

Armagh Baptist Friendship Hour
24th September 2009 - 2:30pm
Psalm 92:8-15

Introduction

The first time I preached on this Psalm was in 1987 – that was 22 years ago! I was just a first year student at the Irish Baptist College in Belfast.

We often had to speak at various meetings around churches in order to get some experience at preaching in those days.

Now, I know I still look very young now, but if you could have seen me then, I must have looked like a baby – or at least a tall lanky school boy!

So, very often as I went around speaking at meetings in our churches, some older person would come up to me afterwards and say,

*'It's great to see the young people giving their lives to the Lord
and getting involved in the Lord's work!'*

Now I understood what they meant, and of course I appreciated their encouragement very much indeed. But this afternoon I want to turn the tables on you 'older' folk here, and say this:

*'It's great to see older folk giving their lives to the Lord
and seeing them involved in the Lord's work too!'*

I have lots of good reasons for saying that:

1. You have a ripe experience of life and of the Lord.
2. You have wonderful testimonies of what the Lord has done for you in life.
3. Tempers mellow with time, and patience grows with time – those are things us younger folk, are only learning – so you have a lot to teach us about grace!
4. You have a wealth of spiritual wisdom to share with younger people like me. Perhaps we don't look for your advice and guidance as much as we should!
5. The greatest and most effective prayer warriors are folk like yourselves, who have proved God and the power of prayer over many years.

I'm sure some of you will remember Rita Moorcroft. She came from Tassagh, down below Keady – and after living in Belfast for most of her life – she came to live in Legacorry House in Richhill, as one of its first residents. Rita and her sister Dessa were my prayer warriors as I was starting out in the Lord's work. Their nephew, Glenn, was one of my closest friends at school in Lisburn, and that's how I got to know them. They prayed for me night and day for many years, while I was church-planting in Fermanagh and Cavan. I praise the Lord for them, and for the answers we saw to their prayers!

And so, it's with that in mind that I want to bring you a word of encouragement and a word of challenge from Psalm 92:8-15 this afternoon:

First of all, just notice that vs.9-11 talk about the downfall of the Wicked. (See v.9 and v.11) – Like grass (v.7). But then, by way of contrast to that:

(vs.12-15) – The Progress of the Righteous.

Here in these verses, the righteous are compared to trees.

We get some lovely pictures here e.g. tree growth is different from human growth. A tree grows throughout its life, adding a new ring every year, or every season, always getting bigger and stronger.

As human beings we grow up until we are about 20 yrs old, then we grow out until we're about 40 years old, and then we begin to decline, and sometimes even shrink back towards the latter years of our lives. But God wants us to grow spiritually throughout our lives, ever getting bigger and stronger in our faith. So here we have a picture of spiritual progress in vs.12-13:

Two trees are pictured here:

1. *'The Righteous will flourish like a Palm Tree'*
2. *'They will grow like a Cedar of Lebanon.'*

v.13 tells us where these trees are planted – *'In the house of the Lord.'*
'They will flourish in the courts of our God.'

Such trees were often planted within the Temple courtyard in Jerusalem. There they experienced ideal conditions for growth.

But the parallel that the Psalmist is trying to draw out for us is that if we as people draw our nourishment from God himself and from meeting together with God's people, and around his Word, then we too will flourish and grow strong and stay healthy - spiritually speaking.

If you have been well-grounded in the Word of God over the years, then today that's why you are spiritually strong. But if you've neglected the Word of God over the years, and not bothered to read his Word and feed upon it, then maybe that explains it, if you're spiritually weak today?

But on the subject of Spiritual Progress, what lessons can we learn from a Palm Tree and from the Cedar of Lebanon?

Well, the same lessons can be learned from both of them:

1. Both trees survive through adverse weather conditions.

The Palm Tree survives through times of drought because of its long roots, which it puts away down deep into the sandy soil, so it gets down to the water table, and is able to draw up that nourishment from deep in the earth.

The Cedar survives through stormy weather because of its great strength – it's like a mighty oak tree, with its trunk well buttressed around the bottom for strength to withstand the storms of life.

Do your roots go down deep into God's Word, so that you can draw nourishment from it for yourself – perhaps to help you survive through long periods when you're not able to get out to church as much as you would like?

Is your faith well buttressed around by what you have learned from God's Word over the years? I hope you have memorised lots of Scripture verses, that you can draw on now for strength, if you're not as able anymore.

But contrast the strength and endurance of these 2 trees with the grass of v.7: *'The wicked may spring up like grass, and evildoers may flourish for a time, but they will be forever destroyed.'* Our strength comes from the Lord, and God's people who have walked a lifetime with him, will have the strength to endure whatever comes their way in later life. I want to encourage you to get into God's Word, and get as much out of it as you can, so that you will have a strong faith for the days that lie ahead.

2. Both Trees are Evergreens:

In other words, they never lose their leaves. They are constant. Not fickle. They are reliable. They're always the same way. It's good to be dependable.

3. Both Trees have Long Lives:

It is thought that 7 of the Great Cedars of Lebanon are still standing today, which were part of the forest that Solomon took his Cedars from to build the Temple in Jerusalem! That's almost 3000 years ago!!

But that brings me to the main point that I want to make to you this afternoon:

4. Both Trees Produce Fruit even in their old age:

I am told that the Palm Tree produces its best fruit between the ages of 30 and 100. I am also told that 300 lbs of dates are yielded from each tree every year during that period of its life.

This is the point that I want you to think about this afternoon: (v.14)

The Righteous ***'will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.'***

Now I have to be careful here, this afternoon, I don't want to offend anyone.

There is no-one here today 'in old age' – you're just older than I am!

'You're only as young as you feel' isn't that right?

But just like the Palm Tree that bears its best fruit in its old age, in its more mature years, so it should be with the Christian – you too should be bearing your best spiritual fruit for the Lord in your latter years.

So we have here a picture of spiritual produce:

'The righteous will still bear fruit in old age.'

Don't be saying, that you couldn't do anything for the Lord, that you don't have youth on your side anymore, or that you're too old to be doing anything for the Lord now. That's just simply not true!

You may feel you're declining physically as you get older, but spiritually you should be maturing still. And when you're maturing spiritually you should be of more use to the Lord and not less useful to him-as long as you're still growing!

As Isaiah 40:31 says, *'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not be faint.'*

If you are waiting upon the Lord regularly, you will still be growing spiritually, and so the Lord can use you to help others, maybe even point others to the Lord for salvation.

Someone has said, *'an older Christian is a store-house of wisdom and spiritual power.'* – a store not just to keep things in, but to get things out of too! You have a wealth of Christian experience that younger people just don't have yet. You need to pass it on, you need to share it with others if you can.

Take Caleb for example in Joshua ch.14:6-12

At 85 he was still prepared to 'attempt great things for God.'

So should all the senior saints!

Since I became pastor in this church 5 months ago, it has been great to see the work that older folk do behind the scenes here. It's great to see you involved in the Lord's work still. You are much appreciated for your prayers, your maturity, and your wisdom.

A man who was celebrating his 100th birthday was told:

*'Congratulations on reaching 100,
but I'm afraid you'll not be here to celebrate a second 100!'*

To which the old man replied:

'I'm not so sure of that. The thing is I feel much stronger now to begin the second 100, than I did, when I was just starting out on the first 100.'

You should have the same attitude:

Maybe you've been on the Christian pathway for 50 years. Are you feeling stronger now to start the second 50 than you were when you started the first, spiritually speaking? After all, you were only a spiritual baby back then, you were just taking your first steps of faith. Well, you should be much stronger now in your faith, ready to attempt greater things for God now, than then.

'You shouldn't just be coasting through later life, you should still be climbing!' Just the other day I was talking to somebody about great missionaries of a certain age – Helen Roseveare, or Maud Kells (WEC) or Jani Van der Klis (AIM) –all ladies in their 70s+, all still going back to Africa to serve the Lord. They have shown that there is no pension scheme in the Lord's work. There are no retired people in God's army. The day of our spiritual retirement is the

day we enter glory and receive the greatest golden hand-shake ever, and hear his *'Well done, good and faithful servant!'* as we enter heaven and see our beloved Saviour face to face.

Never stop growing in the Christian life. Never give up serving the Lord. God won't give up on you, as long as you are willing to be used by him!

That never-give-up attitude is expressed in the last verse of the hymn: 'Teach me thy way, O Lord'. It goes like this:

*'Long as my life shall last, teach me Thy way,
Where e'er my lot be cast, teach me Thy way,
Until the race is run, until the journey's done,
Until the crown is won, teach me Thy way.'*

Let me ask you, are you still walking with the Lord?
Can you still say:

*'I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day,
Still praying as I'm onward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.'*

Never stop climbing with your Lord. When I came to this church, I talked about wanting to see discipleship a reality in every area of church-life. Well that includes the Friendship Hour. I want to see each of you not only coming to faith in Christ, but following Jesus day by day, becoming more and more like him. So keep on praying fervently for the unsaved, for missionaries, for those who are in the Lord's work at home and abroad. And always take that opportunity to speak a word for Him, and to live for Him, right to the end.

Paul could say in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, at the end of his life:

*'For I am already being poured out like a drink offering,
And the time has come for my departure.
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.'*

*'The righteous will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.'
(Psalm 92:14) – Amen!*