

An Inside Out Psalm

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Stephanie. Good afternoon, everyone. Really good to have you with us today. Particularly, I know there are quite a number of visitors here. You're very, very welcome at our service today. So we're looking at Psalm 92 today. We've been going through some of the Psalms in what's known as Book 4 of the Psalms, starting at Psalm 90 and going on from there. And I've called today's Psalm an Inside Out Psalm.

One of the most popular animated films of recent years was the film Inside Out. I'm not a film goer, so I've read about it rather than seen it. But I understand it's about an 11-year-old girl and it's about her emotions, which are all shown as being characters, as you can see up there on the screen. And this 11-year-old girl moves house. She goes to a big city, I think it's San Francisco. And her emotions get all muddled and she feels she can't be sad, so sadness gets pushed out. And for a while she finds it really difficult, until in the end she realises that her emotions are very important, even sadness is an emotion that has value. And as she gets her brain sorted out, if you like, as she gets her insights sorted out, so she's able to adapt to her new circumstances in a new city.

Now I apologise to those who've seen the film, that's not a very good representation, but that's what I took from it. And it emphasises to us, I think, that what is inside, what is in our heads, if you like, it is vitally important in the way that we react to the world around us, what is outside, inside, out.

[1 : 3 2] If we get the inside right, if our thoughts and our attitudes are right, then it's a lot easier to cope with what's outside. And that was one of the great things I took from this psalm, that if we can get what's inside right, particularly if we can get our relationship with God right, then it's a lot easier to cope with things that happen in the world around us.

That's one reason why we called it an inside out psalm. There's a second reason as well. If you look at the psalm, if you've got it in front of you, look at the structure of the verses, you'll see that most of the verses have two lines in them.

So verses 1 to 6 and verses 10 to 15 at the end all have two lines in them. There are then two verses that have three lines, verses 7 and 9.

And then there's one verse in the middle that only has one line. And you look at that and think that must be a really important verse. It's only got one line and it's right in the middle of the structure. And it is, it's the key to the whole psalm. And it's, you, Lord, are exalted forever. I think it said, you, Lord, are forever exalted in the version it's definitely read. So it's a verse that's about God and about how great he is.

[2 : 5 1] And when we come to understand that, and when we see that verse, we can look at the rest of the psalm and we see some of the difficulties the psalmist faces. We see the enemies that are against him.

And we also see that at the end he's able to praise God and even to be fruitful as he gets older. But it's that verse in the middle, you, Lord, are exalted forever.

That is the key to understanding it. When we have the inside right, when we have a right attitude and right relationship with God, and we have him in first place in our lives, then everything else falls into place.

This psalm, again, if you go back, you notice at the beginning it says it's a psalm for the Sabbath day. Now it's entirely clear why it's a psalm for the Sabbath day, but perhaps it is because it talks about God and his works and how good they are.

And of course, God in the seventh day and the Sabbath day he rested, and he was able to look back at how good his works were. And he was able, as the exalted God and king, to say that they were good.

[3 : 56] And we can look at it and we can say, too, God's works are good. So that may be why it's a Sabbath psalm. Let me just rearrange the verses a bit and we'll look at how we're going to go through it this morning.

Again, I'm going to be straight for a verse. We're going to go from right to left on this diagram. So we're going to start with the verses in the middle about God being exalted. And I'm going to say that that is about believing in God.

Believing in who God is. And that is the starting point for the rest of the psalm. We have the verses round about it. There's four verses there which I say are about trusting in God.

In these verses, the psalmist talks a bit about his enemies and God's enemies and how, as someone who trusts in God, he is strong. He talks about having a horn like an ox.

And he is able to stand up to all the difficulties. And then the outer shell of the psalm, if you like, is about rejoicing in God. There's some great verses at the beginning about music and about singing.

[4 : 57] And then at the end, the psalmist talks about how even in old age, it's possible to be fruitful and to be like a palm tree or a cedar tree if our trust is in God.

So we're going to start with believing in God. We're then going to think about trusting in God, which comes from believing in God. And then we're going to think about rejoicing in God, which is the result of trusting in God and of seeing his goodness.

So believing in God is just the one verse. And it's about God being, as said, eternally exalted. You, Lord, are forever exalted. And like what here in his translation says that God defines exaltedness. You are the definition of exaltedness. And that's perhaps a good way to put it. We need to start by recognizing what a great and what an awesome God we have.

And in particular, when it talks about God being exalted, I think what it means is that God is in control of everything. And that God ultimately is the judge of everything.

[6 : 06] The psalmist looks around him, and we'll come to this in a minute. He looks around him and sees a lot of people who have no interest in God. And he's wondering, why do they seem to do well? But it comes to the conclusion, God is exalted.

God is all-powerful. And therefore, God will judge righteously. And ultimately, good will be seen to do right. God is eternally exalted because he is the creator.

He is the sustainer of the universe. And he is the one who is all-wise and who is all-good and who deserves all our praises. And so the psalmist begins by stating his belief in God that God is eternally exalted.

Now, the psalmist, of course, only had bits of the Old Testament, only a partial understanding of what we understand about God today. And I look at a verse like this, and I think as we look at God the Father, the Lord of the psalmist being exalted, we also need to look at the Lord Jesus as the one who is exalted.

You may well know Philippians chapter 2, where it talks about the Lord Jesus humbling himself, becoming obedient even to death on a cross. And then it says, therefore God has highly exalted him.

[7 : 27] So the Lord Jesus now has been put in that place of the highest honor and the highest authority. Jesus himself said, all authority has been given to me.

And Paul talks about Jesus as the one who will judge the world in righteousness. So when we think about the God being eternally exalted, we also think about the Lord Jesus who has been exalted because of his death on the cross and is the one now who has authority, the one who will judge, the one who is eternally exalted.

And as we start from that point in the psalm, then we can move on and we can think about, well, what are the implications of that for me? And that's where the psalmist talks about trusting in God.

So you're following your Bible, now looking at verses 5 to 7 and verses 9 to 11. And I've said that 5 to 7 are about God's deep thoughts and 9 to 11 are about God's decisive actions.

So verse 5, the psalmist says, how great are your works, O Lord, how profound your thoughts. The psalmist recognizes, as we should too, what a great, wise, all-knowing God we have, and someone who knows much better than we ever could what is good and what is right for us, and who thankfully is ultimately in control of all things.

[9 : 02] But then he thinks, look at all these people round about me. There are lots of people in the world who really have no thought of God. Doesn't mean they're not intelligent.

He calls them senseless and fools. Doesn't mean they've not got good brains and they're not intelligent people, but they just can't see how great God is and how good it is to worship him and to live for him.

Now, the psalmist saw that all these thousands of years ago, how true it is also today. An awful lot of people in our world who have no time for God who would say there is no God.

And the Bible describes people like that as being fools. However intelligent they may be, however good they may be at doing things in human terms, as they don't see the greatness of God, then the psalmist says they're senseless.

They're fools. They don't understand. God has revealed himself to us. He's revealed himself through creation. He's revealed himself through the Bible. He's revealed himself through Jesus.

[10:11] And for some people that just means nothing. And the Bible says, well, they're senseless. They're ignoring something that's really important. And yet in our world, often these are the people who seem to do well and to earn respect.

And the psalmist says, yes, that's true. We're verse 7 now. Yes, that's true. They spring up like grass. They flourish. But ultimately, they don't prevail. If they ignore God, ultimately there are consequences for that.

They're like the grass that springs up today and it's gone tomorrow. They don't understand God and his deep thoughts.

And then verses 9 to 11 talk about how God's deep thoughts translate into decisive actions. So again, the psalmist is thinking about evildoers, but he's thinking particularly about those who are his enemies.

Now, I think we would take his enemies as also being God's enemies in this context. The psalmist is saying, I'm a man of God. Here are people who are opposed to me. And he would also be saying, they're opposed to God.

[11:24] So he talks about them as your enemies in verse 9. And he talks about them as my adversaries in verse 11. And he says, these people who ignore God, there are going to be consequences for that.

If you ignore God and want to do away with him and with his standards and with his rule, then ultimately you will be judged for that.

They will perish, he says. They will be scattered. And that's kind of sobering reminder that those who reject God in this life will have to face them in eternity.

And that they will be judged for the fact that they have rejected God and that they have rejected Jesus. But says the psalmist, as part of your decisive action is dealing with my enemies and your enemies, but it is also giving me good things as you are the God of heaven and you want what is best for me.

And that's in verse 10. You have exalted my horn like that. The ox is one of the strongest beasts in the Holy Land, particularly strong because of its horns.

[12:33] It is able to defend itself against anything that comes against it by using its horns. And the horn that the psalmist talks about here speaks of strength that comes from God and it speaks of being able to withstand even the most evil people and the worst plans that they may make against him.

And alongside that, he talks about fine oils being poured on me. Now, oil was used in the Bible for anointing, for anointing priests and kings and so on.

It was also used as something that would refresh you, that would give you joy, and that would help you to keep going in your life. Now, I think that's probably what is being talked about here. So he's got the strength like the ox, the horn like the ox, in being able to stand up to those who oppose him and oppose God.

But he's also got these fine oils being poured on him, so he's not just feeling all the time oppressed and under pressure. He's also refreshed by God and by everything that God does for him.

God acts in the psalmist situation to work things for his good and to ensure that justice is done. As we think about deep thoughts and decisive actions, looking at it from a 21st century, from a post-Christ perspective, we need to look back on Jesus and think how it applies to him.

[14:02] The deep thoughts that God had about how we who were rebels against God, who went our own way, who had nothing that would please God in us, how could we be brought back, how could we get forgiveness for all the wrong we've done.

And God, in his great wisdom, made his plan, and he took decisive action as he sent his son, Jesus, into the world to be our saviour.

To go to the cross at Calvary and there to take the punishment that was due to us so that all those who put their trust in him can know that they have forgiveness for sins and can have a real relationship with God.

God's deep thoughts and his decisive actions. And we need then to look at these and say, I want to trust in God. I want to recognise my failure before God and I want to come to him and to put my trust in him in the Lord Jesus as my saviour.

So we believe in God and we believe in who he is and his greatness and then we trust in him, particularly trust in Jesus for all he's done for us. And finally, we can then rejoice in God.

[15:22] Two thoughts here as well. Verses 1 to 4, I call constant praise. And then verses 12 to 15, I've called consistent growth.

1 to 4 is about music. Isn't music wonderful? Great to come to church on a Sunday morning and to sing these great songs together of praising God and praising Jesus.

Great too if during the week we can be singing and playing if we're musical or listening to music that praises God and that exalts him. And the psalmist says that is a good thing to do.

It is good for us to praise God. That's why he's created us so that we can enjoy him and we can appreciate him and we can bring our praise to him for all that he's done for us.

Psalmist says we should do it in the morning and at night. In other words, we should do it all the time. Our lives should be a kind of symphony of praise to God. And he pictures first the musical instruments.

[16:28] 10-string lyre. Lyre is normally a four or five string. So I think of a 10-string lyre as being a bit like a 12-string guitar. So it's a bit more substantial than a normal guitar.

Perhaps it makes a slightly louder noise. It gives us the chance to really let go and to celebrate what God has done. And then alongside that, you have the melody of the harp.

The harp quieter, more reflective. Again, for many of us, a good way to praise God just to be reflective and to be quiet as we think about him.

Both have a place in our worship, in our music, in our praise of God. And then, of course, there's singing. Verse 4, You've made me glad by your deeds.

I sing for joy at what your hands have done. It is good for us to praise God. And we should come together on a Sunday morning and as we praise together, we should be enjoying thinking about our God, thinking about Jesus and all that he has done for us and worshipping him together.

[17:33] And what should we be thinking about? What should be the theme of our praise? Well, verse 2 says it's God's love and his faithfulness. Verse 4 says it's his deeds.

So we're focusing on God. Now, we're focusing on God in relation to what he's done for us, but very important that in our singing we're not just focused on me and am I enjoying this and is this something that's of value to me.

We're focused on God and we're focused on all that he is and all that he has done for us. And if our hymns, if our songs together exalt and glorify God and glorify Jesus, then it is good for us to be praising like that and that is pleasing to our God.

Never think of worship songs as just something that we come and do almost as wrote or just fillers in the service. They are a great opportunity for us to bring together collectively our praise and our adoration of our God.

And they should be not just on a Sunday morning but throughout the week. We should be making music in our hearts. Some are better, more musical than others. All of us can do it in our hearts at least.

[18:48] We should be making music in our hearts to God as we reflect on all the good things that he has done for us. So that's constant praise. And then at the end of the psalm, there's one of the reasons why we should praise God constantly.

I call that consistent growth. The picture here is of trees. Two types of trees. There's the palm tree and there's the cedar of Lebanon.

Palm tree is probably the date palm which would be the most common in the lands of the Bible. So a great source of food, of nourishment for people and a real presence among them.

Palm trees grow to an enormous height. They live for many hundreds of years and again and again they keep producing fruit even as they get older.

Cedars of Lebanon also were very tall trees, very imposing, very majestic, but they were particularly valued for the quality of their wood. So they provided really good wood and they were particularly used by the people.

[19 : 55] And the psalmist said, if we trust in God, we can have the characteristics of these trees. We can be fruitful. We can be useful. We can, even in old life, in old age, we can continue to be productive for God.

But particularly, he says, that happens when we're planted in the house of the Lord. Verse 13, plant in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

Now, palm trees and cedar trees can flourish perfectly well in the wild, but the psalmist here is thinking of those that are in the courts of the temple that people will see as they come to worship God.

They've been transplanted, if you like, and they're now in the place where God is. And of course, when we think of ourselves as being a bit like trees, that is true of us as well.

We have been transplanted. We have been taken from the state that we once were in. We have come to know Jesus and we have been changed and we are now in the place where God is and we are able to grow in his presence.

[21 : 07] And so says the psalmist, these trees, they bear fruit in old age and so can we if we are trusting in God. We can bear fruit, we can stay fresh and green, we can still be productive.

Older people in church are a wonderful blessing to those of us who are younger. I'm not really carrying myself in the younger ones these days but younger than some. But for those who are younger, older people can be a real blessing.

Those who have been walking with God for many years and who have a great wisdom and great experience to pass on in the Christian life and who very often are those who are most faithful in prayer for the work of the church even if they're not always able to be very actively involved in it. As a church it's very important that we value, that we treasure those who are older in the faith, those who have all these years of experience and of loving God behind them.

If we are older it's important that we stay fruitful. Now old age does bring its problems. We're not able to do as much as perhaps we used to or as we would like to.

[22 : 26] And for some older people they can be feeling I'd really like to do more but I'm not able to. But even though our bodies may be fading away yet our spirits can be constantly renewed and can be constantly rejoicing before God.

And it's very important if we are older that we don't become grumpy old men or grumpy old women. That we look at what's happening and we say well that's not really the way I would have done it that's not the way it was done in my day and so I'm not really very happy about it.

It is wonderful when you see older people and there are quite a number in this church you see older people and they see things changing and they see God working and they rejoice in it.

they're not there just to criticise and to put younger people down they're there to encourage them and to build them up in their faith and to continue to bear fruit in their old age as they encourage the younger ones as they pray for them as they continue to form the bedrock of the church.

Older people are a wonderful privilege for us to have among us as a church and as we get older so important that we remain fresh and keep that confidence in God and look at him at work and even if it's not the way we might have done it still to rejoice when God is moving among us and to proclaim as it says in verse 15 the Lord is upright he is my rock there is no wickedness in him.

[24 : 06] So where we start in the middle of the psalm actually is reflected right at the end of the psalm in the testimony that we have about God. The God who is exalted who is high above all things he also is our rock and we know that he will always do what is right because in him is no wickedness.

Everything he does everything he thinks is for our good and he acts and rules with justice. So we believe in God we believe in who he is we understand his greatness believe in his son the Lord Jesus we trust in him we have a confidence in him and the knowledge that he will reveal ultimately even at times if it seems that those who are godless are prevailing in our world we can trust God and have confidence in him if we know him and then we're able to rejoice in God whether we're young or whether we're old we can rejoice in song we can rejoice too as we see God at work among us.

As I put it the heading of the slide there our God reigns and we can enjoy his presence here with us. Let me finish with some more botany trees.

Most trees if you cut their trunks in pieces and get a cross section look something like that that's I think an oak tree but many trees are like that they have rings and you can tell a lot about the history of the tree and the history of the seasons of the years by looking at the rings and by seeing how big they are and how they've been formed and so on and each year a new ring is created because the life of the tree if you like the bit that is creating new life is the bit around the outside and the tree adds more and more layers to it.

Palm trees are a bit different we were thinking about palm trees earlier palm trees are a bit different they might look a bit more like that there aren't the rings because palm trees don't grow in the same way as other trees where other trees grow around the outside and add extra layers to themselves palm trees kind of grow from the inside they kind of push out and they grow in that kind of way now that creates some practical differences if you were to tie a piece of wire around a tree perhaps for a washing or something like that if you tied it around an oak tree then what would be likely to happen would be that the tree would grow over the wire so in a while it would look as if the wire was coming out of the tree and you wouldn't actually see the bit that was around the tree because it would have been covered by the bark and so on if you did that with a palm tree and tied a wire around it the tree would grow out and eventually the wire would snap because the growth is coming from the inside rather than outside rather than over what was there already what good does that do for trees well if you have a palm tree they can grow in the most difficult of circumstances they can grow in situations where there are hurricanes and there are typhoons and there are lots of things which if a normal tree came up against them it would just snap because the core is hard the outside is soft and as we see when there are storms in this country very often trees fall down or they break palm trees on the other hand have that inner strength and although they may bend although they may look as if they're going to fall they have that strength throughout them they have that elasticity and in the worst of circumstances they will prevail because from the inside out they are strong and that I think is the message of this psalm if we are strong from the inside out then whatever the circumstances in life then we can prevail in them if we have that relationship with God as the core of our lives and we truly do recognize him as the one who's exalted and have our trust in him then whatever the circumstances of life we may bend we may struggle at times life is hard but it can't break us because we have that inner strength through our relationship with God so the question this morning is do we have that relationship ourselves do I have that personal relationship and trust in God and if I do then I can depend on it and I can rejoice in it

[28 : 42] I can sing his praises and even as I get older even as my body is perhaps failing yet my spirit can be constantly renewed and like that tree that remains fruitful even in old age I can continue to be productive and to serve God let's all be like that make sure we're trusting in God and then be fruitful in our praise and our service for him let's pray together and we're going to pray using the words of a hymn since we've been thinking a bit but hymns this morning a hymn written by Timothy Dudley Smith based on the latter verse of this psalm so let's pray let this prayer O Lord be granted may we live and grow fruitful trees that God has planted where the waters flow when the storms of life assail us let our roots be found firm in hope that will not fail us deep in hallowed ground word of God to teach and nourish love of God to tend grant us in your course to flourish fruitful to the end then in Christ our sins forgiven

God who loves to bless calls us to the life of heaven trees of righteousness Amen