

New Years Day Service

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me now to the psalm that we read, Psalm 90, and in particular to verses 13 to 17.

Psalm 90 and verses 13 to 17, perhaps to fix them more firmly in our mind, we'll just read them through again. We lent, O Lord, how long will it be, have compassion on your servants, satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.

May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us. Establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

I think you will have all probably noticed as you are reading the psalm through from the beginning, that we do have here, really it's an incomparable presentation, isn't it, of God's grandeur and his eternity in comparison to the frailty of mankind.

[1 : 22] It is the case, I think, at this time of year, that we can't but contrast the temporary nature of our own lives, our own existence in this world, and the eternity of the God who we worship and who brought us into this world.

It's one of the great psalms, I think, you have here in just a few verses this marvellous comparison of the eternity and the grandeur of God. God on the one hand and the frailty and sensory nature of mankind on the other.

And I think when we think like that, we are also inevitably drawn to, as we look back certainly, perhaps less to the good times of what we've experienced in the year gone by, perhaps more to the difficulties that we've had, the problems that we've faced, the sadnesses that perhaps we've had, perhaps more to the individual experience.

And I think also, through the congregation of God's people, we can't but look back to the successes and disappointments in the work of the Gospel that we might have experienced also in the past year.

And certainly when we think about what we might have been able to achieve for the Lord Jesus, or people in other parts of the land or in other parts of the world perhaps have been able to do for him and the success of the Gospel which they've seen, it quite often can lead to a feeling of purposelessness or hopelessness in our own lives.

[3 : 01] And I think perhaps that's the sort of situation that this particularly speaks to, and particularly speaks to at the beginning of a new year. And can I therefore look at these verses under the general heading, verses 13 to 17, under the general heading of four prayers, or if you like, four petitions for the new year.

So I think in verses 13 to 17, there's four fairly clearly defined things that we can use to direct our thoughts and prayers to in the next few days and in the weeks that lie ahead.

Now can I draw your attention first of all to verses 13 and 15, and to what I think there we can call a prayer for evil reversed. Evil reversed. Evil reversed. It's the first petition I want to bring to our notice this morning as things which are appropriate to pray for today and at the beginning of a new year.

Now there's boldness of course on the one hand in verse 1, Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. And I think really it's connected, fundamentally, with the petitions of verses 13 to 17 as a whole, because they are largely, I think, petitions for a reversal of what has been the experience of the Lord's people, at least in Moses' mind at this time, in the period it's gone before.

They are largely for a reversal of what God's people have been experiencing, if you like, especially in view of the fact that God has been their dwelling place throughout all generations.

[4 : 49] Verse 13, I think, if you like it, there's a harking back to verse 3, you turn men dust to dust, saying return to dust. That word return, I think it's a significant one.

The same word basically as is translated in verse 13 as relent. I think I'm correct in saying that in the older version the word is return that's given there. So God has rebuked man earlier on in verse 3 and said turn back.

And now man is, if you like, returning the cry to God. And seeking and praying that God would return to them. And the second part of that verse 13 really indicates that God is intending to do what's requested.

Have compassion on your servants. Well, one of the things which God's servants can always be absolutely sure about is that when they turn to him, or if they've been less close to him than they should have been, if they've vaccinated in any way, then when they return to him, he cannot ignore them.

If you can put it like that. Not that God would ignore his servants. But there's a way in which he cannot because of his covenant which he's made with them. All those who belong to the Lord Jesus are in covenant with the Lord God.

[6 : 13] And he is not going to ignore them. He may chastise them. He may rebuke them. But he's not going to ignore them. And especially when they've been experienced in difficult times, he will most certainly not ignore them.

And that's what he said in verse 3. It's like reminding God of his covenant permittance, if we can put that reverently. Have compassion on your servants. How long is it going to be before the compassion which God has for his people is made evident?

And verse 15 is connected with it. Because there's, I think it's stated that the appropriate way, in verse 15 we get the appropriate way stated or delineated for assessing the amount of gladness which we have a right to expect, if you like.

And those two verses, verse 13 and verse 15, are connected. But do notice that the first thing I think that we should pray for at this time is that the evil we have experienced in our lives, individually or as families, or what we've experienced by way of sorrow and difficulty as congregations of God's people, we are praying really that it should be replaced, it should be reversed, it should be replaced by a proportional amount of gladness.

Now, if you actually think about what the New Testament says, that is really a very modest prayer. The New Testament far exceeds the modest petition of Psalm 90 here in verse 15, for joys to balance sorrows, because the New Testament promises God's people, what Paul calls in 2 Corinthians 4, we touched on the same theme yesterday in the morning service, an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

[8 : 15] That promises far in excess of what the Pharisee, of what Moses here in Psalm 90 is praying for. He's praying for a proportionate amount of gladness to replace the evil, to replace the sorrow, to replace the difficulty.

A little while ago, perhaps some months ago now, there was the word proportionality was a sort of in word, wasn't it? I think it was introduced in connection with the various provisions of the European community.

Proportionality. But what the psalmist is requesting here, is that God would replace the evil which he has permitted his people to endure, by a proportionate amount of gladness.

Now, I would suggest to you this morning, that that's a not unreasonable petition to make with the Lord. If you have experienced in your own lives, evil of one sort and another, difficulty of one sort and another, it is surely a request that you can make with confidence, that in this new year which is beginning, the Lord would give you, in his providence and his goodness, a proportionate amount of joy.

The psalmist Moses here, is praying for evil to be reversed, and to be replaced with an equivalent amount of gladness. Modest request.

[9 : 42] Do not, if you like, ask him too much of the Lord, if we petition him for that, I think we can all do that. And that's something which I see with some young people in the congregation.

Can I say to you, if things have been difficult for you at school, if they've been difficult for you with your friends, perhaps you've fallen out with your friends, or something like that, you can ask the Lord to replace that difficulty, the sadnesses which you've had, with an equivalent amount of joy.

You'll be very much in line with psalm 19 here. Petition, evil reversed, we pray that the Lord would replace it with an equivalent amount of proportions, amount of gladness, and bearing in mind that God has said, there's a waking for us, this eternal weight of glory, beyond the ability of our words to express, that surely is quite a reasonable, and a petition which you can make, I think, with confidence.

The second petition, which I would bring to you, notice from these verses, I think, is a petition, a prayer for joy unceasing. Verse 14, satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy, and be glad all our days.

That word translated unfailing love, or the translated unfailing love, is that word which we know so well elsewhere, it's translated mercy, covenant faithfulness, loving kindness.

[11:14] This is one of the great characteristics of the Lord in all his feelings with his people. And it's reminding us that really the basis for the enduring gladness and peace of the Lord's people is the knowledge that they're living under the shadow of that love.

If we constantly remind ourselves that if we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, then all through our lives, each day we're living under the shadow of his love, then that really is the basis for enduring gladness, over against the sadnesses, over against the difficulties, over against the problems that often weigh us down.

If, as believers, we have this conscious awareness, constant awareness, of the love of living our lives under the shadow of God's love, then we can indeed be glad all the days of our lives.

So, can I suggest to you very briefly that we should be all asking the Lord that he would give us joy unceasing. We should pray for the joy that...

And how do you get it? Well, you can't have that unless you know that you're saved from your sins and have the assurance of God's love. And if you know that, you have that, then that will most certainly enable you to live your lives in the sort of unceasing joy that the psalmist is speaking about.

[12:53] You know, at a time like this, it's almost in the stable, you can't help noticing it, can you? How so many people are devoting their lives to entertainment and to pleasure in one form or another?

And isn't it equally noticeable that they're not really getting any long-term satisfaction at all? And I think that this time of year is really quite inescapable.

People who are committing themselves or seeking satisfaction aren't going to find it. They aren't going to find long-term peace. People who won't recognize that they're sinners won't find long-term peace.

People who won't turn to the Lord Jesus Christ won't find long-term peace. And wherever you look in society, that's the way it is. And verse 14 really indicates what we should be doing if we do want the joy unceasing that's spoken of here.

We should look to the Lord for salvation and having got that, we'll have an assurance of his love for us and we will in fact know that sort of unceasing joy.

[14:08] You young people, can I say a word to you again? Your friends, the people you're at school with, many of them will be telling you that looking for pleasure in life, that's the really great important thing.

You get a good job in order to have lots of money, in order to go on lots of big holidays and get all the things you want and that's how you'll be happy. Now that's not the way you become happy.

The way you become happy is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ and put your trust in him and love him and your life will be transformed. It's that sort of thing which explains why people all over the world without the sorts of things which we have are yet perfectly happy and content with the loss that God has given them because they have the peace in their hearts that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's all pray in this year which has become that we will know the unceasing joy that comes from having the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, having God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us and being surrounded by an awareness of God's love for us.

That's what is unceasing joy and that's what Moses here is praying for in verse 14. Then in verse 16, May your deeds be known to your servants, your splendor to their children.

[15:39] The psalmist here is praying for a sight of God's work. A sight of God's work. It's often hard to raise our eyes from our puny and at times apparently ineffective work on earth to the great and to the successful work that God does both here on earth and on earth and in heaven.

And failure to raise our eyes at least from time to time to what God is doing here on earth and in heaven above, if we don't do it, it can lead to discouragement and it can lead even to a sense of hopelessness.

One of the problems that we face as Christians is that often we see nothing of the work that God is doing. The great work that God is doing is the work of the salvation of mankind.

That's the work of the kingdom. And it's so often the case that because we allow our horizons to become too small, we don't see what the Lord is actually doing.

Because there's not as much blessing as we would like to see in our own particular part of his vineyard, we tend to fall into the mistake of thinking that he's actually not doing very much these days.

[17 : 05] One of the things which does worry me I think quite a lot is when people talk about it being a day of small things. It's only a day of small things if we think about our own part of the world.

In other parts of the parts of the world, it's a day of the greatest things that have ever happened. If you look at the situation globally and the work of the kingdom, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in our day and age is being expanded, it's growing as it never has done before in human history.

And in our prayers, we talk about it being a day of small things. We can only say that if we've allowed our horizons to get far too near.

It's not a day of small things. It's a day of huge things in the work of the kingdom. But in our part of the kingdom, it's not happening and we don't see it.

And we're not getting the joy that comes from knowing that we're part of this marvelous, huge, worldwide process. There's one thing that's worrying, I think, contemporary.

[18 : 23] And that's, and perhaps some of you heard it in the news in the last couple of days, that the fastest growing religion at the moment is Islam. And that's not something which has been the case until very recently.

And it's something that we need to be very earnest in our prayers for that that would be reversed. And that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ would become the fastest growing religion in the world it would be until very recently.

But once again it would be. That's something I think which we should pray very earnestly about. Here's Moses in the psalm praying that the Lord would let his worth become apparent.

Let it be seen, says the psalmist here. And I think underlying that petition is the fact that we only really see God's glory in a most effective way when we see how marvelously he works.

When we become aware of the evidences of God's glorious work going on continually and uninterruptedly then we can live the hopeful life too.

[19 : 37] I think this is a petition which draws our attention to how important it is to two things. First of all to look at the global situation but also be very careful and always on the lookout for evidences of that work going on in front of our own eyes.

One of the greatest things which does show the glory of God's work is when believers and people are converted to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before our own lives.

Now there are some congregations of God's people in this land of ours who haven't seen that happening for years. I know a congregation reasonably well which had not seen a new believer for about eleven years and when it happened and when two people were converted the whole life of that congregation was transformed.

the whole life I think of the community may well in God's confidence be transformed as a result of that very small example of God's marvellous work.

Never never never underestimate how significant it is when the Lord converts someone from a life of sin and godlessness to a life of faith and righteousness.

[21 : 04] That's God at work and here's the psalmist saying may your deeds be shown to your servants we must pray for that. May we all see the Lord at work in this great work of conversion yes before our very eyes in our own congregations in our own families wherever the Lord may praise us.

And there's a second part of this verse and it's really I think a very important part and it's something which I think perhaps many parts of Christ's church have lost sight of the significance of it.

May your deeds be known to your servants your splendor to their children. And I think this draws attention to the fact that the church in every age should have a care that children may be part of the same merciful work of God.

Now I think one of the things that's happening in our own land, it's happening in our own free church denomination to a side extent I'm afraid, it's happening in other denominations as well, and that is that young people, the young people of the children of believing parents are turning their backs on Christ.

Now it might be happening here, one of the really encouraging things, and I say this coming to you every now and again, is the number of young families I've seen before in each time I preach here in Bonacord.

[22 : 44] That's tremendous. And it's the way it should be. But you parents, please prayerfully do everything as you can for the conversion of your children.

Because in congregations all over Scotland, young people who have been born into the God-fearing families, worshipping regularly, just are drifting away once they leave home. And I do think we have to ask ourselves why. And I do know that one of the things that tends to happen, for example, is that family worship is less and less often the case.

And we have this expression quality time. But for Christian parents, quality time must involve spending time with their children talking about the things of God.

It must. It's not to do with being out playing with them, or taking them to places, or sitting in front of the television with them.

[23 : 56] Something which Christian parents must really, I think, think seriously and prayerfully about, is are they doing enough to ensure that their children are to be prepared?

It's something we must look at. And the reason that I'm suggesting that here is that the second part of verse 16, I think, seems to suggest that this work of children seeing the glory, seeing the splendour of the Lord, is from our point of view, mankind's point of view, one of the clearest demonstrations of the glory of God.

That he's a God not just to his people, not just to his servants, but to their children after them. And yet, that's not foremost what we expect.

It's almost that we more confidently expect that people will be gathered in off the street than their own children will be gathered in. And I think what Moses is saying here, that the way in which man can see most clearly the glory of God is when their own children see his glory to.

Now I know that there are doubt that some of you here whose children are far away from the Lord Jesus at the moment. So redouble your prayer. Confess your covenant things.

[25 : 33] I don't think any of us can say I've done everything I should have to bring up my children in the way they should have been brought up and I haven't done everything that I could have to bring them up knowing the Lord Jesus. I think if that's the case then I suggest it is for most of us we need to confess that to the Lord.

Have you ever noticed in Daniel how one of that great prayer in Daniel chapter 9 is that he confesses not just his own sin he confesses the people sin and he is the strange one who confesses the sins of his father.

Have a look at Ezra. He does the same sin. Perhaps we need to confess the sins of our own fathers and the things which have led to our own generation being less solid in its worship of the Lord as it should be.

These are things I think which we do know here. But we don't think any more about it. I think the third petition that we should be putting up to the Lord at this time of year is that we would have in this year of 2007 a site of God's love.

God at work bringing people from sin to salvation. We must pray for that. And then finally verse 17.

[27 : 06] May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us. Establish the work of our hands for us. Establish the work of our hands. Here is a petition for the endurance of the work of our hands.

Then there is the great contrast between what was seen as perishable in verses 3 to 12 and the abiding glory of what God does in the work of salvation.

And what we have here is the petition in the previous verse that not only will God's work endure and be manifest to us, here there is the petition that this God's blessing so too will our own work be, will it endure as well.

May the beauty of the Lord rest upon us. favours, I think favours are a bit colourless to be perfectly truthful.

It's delight would be a better word, may the delight of the Lord our God rest upon us, but there's still this connotation of steadfast love, it's still rare, they're still being reminded that to be sheltered by

God's favour is the sum of all the blessings God's people may aspire to enjoy forever.

[28 : 34] It goes back to the ironic lesson, doesn't it? Deuteronomy 6. But we remind it here, I think, also that men, men and women have their assignments from God.

We have work to do under God in and among his people. Now we don't give success or permanence to our assigned past, past to ourselves, because success comes only from God. Therefore what we've got to do is to pray for God's presence and his blessing to give success to our efforts. But those two words at the end of the first steps are made the favour of our Lord, our God, rest upon us.

And this expression upon us is perhaps a bit unusual. It seems to suggest, in the original Hebrew, it seems to suggest something like, in our midst.

May the favour of the Lord, our God, rest in our midst. I think it means, that it's a petition that we may see God's blessing left in on our work, and enjoy it as we see it.

[30 : 04] And it is the idea is repeated, establish the work of our hands for us, yes, establish the work of our hands. So I think that what we've got is a prayer in verse 17, a petition in verse 17, that God will bless our efforts in his cause, and that we might see and enjoy their success, and may we see and enjoy their endurance.

they're lasting. So I want to suggest that verse 15 gives us a fourth petition for the beginning of a new year, which is that the work of our hands in God's service might endure, and that we might see it, and that we might enjoy it.

now we all know that the sisters tell us that Paul plants and Apollos waters, and God gives the interest, that's too. But I think what Moses is saying here, and commending to the people of Israel, is that what they do in God's service, they'll last, and that they will see it lasting, and that they will have the joy, the spiritual joy that comes from seeing God's blessing, rest on what they are doing for him.

So can I suggest to you today, that here are four petitions that you can all pray at the beginning of the new year, which we all should pray, that evil would be reversed, and be replaced by proportional loss.

That in God's providence, the joy would be unseeking, because if we are saved, we know that God's favour rests on us, and we know that that is surely the way to unseeking God.

[32 : 06] We should pray that we might have a sight of God's work, God's work in this great work of saving souls, and that in our work for his kingdom, we might see the joy results, of what we're doing as service, and have the joy that comes in that.

And that is something, three things are all things, which you don't need a minister to pray for, and you don't need a minister to, to excuse. And I'm not saying for one moment that it's not important to pray for a minister, but three are things that you can pray for at the same time, and you're praying for the Lord's allegiance to the man of his choice.

And it is shown by blessing not just that you will have a minister in the course of 2007, and the Lord's providence, that you would experience these coming true for you, in your own lives, individually, in a family, and as a congregation of God's people.

Pray the Lord in fact, hear our prayers in this new year, and may he bestow his blessing upon all his people for ever may be. Let us unite.