people. "It is good" = the fitting response of God's people is thanksgiving. God is Most High. In other words, **God**

rules over his creation. No one can claim equality with God. No one can stand in his way. And no one can question his actions (see Dan 4:34-45). God's authority and might is unmatched.

God's character is also unmatched. He's a God of steadfast love and faithfulness.

- God's steadfast love = his fidelity, his commitment, his pledge, his loyalty to us. Because God has pledged himself to never leave us nor forsake us, he will continue to act for our good without ceasing. He freely entered into relationship with us without obligation, but now that he's pledged himself to us he's obligated himself to us. It's active love that works for us and doesn't cease.
- God's faithfulness = certainty, dependability, firmness of one's promises, a consistency in what one says and does = God will do what he says because he is reliable

The Psalmist rejoices in God's works. These works are unspecified here (92:4), but as we proceed God's work involves punishing the wicked and making his people fruitful.

The wicked flourish (9:5-7)

There's a problem: the wicked flourish in this life. Flourish = the growth of plants and figuratively things go well for them. They find "success." While the wicked prosper, all is not as it seems. The wicked lack understanding. They don't know their flourishing is temporary. They're ignorant of their end. God's thoughts are very deep (92:6) = God's plan and thoughts are beyond us, like allowing the wicked to flourish, yet punishing the wicked at times while making his own people fruitful. We don't know the depths of God's thoughts either. When discussing the nature of God's plan of salvation, how he used Israel's disobedience to bring salvation to the Gentiles, and how he'll use the mercy shown to the Gentiles to bring the Jews to repentance, Paul said this:

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Isaiah said:

Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Why God allows the wicked to thrive remains hidden from us. On this side of eternity life will sometimes perplex us. Why is the person who flaunts their disobedience prospering while the godly saint suffers through so much? Why does God allow false teachers into the church? Why doesn't he prevent it beforehand? Why does God allow men to become pastors whom he knows will commit adultery? He knows the damage they'll cause. Why doesn't God act for the good of his name beforehand? These are some questions I might have. God's ways aren't our ways. His wisdom is beyond us.

Supertones lyric is helpful: "I know there must be a reason. Even if it cannot be known by me."

The ungodly are described in four terms: stupid, fool, wicked, evildoer. They're fools in that they lack in knowledge of God. They don't have the big picture. They're also disobedient. They engage in destructive behaviors. Yet they flourish.

This doesn't make sense. Does it mean that wisdom doesn't really work? Or that disobedience leads to prosperity?

The mechanic who tells their customer their car needs work where problems don't actually exist. They make a profit while the honest mechanic loses out on income because they don't create false repairs.

The person who cheats on their taxes has more discretionary income while the person who's honest loses out.

- co-workers weren't paying taxes on income during time in Virginia → legally had to pay Maine or Virginia → was around \$2,000 → isolated instance where it doesn't profit to be righteous → had to trust God rewards integrity but it's annoying

The athlete who uses steroids and other performance enhancing drugs performs better and gets a bigger contract. The honest athlete competes at a disadvantage and loses out on money.

Does obedience really work? It appears not.

God delivers (9:8-11)

In the now the wicked can flourish. But God remains "*on high forever* (9:8)." In the end, when Christ returns to separate the sheep from the goats, the wicked will perish in the form of eternal punishment (Matt 25:31-46). In the end, rebellion doesn't profit.

Sometimes rebellion doesn't work in the present. God may act. He did for the Psalmist:

My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. – 92:11

Sometimes the dishonesty, tax fraud, and cheating results in getting caught. Then comes painful penalties and public shame. Wickedness doesn't always profit.

Ultimately, the fact that **God rules over his creation** ensures that wickedness will not prevail. On the other hand, wisdom and righteousness do work in the present...

Point 2: Remember the righteous flourish in this life (92:12-15)

Explanation

While the wicked flourish for a season, the righteous endure. Compared to the palm tree and the cedar = of great stature and fruitful.

Palm tree = tall and source of sweetness (the date-palm)

Cedar = tall and a major source of timber

The righteous bloom and grow. They mature and bear fruit.

Verse 13 explains the reason why the righteous flourish:

They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. – 92:13

They flourish because they're in the presence of God. They only flourish because they're connected to God and his people. Connected to God and his people, they mature over time which results in spiritual fruit in their later years:

They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, - 92:14

The fruit of a life lived with God and his people is a transformed heart:

Galatians 5:22-24 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law [= ?]. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

= a maturity whereby godly character rules the heart rather than impulsive and destructive passions. God bears the fruit in us by dwelling in us = we need divine help to be fruitful.

And with age comes wisdom. The wise are able to sort through competing options and choose a God-honoring course. They know how to apply truth to complex matters in a balanced way. They know when principles apply and when they don't. With understanding, they avoid folly. And when they don't have understanding, they know where to find it. Years spent with God and his people fosters wisdom.

What's the purpose of maturing and becoming fruitful?

Psalm 92:15 to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

In other words, God causes his people to flourish and be fruitful in old age so that they might declare his character. God is upright and the second half of the verse spells that out. He is my rock = God's reliability or his strength. Could speak of refuge = high rock difficult to get to that provided a safe place. My rock in context seems to be source of protection. The Psalmist had been delivered from his enemies by God.

No unrighteousness = God is sinless. God may let the wicked flourish, but he's not responsible for their evil-doing. They are. God may use the wicked to serve his purposes, but they're responsible, not God (last week we saw how God used Israel's enemies to test and try them). God is able to use the wicked intent of the ungodly to achieve his good purpose. For example, Gen 45:5-8; 50:20 where Joseph's brothers intended evil by selling him to Egyptians while God intended the turn of events for good...and where the brothers sold Joseph yet God sent Joseph to Egypt. The act is simultaneously the work of Joseph's brothers and God. God, being upright, stands behind the good and evil in different ways. God is credited with good whereas the brothers are credited with evil. God, in his sovereignty, can rule his creation in such a way that he directs evil for good purposes without being credited with unrighteousness. Good is always ascribed to God. Evil is always ascribed to sinners. The same goes with the cross. Sinners rejected Jesus and conspired to crucify him. The Trinity planned the redemption of sinners through the death of the Son before time began. God's wisdom is beyond us! His thoughts are very deep. God is content to leave room for mystery.

In our context, God is upright because the wicked don't flourish forever. They meet a righteous end: eternal punishment. An upright God means wickedness is punished. So how can God forgive us? After all, we're unrighteous law-breakers. We can only be forgiven because the sinless Son of God, a sacrifice worthy to appease the Father's wrath, took our place on the cross (Rom 3:21-26). We're forgiven because he was condemned.

One answer to the problem of evil (given God is good and all-powerful, how can evil exist?) is that when the last day comes to an end all unrighteousness will have been punished. The wicked are punished forever in

hell. The righteous escape hell because the sinless Son of God suffered in their place. The punishment of the wicked answers the problem of evil. As does the cross. No wickedness will go unpunished. All sin is either paid on the cross or in hell. Justice will necessarily prevail. Because the Most High is upright.

To unbelievers

This is what we're declaring today. God is perfectly righteous, and we can't hide from him. He sees all. We may escape the consequences of sin in this life, we may not. But we cannot escape the eternal consequence of our sins. That is unless we turn to the Father for pardon through his Son Jesus. By trusting in Jesus' finished work, the only payment for sin the Father accepts, we can receive forgiveness from our Creator whose law we've rebelled against. Only Jesus can take the punishment in our place. God won't merely forgive you. He'll make you new. He'll make you fruitful so that you can proclaim his uprightness.

To the aged

This Psalm says something about the value of the aged. And it assumes a life lived in God's presence with his people bears fruit until the end.

1) You have value

- In Scripture old age is something to desire and pursue (Prov 3:1-2)...old age is a "crown of glory" (Prov 16:31)...old age in Scripture ≠ inferior like it may in our culture

2) You have something to contribute

- ≠ just waiting till Jesus takes you home; = "still bear fruit" until the end

3) You can be helpful to others

- you've acquired wisdom and you've grown in character...you've learned from mistakes...you've seen God's faithfulness...pass on what you've learned

- elders and intersectionality...not up on the latest movements ≠ unsuited to serve...it means you have wisdom to interact with today's world better than a youngster who is less steeped in biblical wisdom...so learn about concerns in your sphere of life, but don't assume old = unfit to serve...don't assume old = must be sidelined

4) You still have life to be lived

- "to live is Christ...to die is gain" (Phil 1:21) = it's good for others that you're still here...so don't be careless with the Coronavirus...protect yourself to be of help to others...as long as you're alive, there's people you can be of help to...meditate on who God is preserving you for

5) You have unique opportunities in retirement

- retirement = freed up to be redeployed and serve in ways that younger people can't...this church needs you!...not a guilt trip, just hoping you see your present life circumstance as a steward = how can I serve now that I'm freed up?

To the young

- In the way you live today (choices, use of time, use of spiritual opportunities, etc.) you are deciding the sort of old person you will be

Conclusion

How can we rejoice while the wicked prosper? We struggle when we see the wicked flourish. And we might be tempted to think living for Jesus isn't worth it. The Psalmist says **Remember the wicked won't flourish forever.** They won't escape the final judgment. In the end, rejecting God is disastrous.

On the other hand, we forget the blessings of being God's children. The Psalmist says **Remember the righteous flourish in this life.** As God shapes our character through his Spirit, and as we acquire wisdom, we become fruitful. The wicked suffer for lack of these things. Maybe the righteous mechanic, because of his integrity, gains a reputation in the community and his business flourishes. Following Jesus makes us flourish.