

Renewing Your Youth

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to turn together this morning back to Psalm 103, and I want to read the first five verses again. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

And it's these verses at the end that I want to focus on in particular, and we're taking our title from them, Renewing Your Youth. Now, this is a very important and really a very fascinating topic for us to think about in relation to the gospel, because we can often think that Christianity and the Bible and church are all just a bit old. So the Bible itself is an old book. It was completed 2,000 years ago. It was started about 3,500 years ago. The church is an old institution. It's got a long, long history in our own nation and throughout the world. And it's very easy to think that actually being a Christian and living the life of a Christian is a bit of an old person's thing.

So often it's the case that, you know, well, if you're a Christian, then you're either old already or you're going to start acting old. And it's often seen as though being a Christian means you're giving up your youth. And that's why many people, there's many people who aren't yet Christians who might recognize the importance of it and who will often come to the conclusion to think, yes, I know that that's something that I want later. But now I'm too young. That's for when I'm old.

And behind that mindset is a kind of suspicion that the gospel and youthfulness are incompatible. And even as Christians, we can slip into the trap of thinking that our journey as disciples is taking us further and further towards just being old. And the energy and excitement and delights of youth are kind of for the past. And maybe they even feel like a distant memory. Today, what I hope we're going to see is that this idea that the gospel and youthfulness are incompatible is completely untrue, completely theologically inaccurate. Because the truth is, in the gospel, your youth is renewed. And so that's what we're going to think about. And we've got three headings.

[3 : 0 7] Your youth is brilliant. Your youth is fading. Your youth can be renewed. So first of all, your youth is brilliant. Everybody here is either young or was once young. And that youth, youth is brilliant. To be young is exciting. There's potential. There's opportunity. There is so much to look forward to. And there's several reasons why that's the case. So when we're young, we're growing, we're developing, we're improving. So every year you learn more. You get stronger.

You get wiser. You get fitter. You get more capable. And so you're getting bigger as you grow up. And you can look at your body. And you can see something that is being enhanced year on year as you grow. And you can think about your mind. And you can see something that's expanding with every experience that you have and with everything that you're taught. And you look ahead at your life and you have this great sense of potential and anticipation. And that's because when we're young, there is the expectation that there is more ahead of you than behind you. Now, I know that tragically, that is not always the case. And for some people, that's not how things turn out. But for many, when you're young, the expectation is there that your life is ahead of you. There's lots to look forward to. There's exciting days coming up. And that's part of the reason why those of us who feel like we're kind of getting past it or those of us who feel like we're very past it will often think, oh, to be young again. And Psalm 103 uses a very vivid image to describe this. It compares being young with being like an eagle. And that's a great image because an eagle is strong and capable and dynamic. It's able to go far and wide. An eagle is resilient. It's tough, full of energy, full of potential, full of vigor. And it's the kind of bird you look at and think, well, you know, if I was going to be a bird, I would want to be an eagle because it's so capable, so strong.

And that's a picture of our youth. Because your youth is when you can run your fastest. It's when you can jump your highest. It's when you can set out on the path to achieving your dreams.

There's something brilliant about your youth. Now, that's not to say that youth is always easy. And there are lots and lots of ways in which being young is hard. And for some people, the years of their youth are especially hard. And there are some people for whom their young years are the years that will bring the biggest bruises in life. And there are some people for whom the years of their youth, in fact, maybe many people, it's the years of your youth where you actually also have your most regrets and you think, oh man, there's things I did that I wish I hadn't done. So I am conscious that when I'm saying all this about youth being brilliant, I'm making a very general statement for which there are lots and lots of exceptions. But I think that the general point is valid.

Being young is brilliant. There's an energy, there's an excitement, there's an optimism that comes with your youth. And all of that raises just a very obvious, very basic, very obvious, but important point of application. We should view youth positively. And that might sound very obvious, it is. But the reason why it's important for us to think about that is because it's actually really easy to view youth negatively. And I think that that can happen in two ways.

[7 : 06] It can happen when you are young yourself. And when you're young, sometimes you can resent your youth, especially when you feel restricted. So you think, I have to listen to my parents, I have to go to school, I have to study, I have to work, I have to wait until I can drive a car, I have to go to church. And there's loads of things that I'm not allowed to do.

And sometimes, you know, when you're young, you can actually feel more like a kind of budgie trapped in a cage than like an eagle soaring in the hills. But it's easy to feel like that. But if anyone does feel like that, or anyone at home feels like that, it's really important to remember that the restrictions that are placed over young people are always placed to protect you.

And discipline is there to improve you. Education is there to empower you. Advice is there to guide you. And if your parents or your teachers or your church or the Bible says, don't do that, it is not because they want to ruin your life. So it's easy when you're young to resent your youth.

But maybe more importantly, it's important for us to remember, secondly, that when you're old, it's easy to be suspicious of youth. And so for those of us who are older, we look at the clothes and the music and the hairstyles and the phones and the ideas and the interests of young people, and we think it's ridiculous. And we're suspicious of it. And sometimes frustrated by it. Now, the resentment of music, I think, is justified in almost all circumstances. But overall, I think it's fair to say that there's an unhealthy level of suspicion towards the young. And that's definitely a danger in the church. It's so easy for the older generation to view the young as a threat, to view them with suspicion or frustration. And we can see the ways in which they're not like us. And we see new ideas coming in, and we maybe see long-standing traditions left behind. And it makes us feel very uneasy. And sometimes we don't like it at all. Now, it's important to say there's danger in all directions here. Younger people, younger generations have to take great, great care to value and honour and respect the generation that's above them. That's a massive biblical principle. And it's so, so important. And it's also important for younger generations not to squander all that's been handed down to them. And absolutely essential is that every generation that rises up sticks to the truth of the gospel as it has been handed down to them. So there's dangers for young people that needs to be guarded against. But at the same time, there's also dangers for older people. And the older generation must not look at youth.

As though it's a danger or a problem. Because the danger for the church is not the youth. The danger for the church is no youth. Because if we have no youth, then very soon we have no church.

[10:37] Now, all of that's reminding us that a healthy church will have a deep appreciation and respect for the older generation and will have a passionate and enthusiastic commitment to the youth. Now, there's loads more we could say about that. We could sort of make the whole sermon about that. Maybe you can chat about it over lunch. You can ask yourself, you know, if you're young, what do you love about the older generation? What don't you like? If you're older, what do you love about the youth? What are you suspicious of? You can chat about that whilst you have your lunch together. You can also compare fashion and music tastes and all these different things. The big point is that whether you are in it right now or whether you're looking back on it in the past, there is something brilliant about your youth. However, that youth is fading. When you're young and you're growing, you don't think about this too much. But as you get older, you very quickly realise that your youth is fading fast. And there are lots of cruel reminders about this, especially hair, grey hair, receding hair, out of control, eyebrow hair, awful. Lots of hair problems as you get older. And it happens in lots of other ways as well. Your legs get slower. Injuries don't go away. You have to hold the phone further away from you if you want to read it. You want to turn music down instead of up. And all of a sudden, you become obsessed with who is related to who. And more seriously, more seriously, you know, you just get all this stuff. Like you face health scares. You get a, you know, you go to the doctor and you're, you're not just thinking, oh, well, you know, you've got a sore leg when you're young. You think, well, I've just, I've just bruised it. I've hurt it. I've sprained it. But if you feel a pain or something when you're old, you're going to the doctor thinking, what is this? And sometimes it can be something very, very serious. And, you know, you see your body ageing before your eyes. And also, you know, there's just the awful reality that, that as we go on through life more and more, we lose the people that we love and we lose the people that have always been there and were confronted by grief.

And all of a sudden, we move towards the realisation that there's more of life behind us than ahead of us. And that's really the opposite of how it felt when we were young. And it all happens so fast. Psalm 103 captures this really powerfully in verses 15 to 16.

As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it, and it's gone. And its place knows it no more. Our lives flourish and fade so quickly. And when you think of the names on a family tree, I don't know if any of you've got your family trees. If you think of the names on a family tree, or even if you go and you look at the names on the gravestones at Dalmor or in any other cemetery, all of those names were once young.

And now that youth has gone. Our youth is fading. And whether, you know, some of us might never think about that. Some of us might be constantly thinking about it. But whether we think about it or not, we're all in exactly the same situation. Every time we enter a new week together on a Sunday on this earth, our past is one week longer. And our future is one week shorter.

All of this is pointing us to one of the key truths that runs through the Bible. It's pointing us to the fact that sin results in death, and death is the destroyer of youth. Death is the destroyer of youth.

[14 : 50] Sometimes we can make a mistake whereby we only associate sin with moral badness. Now, we are right to make that association, because sin is moral badness. Sin is a rebellion against the good, holy God. Sin is a violation against all the righteousness that he has commanded. And sin is the source of everything that's evil and harmful in the world. Sin is the word that describes all that is morally bad. That's correct.

But that's only part of what sin is. In fact, I think we can even say that it's not actually the main problem that the Bible associates with sin. Because from the Bible's perspective, the biggest problem of sin is that it brings death. And so the warning that God gave in Genesis 2 was not to say, look, if you eat this fruit, then you will be bad. The warning was, if you eat this fruit, you will die.

And that's what makes the impact of sin so devastating. God is the creator. God is the life giver. We are made to glorify and enjoy him forever. We're made to bear his image, to thrive in his creation, and to know him, and to be with him for all eternity. And death ruins that. In many ways, the Garden of Eden is the scene of perpetual youth. There's life, there's energy, there's opportunity, there's potential, there's excitement. And sin comes in and ruins it. The youthful life that God has given us is now fading away.

And it's so important that we see sin in this way. Sin is not just about making people bad. It's about making people dead.

And when God told humanity, I don't want you to sin, it's not just because he doesn't want us to be bad, it's because he doesn't want you to die. And yet that's exactly where sin has left us. It's left us guilty before a perfect, holy, good God.

[17 : 01] It's left us condemned on a pathway to death. And our aging bodies are reminding us of this every single day. But the astonishing thing is that even though we all face this reality, and even though it's one of the most solemn realities that we can ever think about, people usually respond to this with either resistance or resignation or maybe a combination of both. So we resist the idea that our youth is fading. So we try to stay young.

And all around us are people desperately trying to stay young. And we do that by trying to preserve our health, our looks, our lifestyle. We want to hold on to our youth as long as we can. Nobody gets cosmetic surgery to look older.

It's always to make us look and feel younger. And as much as possible, we want to just block out the thoughts of death and the thoughts of eternity. And we just, we do not want to have to confront that reality. We just don't want to think about it at all.

But when those thoughts do enter our minds, or when we do find ourselves confronted with that, often we then just respond with resignation. And we think, oh, well, that's the way it is.

Nothing we can do. My youth is fading. My time has come. Death is approaching. And we just kind of shrug our shoulders and accept it.

[18 : 38] In contrast to all of that, this is where we see why the gospel is the absolute best news that humanity has ever heard.

Because in response to the fading of your youth, the gospel does not offer you resistance or resignation. The gospel promises you renewal.

The words of verse 5 might sound like a positive thinking statement, religious optimism, maybe even wishful thinking, the idea that your youth can be renewed.

But we have got to recognize that these words are actually pointing us to a core and fundamental truth of the gospel. The gospel is a message of renewed youth.

The gospel is the message of renewed youth. And the reason that we can say that is because of what the gospel centers on. The gospel centers on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 45] And the resurrection is the eternal renewal of youth. We often contrast youth, being youthful, with being old.

But the gospel doesn't do that. The gospel contrasts being youthful and being dead. And the whole message of the gospel is centered on the fact that Jesus has come to conquer death.

And the reason that we know that he has accomplished that, and the reason that we know he is victorious, is because he rose from the dead. The whole of Christianity stands and falls on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, Christianity is a waste of time. But he did rise from the dead. And that is why the whole world has people gathering today to worship and praise our risen, living Savior.

The resurrection happened because the power of death has been destroyed. Jesus accomplished a victory on the cross that disarmed and defeated and destroyed the power of death.

[20 : 51] And because of that, every person who puts their faith in Jesus is united to the power of his resurrection.

And because of that, your youth can be renewed. And I think we can say that that applies in two crucial ways.

First of all is the fact that the gospel renews your youth because the decaying power of death is broken. So now, through Jesus, through faith in Jesus, if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you have eternal life.

In other words, we have life that doesn't get old. And so the gospel transforms our lives from a flower that flourishes and fades in the twinkling of an eye towards a life.

It transforms us from that into a life that is an eternal fountain of youth and energy and life.

[22 : 00] In other words, there's a magnificent longevity for all who trust in Jesus. So yes, in this life, our outward bodies may be perishing.

They age and they decay in this life. But the power and promise of the gospel and the power and promise of the resurrection is that when Jesus returns, our bodies will be raised, we will be renewed and restored just like the risen Jesus is.

And we will enjoy endless, ageless, eternal life in his new creation. There's a beautiful longevity because the decaying, destroying power of death has been broken.

We have eternal life. But the second crucial aspect of this is that the gospel also renews your youth because everything that youth gives you is a glimpse of what the gospel gives you.

So we said that youth is brilliant because it's full of energy and excitement and opportunity and potential and growth and eagerness and hope. And all of that is everything that we are going to experience in the new creation with Jesus.

[23 : 19] In other words, you are not going to be old and decrepit in heaven. You're going to be full of vigour, full of life, full of energy, full of youth.

Heaven is not going to be this kind of dull old folks home. It's going to be so full of joy and energy and opportunity and excitement and potential.

And in our lives now, so often we have to make this trade-off. So often we see this kind of contrast between things that are long-lasting but they're stale. Or we see things that are vibrant but they're fading.

And so some things are ancient and in many ways that makes them valuable. But in lots of ways they're frozen. So you think of things like a work of art or a work of literature. Very valuable, very old, very precious in lots of ways.

But it's just stable, it's frozen. The Mona Lisa has been the Mona Lisa for a long time. And it's not changing unless it gets vandalised. And you think of long-standing institutions in our nation.

[24 : 24] Great but kind of frozen. And even the world around us. The hills around us. Beautiful but static. Other things are vibrant.

But they quickly fade. So our achievements. Our experiences. Our songs. Our celebrations. Our laughter. Our victories. Our energy. Our enthusiasm. Our careers. Our fun.

All of these things. It flourishes for a moment. And then it fades. And we've got this trade-off between you. Well it's lasting but it's just a bit frozen.

It's vibrant but it's fading. With God you don't have to make that trade-off. Because I think we can even say that in God. I think in God we can say. We can say that in God we see ancient youth.

I don't think I've seen that phrase anywhere else. But I think we can say that in God you have ancient youth. And what I mean by that. Is the fact that in God we have the eternal. Unchangeable.

[25 : 22] Simple majesty. Of the God who from all eternity. Is who he is. And yet at the same time. He is vibrant. And life-giving. And full of energy.

Full of joy. Full of vigor. Purpose and love. God is not ancient and stale. And God is not youthful and fleeting. In God you see all the energy of youth.

Coupled to the unchangeable immutability. Of the ancient of days. And in the gospel. He is revealing to us. His ancient stability. And he is sharing with us.

His ever young vitality. And the result is that if you know Jesus. Or if you put your trust in him. Then you are going to be young.

And energetic. And purposeful. And motivated. And ready to go. Forever. Forever. And ever.

[26 : 19] And that's captured beautifully. In the red words that we read at the very start. In Isaiah 40. Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God. The creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not grow faint. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint. And to him who has no might. He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary.

And young men shall fall exhausted. But they who wait for the Lord. Shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

That is the amazing promise of the gospel. And it's possible. Because of everything that God gives us. And Psalm 103 speaks about that. I'm running out of time. So I can't go into this in detail.

But you can see. That the reason our youth is renewed. Is because God satisfies you with good things. And some of them are listed here. He forgives you all your sins.

[27 : 18] Heals your diseases. Ultimately in eternity. Breaking that power of sin's destruction. Redeems you so that you are rescued from the power of sin. And you are crowned with steadfast love and mercy.

These are the amazing promises of the gospel. And they will satisfy you. They will satisfy you like nothing else. And all of this tells you two utterly crucial things.

That we're finishing with. Number one. The gospel is everything that you need when you're young. And so please recognize this. And when I say young. You know. Like. I still think I'm young.

So I'm not just talking to people who are under 20. I'm talking to people who are under 50. You know. Like. You're. The gospel is what you need. And please. Please. Don't ever think that the gospel is going to stifle you.

And don't think that the gospel stifles youth. The gospel does not stifle youth. The gospel renews youth. And knowing Jesus when you are young. Is the absolute best thing.

[28 : 19] That can happen to you. It's not going to stifle you. It's not going to muck up your life. If you think life is exciting without Jesus. It is a thousand times more exciting. And more fulfilling. With him.

And as you go through your life. So many changes are going to come. There's going to be so many things that you don't expect. And knowing Jesus brings just an amazing stability. And a wonderful vitality.

Through all these stages of life. The gospel is everything that you need when you're young. And secondly. The gospel is everything that you need. When you're old. Without Jesus.

Without Jesus. As we get old. Hope fades. Optimism fades. Anticipation fades. Life fades. But with Jesus.

All of that gets renewed. And as we think of. The people that Jesus has taken home to be with him.

[29 : 23] Their youth is renewed. And yours will be as well. And so the gospel. Is not saying to you. That if you are old. Your youth is gone. The gospel is saying. If you are old. Your youth is coming back.

And it's coming back. Better than ever. That is everything. That the resurrection confirms. That is everything that the gospel promises.

And that is everything that God wants you to have. And if you are not yet a Christian. Or not sure where you stand. I want you to see.

That this is what the gospel offers. And surely you want this. Surely you want this. In the gospel.

[30 : 23] Your youth. Can be magnificently renewed. Amen. Yes. Thank you.