

What Is Church For?

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, as we've been singing, Psalm 92.

The Book of Psalms and Psalm 92, and I'd like us to walk through this Psalm, but if we read again at the beginning, Psalm 92 from the beginning, a Psalm or a song for the Sabbath day.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord to sing praises to your name almost high, to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night.

Now, as you know, this evening we're gathering together for the AGM, the annual general meeting. And this meeting, you could say, it's necessary not only because the church is a charity and all its accounts, they all need to be open and they need to be transparent.

But you know, it's also a good opportunity for us to remind ourselves what the purpose of the church is. I mean, to give a report on all that's happened in the congregation over the past year, and list all the strengths and all the weaknesses of a congregation, I don't think, or I don't believe that that would serve any purpose.

[1 : 19] Because patting ourselves on the back for what's been done, that's not the purpose of the church, nor as kicking ourselves for the things that we fail to do. I don't think the purpose of the church, I don't think it's about praising or even punishing ourselves.

Rather, the purpose of the church is to encourage and enable saints and sinners to fulfill their chief end. The purpose of the church is to encourage and enable saints and sinners to fulfill their chief end, which is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And so on an evening like this one, I believe that it's a good opportunity for us to be reminded of what the church is for, as it meets on the Lord's Day and at various times during the week.

And as you would expect, well, there's a Psalm that explains to us what the church is for, and that is Psalm 92. Because Psalm 92 reminds us that church and coming to church is a gift.

It's not a grudge. It's to be a delight, not a dread. It's to be a blessing for us, not a curse. Coming to church on the Lord's Day on midweek, it's to be the highlight of our week, and it's to affect our whole week.

[2 : 34] Coming to church on the Lord's Day and even midweek is to be something we anticipate, something we prepare for prayerfully. And so church is to be the place where we love to come.

We love to gather together and worship the Lord for His love and for His faithfulness towards us, and where we're encouraged and even equipped and enabled to go into a new week or to carry on through the rest of the week, ready to serve the Lord.

And so we're asking this evening the very simple question, what is church for? What is church for? And Psalm 92, it reminds us that church is for a day of gratitude, a day of grace, and a day of growth.

Church is for a day of gratitude, a day of grace, and a day of growth. So we'll look first of all at a day of gratitude. Church is for a day of gratitude. That's how the psalmist begins.

He says, a psalm, a song for the Sabbath. It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name almost high, to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night.

[3 : 45] Now, the title of Psalm 92, it affirms to us that this particular Psalm, it was always sung on the Sabbath day in the Jewish church or the synagogue.

Psalm 92 was always part of the Sabbath worship to remind the Lord's people as to why they had gathered together for worship. Of course, the Jewish Sabbath, as we know, it's on the Saturday.

But we can easily apply Psalm 92 to our Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day. But you know, what's interesting is that the Jews, they appointed a particular Psalm to be sung in the synagogue each day of the week.

And the schedule that the Jews followed was that on the first day of the week, our Lord's Day Sunday, they sang Psalm 24. On the second day of the week, Monday, they sang Psalm 48. On Tuesday, it was Psalm 82. On Wednesday, it was Psalm 84. On Thursday, today, it would have been Psalm 81. On Friday, tomorrow, it would be Psalm 93.

[4 : 50] And then on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, the Jews would sing this Psalm, Psalm 92. But as I said, even though Psalm 92 was sung on the Jewish Sabbath, on Saturday, we have to see its relevance and its application for us as those who gather to worship on the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath.

Now, we don't know who wrote Psalm 92, but in many ways, it doesn't really matter. Because Psalm 92, it speaks to all of the Lord's people in every generation.

Because in the opening words of the Psalm, the Psalmist, he gives this call to worship. He gives this exhortation, this appeal to come and give thanks to the Lord.

He says that we should come to church with this heart of gratitude and praise to the Lord. He says it is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name almost high.

The Psalmist says it's a good thing. It's a good thing to give thanks to the Lord. It's a good thing to come to church with a heart of gratitude. It's a good thing to come to the Lord's house with joy in your heart and praise upon your lips for the one who is the most high.

[6 : 03] Because you know, what better thing could we do than come to church and praise the God who created us and called us to himself? What better thing could we do than come to church with this heart of gratitude and gratefulness to the Lord?

What better thing could we do than come to church with this attitude of adoration and appreciation towards the Lord? What better thing could we do on the Lord's day and even midweek than give praise and thanks unto the Lord?

Because this is why we were created. This is why God made us. This is why we exist. And what better way to spend our Lord's day and even midweek than to rejoice, to rejoice together?

What better way to spend the Lord's day than to rejoice in the Lord of the Lord's day? What better way to start our week than to have a day of gratitude and give thanks to the Lord?

And you know, there's no doubt that we ought to be thankful for all that we've received in and through our Savior Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us that we have received from him.

[7 : 11] We've received exceedingly, abundantly above all more than we could ask or even think. But you know, it seems to me that the Samist, he's not only thanking the Lord for the wonder of salvation.

He's actually thanking the Lord for the gift of the Sabbath. He has this heart of gratitude when he thinks of the benefits and the blessings of coming to church on the Lord's day.

He says, it's a good thing. It's good to give thanks to the Lord. But then he says in verse four, for you, Lord, have made me glad by your work at the works of your hands.

I sing for joy. And in that verse, the Samist, he's rejoicing that the Lord has created all things. He's created everything by the word of his power in the space of six days and all very good.

And he's the Samist is praising the Lord and he's saying the work of your hands, the work of your hands where you formed the hills and filled the seas and placed the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky.

[8 : 15] That's the work I rejoicing. But more than that, he says, you formed me by the work of your hands. You made me in your own image and likeness. You created me from the dust of the ground.

And he says, the work of your hands has made me glad and I sing for joy. The Samist, he has this heart of gratitude to the Lord for his creative, handy work.

But the Samist is not only grateful for the creation. He's also grateful for what took place after the creation. The Samist is thankful, you could say, for the creation ordinance of Sabbath rest, where the Lord set apart one day and seven and made it holy for himself.

And you know, that's how we should view the Lord's day. We should view the Lord's day as he says in verse one as a good thing. We should see the Lord's day as a day of gratitude in which we set apart and devote and dedicate to the Lord.

My friend, we should see the Lord's day and coming to church as the greatest blessing. Because you know, with all that goes on in a busy week, where we're so busy and we're rushing around and we have no time to stop and think, we have to see the Lord's day as a gift to us, a gift of which we should be thankful that we can come aside and rest a while.

[9 : 44] But you know, the Samist here, it's amazing how the Samist put together, he not only teaches us that we need to have a day of gratitude.

He also teaches us how we should spend our day of gratitude. He teaches us here how we should spend the Lord's day, how we should spend the Lord's day and even how we should come to church.

And with us, John Calvin, he states in his commentary, he says, the Sabbath day is not to be holy in the sense of being devoted to idleness, as if idleness should be an acceptable form of worship to God.

But the Sabbath day, he says, is to be holy in the sense of separating ourselves from all other occupations in order to engage in meditating upon the divine works of God.

We need to be disentangled from all our cares, says Calvin, if we would seriously apply ourselves to the praises of God. And so the Lord's day we've been taught here is to be a day of gratitude.

[10 : 50] It's not to be a day of idleness, where we spend most of the day in bed or sitting watching the television. That's not what the Lord's day is for. No, the Samist, he's urging us to fill our Lord's day with gratitude to the Lord.

Because he says in verse two that the purpose of the Lord's day is to declare the steadfast love of the Lord in the morning and then to declare his faithfulness in the evening, which means that the morning and the evening service on the Lord's day, they're not two separate acts of worship.

No, they're the bookends of an entire day of gratitude and worship to the Lord. It's a whole day of worship that's dedicated to the Lord.

And therefore the application for us is that we're to try and be in church both ends of the Lord's day. Of course, it's not always possible. Some people have young children, others don't keep well, some are elderly, and they're only thankful to get out to church at all.

But you know what's becoming more and more common amongst the Lord's people is that worship on the Lord's day is just a morning or an evening activity.

[12 : 10] And the day of gratitude, the full day of gratitude has now become just a half day. And a half day only emphasizes our half hearted commitment to the Lord.

Because you know, when it comes to the Lord's day, some, well, they just take the liberty of having the morning off or they want a night in. They're too tired to come and worship the Lord. They're too tired to give the best day of the week to the Lord.

But you know, it all comes back to our priorities. What are our priorities? Because if there's too much going on during the week that we're too tired to go to church on the Lord's day, then we have to ask ourselves, is the Lord my priority?

We need to ask ourselves, who is the Lord of the Lord's day? Is it me or is it the Lord? Who's Lord over my life? Is it me or is it the Lord?

And you know, what I find so sad is that our commitment, which I see more and more, our commitment and our desire and our love for the Lord's day, it's diminishing among the Lord's people because our love for the Lord's day, it's a reflection upon our love for the Lord.

[13 : 19] And the Lord's day is a day in which we should be taken up with Jesus. That's actually what the Psalmist says in verse two. He says to the Lord's day is to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night.

The Lord's day says is a day of gratitude to spend our day declaring the steadfast love of the Lord and the faithfulness of the Lord. And those words, steadfast love and faithfulness, they're translated in the New Testament as grace and truth, which is the description given to Jesus in the New Testament.

He is the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. He's full of steadfast love and faithfulness. And so the Psalmist here, he's reminding us that our Lord's day, our day of gratitude is to be taken up with Jesus.

Our day of gratitude is to be taken up with Jesus. That's what church is for. It's a day of gratitude. But secondly, it's a day of grace.

It's a day of grace. Look at verse five. The Psalmist says, how great are your works, O Lord? Your thoughts are very deep.

[14 : 39] Now in verse five, the Psalmist, he continues his song for the Sabbath day. And he does so by confessing the greatness and the vastness of his God, because he says, how great and how deep, how great and how deep.

And with this, the Psalmist, he's reflecting upon who God is, that God is infinite. He's immeasurable and he's inexhaustible.

And the reason the Psalmist says this is because he's now considering the work of salvation in his own life. He's no longer thinking about the Lord's work of creation like he did in verse four.

He's now thinking of a greater work, a work that is very personal to him, the work of salvation. And he says, how great are your works, O Lord? Your thoughts are very deep.

He says that the wisdom of God in saving sinners, it's beyond his asking and it's beyond his thinking. He says, how great and how deep.

[15:44] In fact, you could almost say that the words in verse five, they convey to us the idea of God's workmanship and his commitment, his commitment to restoring and renewing his creation and that the Lord is working according to his perfect plan.

How great are your works, O Lord? Your thoughts are very deep. The Lord is working according to his perfect plan of salvation. And you know, that's what church is for.

Church is a day of grace. It's a day where we're reminded that salvation is all of grace and that that salvation was planned and perfected in eternity and brought to fruition in our lives in time.

And tonight, well, we're saved by grace. It's not of ourselves. It's not of works, lest any of us should boast. It's all the gift of God.

And the marvel is, we're God's workmanship. We're created in Christ Jesus for every good work. So the Lord's day, it's a day of grace.

[16:54] And it's all about reminding us that our salvation is all of grace. Our salvation is all of grace. But then you have this contrast in verses six to eight, because the grace of God in salvation verse five is contrasted with the blindness of a sinner in verses six to eight, which all the stupid man cannot know the fool cannot understand this.

That though the wicked sprout like grass and all evil doers flourish, they're doomed to destruction forever. But you, Lord, are on high forever.

You know, the Samus description of the stupid man is someone who refuses to accept the grace of God in salvation. Now, I know many ways they can't accept it unless the spirit is working in their heart.

But the Samus here, he's saying that the stupid man, he rejects the gift of salvation because in his own eyes, he's flourishing. He's sprouting up like the grass.

He's progressing in life. He's enjoying life. He's filling his life with everything but the Lord. And yet the Samus says about him and those like him.

[18:08] He says at the end of our seven, they are doomed to destruction forever. The rejection of God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, he says is absolute stupidity.

It's foolishness. And yet that's what church is for. Church is a day of grace where God's gift of salvation.

It's presented to the saint as a comfort and to the sinner as a call. That's what the Lord's day is for. Church is a day of grace where God's gift of salvation is presented to the saint as a comfort and to the sinner as a call where the sinner is invited.

They're pleaded with to come to Christ and embrace God's gift of salvation that is freely and graciously offered to them. But you know, as the Samus, as he warns in verses nine to 11, he warns those who reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

He says that they will perish. He says in verse nine, for behold your enemies, O Lord, for behold your enemy shall perish. All evil doers shall be scattered.

[19:19] But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild dogs. 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.

Now all must notice about verses nine to 11 is that the Samus describes in verse nine. He describes those who reject salvation as the Lord's enemies.

But then in verse 11, the Samus describes those who reject salvation as his enemies. We see that for behold your enemies, O Lord, for behold your enemies shall perish.

So he describes them as the Lord's enemies. And personally in verse 11, my eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies. My ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

Now I don't believe that the Samus is actually referring to his personal enemies who shall perish. Rather, I believe the Samus, especially in verses 10 and 11, he's speaking prophetically about

Jesus, Jesus whose mission was to destroy his enemies.

[20 : 31] And I say this because the reference in verse 10 to the horn, the exalted horn and the fresh oil, those words exalted horn and fresh oil, that's royal language.

The horn was a symbol of power. The fresh oil was used to anoint a king. It's royal language. And when you think about it, it's drawing our attention to Jesus.

Because well, our Jesus, as we know, he was given all authority, all power in heaven and on earth. Our Jesus was anointed. He was Christed to be the savior of sinners.

But more than that, our Jesus, he humbled himself. He became obedient and done to death, even the death of the cross. That's the lowest point he went.

But what I love is that although Jesus went down, down, down, he was also, as Paul reminds us, he was highly exalted.

[21 : 33] He went up, up, up. And he was highly exalted because he rose again on the third day. He rose again on the Lord's day.

And you know, his victory over his and our enemies, it took place on the first day of the week. And this is why church and coming to church is a day of grace.

Because we're reminded that it was on the Lord's day that Jesus defeated death and conquered the grave. It was on the first day of the week, the first Lord's day that our King, he stood over all his and our enemies, and he says, Oh death, where is your sting?

Oh grave, where is your victory? And so what we ought to see from Psalm 92 is that church and coming to church, it's a day of grace.

We were reminded that salvation is all of grace. And God's gift of salvation, it's to be presented to the saint as a comfort and the sinner as a call.

[22 : 41] So what is church for? Church is a day of gratitude, a day of grace, and lastly, a day of growth. A day of gratitude, a day of grace, and a day of growth.

A day of growth. Look at verse 12. The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a seeder in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord.

They flourish in the courts of our God. In these closing verses, the Psalmist, he draws our attention to the effects that coming to church should have upon our lives.

And the effect is that we should grow. In fact, the Psalmist says that the effect church should have on our lives is that we grow. And as he repeats the fact, we should flourish because it's in church. Because you know, it's in church that we're taught from the word of God, we're encouraged from the word of God, we're challenged from the word of God, and we're even prepared by the word of God to go out into a new week.

[23 : 44] And you know, all the activities that you do as Christians and even as a congregation, they're to flow out from and they're to be a result of what you do in church on the Lord's day and even midweek.

Because church on the Lord's day, it is and midweek, it has been gifted to us so that we will flourish in our faith. These things are gifts to us.

So that will do us the Psalmist says will flourish like the palm tree and will grow like a seeder in Lebanon. And you know, it's such a brilliant illustration that he uses in verse 12.

Because the palm tree, the palm tree was said to be one of the most beautiful trees in Israel. And it gave to the people a great provision of food.

But it was also a great provision of shelter, the leaves of the palm tree, they were about eight feet long, and they would provide protection from the heat of the sun.

[24 : 45] And so the palm tree that the psalmist is talking about is one of provision in which the Lord's day and gathering together in church, it's to be reviewed as a provision from the Lord.

It's a gift from the Lord by which we flourish in our faith. And the seeders of Lebanon, which he goes on to describe, we are to grow like a sweetened seeder in Lebanon.

They were the oldest and the largest trees in Israel. And they're often mentioned in the Bible because of their strength. The seeders of Lebanon, they were used in the building of Solomon's temple.

And that's what the psalmist is reminding us that coming to church on the Lord's day, it's to where it's where we're to be strengthened in our faith. That we might come into church weak in our faith, doubting, questioning ourselves.

But it's in church that we're to be strengthened in our faith and encouraged in our walk with the Lord. It's in church that we flourish.

[25 : 48] It's in church that we grow. So we're flourishing and we're growing. But as the psalmist concludes this beautiful psalm about what church is for, he says that those who have been planted in the house of the Lord, they shall continue to flourish even in old age.

He says in verse 13, they are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green to declare that the Lord is upright.

He is my walk and there is no unrighteousness in him. And you know, even after all the years have rolled on and life has taken its toll, despite all the trials and temptations, the persecutions and the pitfalls, the trials and the sorrows, those who reach that good old age, he says, they still bring forth fruit.

That's a wonderful promise. They still flourish and they'll flourish as we're reminded here. They'll still bear fruit in old age. They're ever full of sap and green.

They'll flourish. Why? Why does the old Christian still flourish? Because what they've learned throughout their life and what they've discovered is that they're planting and they're growing and they're flourishing and they're keeping is nothing to do with them.

[27 : 21] It's solely the work of the gardener, Jesus Christ. He is the true vine. And you know, what's remarkable about those who continue to flourish in old age is that their confession, it doesn't change.

It doesn't change as the years go on. Their confession and if anything, it becomes more stronger. They continue to say as it is in verse 15, they continue to declare that the Lord is upright.

He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him. That's their confession. The Lord is upright. He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.

You know, what a confession to have when you reach your old age as a Christian, the Lord is upright. He is my rock. There is no unrighteousness in him.

You're my friend. We have good reasons to come to church on the Lord's day and during the week because what is church for? Church is to be a day of gratitude.

[28 : 25] It's to be a day of grace and it's to be a day of growth where we flourish in God's house. So may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee that the seed has been sown in our heart and that there were the one who has brought forth fruit from it and we pray that Thou would continue to work in our lives, that we would keep growing and keep flourishing, that we would bring forth fruit, some 30 fold, some 60 fold, some 100 fold and Lord there would be glorifying in Thy sight and there would bring glory to the name of Jesus.

Our longing is Lord that we would use the Lord's day and even Thy church, that we would use it for the building up of Thy kingdom and the extension of Thy name and Lord that we as Thy people, that we would be built up as a spiritual house, holy and acceptable unto Thee, all use us Lord we pray, we realise that we are weak vessels, we firt and fail but our testimony is that God doth fail us never, bless us then we pray, bless us and have been together and watch over us and do us good for Jesus' sake.

Amen.