

Are you flourishing?

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[0 : 00] Let's read again the final verses, the final four verses of Psalm 92.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, the Lord is upright. He is my rock, and there is no wickedness in Him.

As we read these words, I wonder, do you think that these words, in a measure, describe our Queen? Much has been said, and rightly so, concerning Queen Elizabeth in these past days, given her 90th birthday being celebrated just this past week.

And in the comments that have been made, there's been a great deal of focus on her continuing physical vigor, even at her advanced age. Her mental sharpness is also noteworthy.

And she is, without doubt, a remarkable 90-year-old woman. But from our perspective as believers, we thank God that our monarch is also characterized by a spiritual vitality that bears resemblance to what is described at the close of this psalm, still bearing fruit in old age, still bearing fruit in old age, and proclaiming and testifying to the goodness of God.

[2 : 07] Well, enough of the Queen. What about you? Are you flourishing? To focus a little bit on this verb that we have repeated on two occasions towards the end of this psalm, the righteous will flourish like a palm tree.

And then again in verse 13, those planted in the house of the Lord will flourish in the courts of our God. Are you flourishing?

Is that a word that you would use to describe yourself? We're often asked the question, no doubt this evening, maybe after the service has finished, and you're chatting to somebody there in the pew or downstairs over a cup of tea, you'll be asked the question, how are things?

How's it going? How are you? Could your response be, I'm flourishing? And well, perhaps modesty might detain you, even if that's how you felt, but could others describe you in that way, as a man or a woman who is flourishing?

It's very attractive language, and not only attractive language, but I think a very attractive prospect or reality to live lives that are flourishing lives.

[3 : 24] And I think these words of the psalmist, we can take them in different ways. I think the psalmist is simply describing a reality, but as we read them, I think we can profit from them in different connected ways.

We can take the language of the psalmist as an encouragement. And as we read these words, be encouraged that our lives would, in some measure, approximate to what is described here, that our lives would be spiritually flourishing lives, and be encouraged to live such a life.

But maybe together with that sense of it being an encouragement, we could see this language and this reality described as a challenge. The psalmist presents this as what is to be expected of the righteous.

This is the experience that should be the norm for God's people. We are to be a flourishing people, and if that is not our experience, there's perhaps also a sense in which the language comes to us as a challenge.

Why not? Why aren't you flourishing? Why is your life not like the one described here, if that is indeed the case? It's an encouragement, a challenge.

[4 : 37] We can maybe go a little bit further, and it's very related to the idea of challenge, but perhaps for some of us, this psalm and the words of this psalm could come to us, and rightly so, and indeed helpfully so, even if painfully so, as a rebuke.

How many years have we been in the Christian life? How many privileges do we enjoy in the Christian life? In how many ways God has provided for us the spiritual means that we might grow and flourish, and yet we don't flourish, or we're not flourishing. And perhaps for us, there can be a sense in which what the psalmist says here serves as a rebuke. I'm not going to tell you in what way you are to take these words. Perhaps for some, what you need is an encouragement. Well, let it be an encouragement to you. Perhaps for others, it's the challenge that we stand in need of, and perhaps some of us do need to hear these words as a word of rebuke, perhaps even a combination of all three in some cases. Well, let's bear that in mind a little as we give some thoughts to the language and what is described here, or how the righteous are described here by the psalmist.

[5 : 55] We want to give some thought then to what is said about those who flourish. First of all, we need to ask a very simple question that, fortunately, we have an immediate answer to, and that is, who are they?

Who are these people described as those who flourish? Well, in verse 12, it's stated very clearly, the righteous will flourish like a palm tree.

The righteous. It is the righteous who are to flourish. It is the righteous who do flourish. Having identified that simple answer to a simple question, we can divide our thoughts by considering certain aspects that are touched on here concerning the righteous.

First of all, to think a little bit about the identity of the righteous. Who are the righteous? How can we identify if we are among the righteous? They're the ones who flourish. Well, who are they?

So that's what we want to spend a little time thinking about, but then also to consider the experience of the righteous. They're very much focusing in on this language. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.

[7 : 02] What can we say about what that means and the significance of it for us? And then finally, consider the testimony of the righteous. So the identity, the experience, and the testimony of the righteous.

The identity of the righteous. Who are the righteous? Now, contrary to what some might imagine, indeed, I would imagine if you were to ask folks, just random people, certainly outwith the church, but even within the church.

If you were to ask people, you know, who are the righteous? Describe the righteous. There might be a tendency to describe the righteous in terms of what they do.

But to be righteous is not principally about what you do, but about who you know. And in this psalm, that is made very clear.

It's made clear in one way. It's in a number of ways. But in one particular way, this is made clear by the contrast that is drawn between the fool or the senseless man and the righteous man.

[8 : 08] Notice what is said about the senseless man. And then in contrast, we can establish what needs to be established about the righteous man. In verse 6, we're told, the senseless man does not know.

The fool does not know. There also, it's not so much about the foolish things he does, though no doubt the foolish man does many foolish things. But the focus is that the senseless man, the foolish man does not know.

And then the contrast is with the righteous man. The righteous man or woman knows. What does he know? What does she know? Well, let's just notice one or two things that were told in answer to that question through the psalm.

The righteous man or woman knows the deeds and the works and the thoughts of God. Verses 4 and 5, we read of that. For you make me glad by your deeds, O Lord.

I sing for joy at the work of your hands. How great are your works, O Lord. How profound your thoughts. These three words, the deeds of God, the works of God, the thoughts of God.

[9 : 18] They capture the totality of what God has done. Though perhaps a little forced, we could see the three words as pointing to God's work of creation, His work of salvation, and His explanation of what He has done as His thoughts are revealed to us, as He explains to us who He is and what He has done and why He has done what He has done.

And we're given an insight into who He is and His thoughts. The righteous man or woman knows the deeds of God, the works of God, the thoughts of God in a measure.

But perhaps even more significantly, or together with this, the righteous man or woman knows the heart of God. At the very beginning of the psalm, the psalmist is giving praise to God for His love and His faithfulness.

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. God's love and faithfulness.

And the one who is able to praise God for His love and faithfulness is one who has much more than simply head knowledge concerning God. It's not perhaps wise to make too sharp a distinction between head knowledge and heart knowledge, but there's some merit in acknowledging a distinction of some kind.

[10 : 45] We can know a lot about God. We can be knowledgeable about the content of Scripture, indeed about what God has done, His deeds, His works, even His thoughts.

as we read and study the Scriptures. But what the psalmist does at the beginning of the psalm is he praises God. He is speaking of his experience of God.

He is one who has experienced and tasted of His love. He is one who has witnessed in his own life and circumstances the faithfulness of God.

The righteous man knows God's love. The righteous man knows God's faithfulness. These are realities that he experiences.

Whenever we see these two attributes or characteristics of God, His love and faithfulness, and so often they are presented to us together, inseparably together in the Scriptures.

[11 : 46] But whenever we do see them, and we see them often, we're driven forward to the person of Jesus. We cannot see those two words together, even in the Old Testament, without being brought to look and to see Jesus.

Listen to what is said of Jesus by John in his Gospel. In John chapter 1 and verse 14, very familiar words to us. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. These two Greek words, translated in our English version as grace and truth, are the Greek equivalents to the Hebrew words translated in this psalm, love and faithfulness, or grace and fidelity, love and truth.

The love and faithfulness of God has found its most dramatic and eloquent demonstration in the person of Jesus.

Jesus manifests and is the living embodiment of the love and faithfulness of God. He was and is, to use the words of John, full of grace and truth.

[13 : 12] It's as if the language isn't sufficient to do justice to who He is, and yet every effort is made to impress upon us that in Jesus we see, we witness the grace and truth of God.

The righteous man knows God. The righteous man knows Jesus. It is those who know Jesus. It is those who trust in Jesus. It is those who, devoid of a righteousness that is their own, are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

Such are the righteous. And it is such, the psalmist assures us, that flourish. So the identity of the righteous is principally about who they know.

They know God. They know His Son, Jesus. Of course, it is true that what we know is necessarily reflected in what we do.

The ground of what we do is what we know, but given what we know, we then act, we then do. And in this psalm, of course, that is what the psalmist is doing. He is praising God in the light of what he knows concerning God.

[14 : 29] He testifies to God in the light of what he knows concerning God. He praises God night and day, this persistent praise grounded in his knowledge of the one that he is lifting up, his voice in praise to.

Let's move on and think just for a moment on the second aspect of this that we highlighted a few moments ago, and that is the experience of the righteous. Having established the identity of the righteous, what can we say of the experience of the righteous?

And here we come to this word that we've already been speaking about quite a bit, this verb that the righteous flourish. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.

Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. The pictures that the psalmist uses of a palm tree and of a cedar tree point to what is involved and required for the

righteous to flourish.

That is what we are to do. That is what we are called to do. That is our privilege and inheritance, if you wish. But what are the aspects of this? Well, we can notice some of them as we think about these pictures that the psalmist uses.

[15 : 45] If we are to flourish, a necessary starting point is that we be planted by God. That's the very language that the psalmist uses, of the palm tree or the cedar of Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord.

And this language, this verb, reminds us of God's initiative in beginning our righteous life, if you wish. It is the owner of the house who plants within the grounds of his property the trees that he chooses.

And so it is with the righteous. The Lord takes us and plants us in his house. It is an act of sovereign grace instigated and performed by God.

He brings us into his very presence. We're not part of a plantation of his ownership distant from the palace that he owns and occasionally visits or has news of.

But no, we're planted in the very courts of the royal household. Planted by God. Of course, not only planted by God but nourished by God.

[16 : 54] These trees that are planted, we're told, they then grow. Why do they grow? How do they grow? Well, because God not only plants us but then he nourishes us.

We're not saved and then abandoned to our own devices. He nourishes us by his work. It is his work but a work that we are involved in and must cooperate with.

The trees, the cedar, the palm tree, they're pictures and so we can't stretch the picture over much. But the image that I have in mind here that speaks something of our responsibility to be nourished and to receive of God's nourishment.

The picture that comes to mind is of trees you sometimes see that are by the side of a river and sometimes it's quite striking when you can see their roots and there's a sense in which the roots, they actually seek out the water.

It's just a tree. How do they do that? I don't know. But there's a sense in which the water that they know that they need, the very way in which they develop and grow is in order to ensure that they have the water that they need.

[18 : 05] We are to seek the nourishment that God provides in and through His Word and the gathering of God's people and the study and meditation of His Word so we're nourished and fed and watered that the tree that has been planted by God might grow.

Now, if we fail to be nourished and that is often true, we don't avail ourselves of the nourishment that God provides. God does, by grace, maintain us with life.

We remain in His house. We're not cast out from His house. He doesn't dig us up and cast us on the fire. But we will fail to grow and to produce fruit as we are intended to.

The righteous flourish, planted by God, nourished by God, but also fruitful for God. God. Then in verse 14, the righteous will still bear fruit in old age.

They will stay fresh and green. This picture of those even of advanced years still fresh and green.

[19 : 18] A superficial reading might lead us to think that here we have the secret of perpetual youth, but that's not the idea at all. It's not what's anticipated. It's not what we look for. We're not looking for perpetual youth.

What we have here rather is the secret of a fruitful life into old age. Not just in old age, but into old age. We do grow old.

That's the reality. But we can remain fruitful in old age. Indeed, not only in old age. As children, as youths, as young men and women into middle and old age, the righteous are to flourish, to bear fruit, to stay fresh and green.

This fruitful life has different characteristics depicted by the pictures that the psalmist used. There's this picture of spiritual vitality. They stay fresh and green.

There's this picture of spiritual usefulness, of producing fruit for the good and blessing of others. A tree produces fruit, not for its own benefit, but for the benefit of others.

[20 : 27] And so, too, our fruit is to be for the blessing and benefit of others. There's this picture of spiritual perseverance, of spiritual longevity, even into old age.

Fruitful, fresh, and green. The experience of the righteous. Is that our experience? It's good for us to just pause for a moment in our own hearts and minds and ask ourselves that question.

Do I flourish in this way? This is what we are called to. This is what God provides for us. And as we were thinking just at the beginning, perhaps this can be an encouragement to you, perhaps a challenge, perhaps even a rebuke.

But then finally, let's notice also one other aspect here of the righteous who flourish, and that is their testimony. The testimony of the righteous. And I'm thinking particularly of verse 15 and how it begins.

We're told that the righteous proclaim. And then we're told what they proclaim. They proclaim, the Lord is upright, He is my rock, and there is no wickedness in Him.

[21 : 32] The word here translated proclaim or proclaiming is an interesting Hebrew word that has a breadth of meaning that's not fully captured by the word proclaim.

The word proclaim is an entirely reasonable and good translation. But as I say, the original does have a broader sense.

The word proclaim in English is a word that speaks very much of a verbal activity. We proclaim words. But the verb here is beyond verbal.

It includes verbal proclamation, but it goes beyond that. Some translations opt for a somewhat broader verb like show or show forth.

They show forth. The Lord is upright. He is my rock, and there is no wickedness in Him. I think the picture is of the righteous proclaiming or showing forth or testifying in word and deed to these truths and to these realities.

[22 : 36] Maybe we can think about these two aspects. The testimony of the righteous is the content. Well, what is the content? What is the verbal content of that testimony? Well, it concerns the character of God.

Proclaiming the Lord is upright. There is no wickedness in Him. We declare, we testify to God's character that He is a good God, that He is altogether righteous, that in Him there is no injustice of any kind, and we proclaim His character.

But we also proclaim our connection to God. The Lord is upright. He is my rock. There's that possessive pronoun that the righteous is able to employ with confidence, not with arrogance, but with confidence.

He is my rock. He is my God. I am connected to Him. I trust in Him, and He responds to that trust. He is my rock.

He is my defense. He is my protector. And so verbally, we testify to who God is, but also to who He is for us and the connection that we have with Him by His grace.

[23 : 53] But the testimony of the righteous is also indeed. We show forth who we are and whom we serve. And the evidence or the manner in which we show forth who we are is precisely by the evidence of a flourishing life.

As we live the life described here, as we flourish like a palm tree, as we flourish in the courts of our God, as we still bear fruit in old age, as we remain fresh and green, in that way we show forth and testify to our God and to what He has done in us.

The Anglican prayer book captures this idea helpfully in a prayer of thanksgiving that I'm simply going to read now. And we beseech Thee, Father, give us that due sense of all Thy mercies that our hearts may be unfaintedly thankful and that we show forth Thy praise.

The language here of the psalm, that we show forth Thy praise not only with our lips but in our lives by giving up ourselves to Thy service and by walking before Thee in holiness and righteousness all our days through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with Thee and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory world without end.

Amen. The testimony of the righteous proclaiming, showing forth the character of God and our relationship with Him. The flourishing life, when we put it in those terms, it sounds like the title of some awful self-help book, Five Steps to the Flourishing Life.

[25 : 46] But the flourishing life has nothing to do with self-help and everything to do with God-help. It is God who enables us to live lives that flourish.

He is the one who has called us to, equipped us for, and daily empowers us that we might live flourishing lives to His praise and glory.

And God grant that it might be so. Let's pray. We beseech Thee, Father, give us that due sense of all Thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we show forth Thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to Thy service, by walking before Thee in

holiness and righteousness all our days.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom with Thee and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.