



Studies in the Psalms Keys to the Joyful Life 6

Summary: The joyful life involves seeing things from God's perspective in the days of adversity.

I saw a headline for an article this week titled Everyone I Know Is Angry. It was an article about COVID and where we are in the fight against the virus, but with a title like that it could have been about anything really, couldn't it? How many people do you know right now that are angry, or can easily become angry? How many are frustrated, how many are depressed, how many are just tired and exhausted, fatigued and burnt out, worn down?

Well, this summer we have been spending time in the Psalms discovering keys to the joyful life, the happy life, the blessed life. A life that looks and feels different than the lives of the people around you, *even when you go through difficult times*. In order to find those keys, we have been looking for a specific phrase: "[blessed is the man who](#)" or "[blessed are the people who](#)" and then listening as the Scriptures fill in the blank.

This morning we turn to Psalm 94 where we discover that the joyful life involves seeing things from God's perspective in days of adversity and trouble. I'll say that again, the joyful life involves seeing things from God's perspective in days of adversity and trouble. Which means: you could experience the joyful life, you could be blessed, right here, right now. No matter what happens with COVID, or the government, or with school this fall, no matter how much difficulty fills your life, you can be blessed, defiantly blessed, right in the middle of it all, *if* you will see things from God's perspective.

That's a bold claim, but I'm betting all I've got on Scripture being true, and I'm absolutely convinced that's the offer God is making to you.

Look with me at:

Psalm 94:12 Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD,
And teach out of Your law,
13 That You may give him rest from the days of adversity,
Until the pit is dug for the wicked.
14 For the LORD will not cast off His people,
Nor will He forsake His inheritance.

These three verses summarize everything else the Psalm has to say. First, there are days of adversity, there is difficulty in life. Second, there is a blessing for God's people even as they endure the days of adversity. And third, a day of judgment is coming for those who cause adversity – a pit is being dug for them while God maintains His promises to His people.

These are important things for us to know so let's dig in and see how the rest of the Psalm develops these themes.

Psalm 94:1 O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs—
O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth;
Render punishment to the proud.
3 LORD, how long will the wicked,
How long will the wicked triumph?

Most people today think of God as a god of love. And that is true, it's even Biblical.

1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

So there it is: God is love.

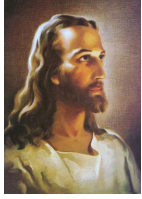
But God is also a god of vengeance, a God of judgment and a God who renders punishment. How can those things go together – love and vengeance? They don't seem to fit together at first, but I would argue that anyone who truly loves is also truly capable of vengeance and wrath. I love my wife. I love my kids. But mess with them and watch how defensive I get and how quickly *because I love them*.

Pre-COVID I had a moment some of you can relate to on the sidelines of a very intense youth soccer game. My son's team was in second place in their division and they were playing the first-place team that was undefeated. Well, one of the parents on the other team was getting loud and making unnecessary comments about the referees and their calls and then about our team's coach, and finally, towards the game, as we were winning, scoring against their previously-undefeated team, he said something about the kids.

And I lost it. I had kept my mouth shut the whole time, let him say whatever he wants, don't engage, just let it go. But then he crossed the line and I turned around and called him on it in front of everybody. Told him he was out of line. Fortunately, others agreed, and he backed down and apologized. But I went back over to where my coffee was and thought, oh man, that could have gone poorly – local pastor involved in fight on sidelines, youth sports are out of hand. It was not one of my better moments, I could have handled it better, but I share the story to help us see how love can compel us to protect, defend, and avenge.

I didn't hate the man; I didn't even know him. It was nothing personal against him. But I was compelled by love, love for my son and by extension, all the boys on his team that he has played with for years now. When they were insulted, vengeance stirred within me.

And if that's true for a dad on the sidelines at a youth sporting event, how much more true is it for a holy God? Do you think He's fine with people messing with His kids? Do you think He's just going to let everything go? No way, He loves His kids too much. The problem is we have this lopsided view of God - too many people think of Him as some gentle, spiritual, grandpa who looks at things and says Aw shucks, I wish that hadn't happened, but it's OK.



Too many people think of Warner Sallman's 1940 picture of Jesus calm, cool, collected, and with some product in His hair, but we don't think often enough of the picture we have in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in **righteousness He judges and makes war.** 12 His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. **He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.** 16 And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.



My friends this is a description of the God of Love! Because He is also the God of vengeance. And why is He the God of vengeance? Because justice must come to the wicked who ignore God and hurt others. Look with me back at

Ps 94:4 They [the wicked] utter speech, *and* speak insolent things;
All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves.
5 They break in pieces Your people, O LORD,
And afflict Your heritage.
6 They slay the widow and the stranger,
And murder the fatherless.
7 Yet they say, "The LORD does not see,
Nor does the God of Jacob understand."

Now, here's what I need you to notice – if you are righteous, you will hear the wicked speak insolent things, you will hear wicked men and women boast in themselves. You will see and experience days of adversity, seasons of difficulty, you will see the weak suffer and you will watch as people think they're getting away with it. But they're not. The day of judgment is coming. The God of love will also avenge.

Never mistake God's patience for His permission. If God instantly punished every misdeed, every sin, everything you did wrong or didn't do well enough, there would be no time and space for repentance, for change.

So, in His mercy, God gives you that space, He gives you the space to do wrong, experience conviction, and repent, which means to turn around, to confess what you did and ask for forgiveness. Unfortunately, some people take the space and say, well, nothing bad happened, I must have gotten away with it, or maybe it wasn't really all that wrong, and they just keep going in their own direction, away from God. They've mistaken patience for

permission and they're headed for judgment. The God, to whom vengeance belongs, will rise up and judge them as His vengeance shines forth.

Christian, you need to know that. It's a key to the joy-filled life. You have to know that *there are days of wickedness on the earth*. You have to know that *there are days when the wicked will rule and be in power*. You have to know that *the widow, the stranger, the fatherless, will suffer at their hands* – but you also have to know that *God knows*. And that the day of judgement is coming. No one is getting away with anything.

So don't be surprised when you see evil. Don't be surprised when evil people take power. Don't be surprised when culture turns it's back on God – that's the course of human history. There is no reason why you should think that we escape that here on this little chunk of earth called America. But there is also no reason for you to think that God doesn't know, isn't aware, doesn't care, or isn't doing anything about it.

Listen to what the Psalmist says next:

Ps 94:8 Understand, you senseless among the people;
And you fools, when will you be wise?
9 He who planted the ear, shall He not hear?
He who formed the eye, shall He not see?
10 He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct,
He who teaches man knowledge?
11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man,
That they *are* futile.

Nothing escapes God's notice. Remind yourself of that. When you see wickedness on display. When you see a headline you don't like. When you feel yourself getting worked up, speak truth to yourself: God sees that, God hears that, God knows that, and He will judge. The God of vengeance will **rise up** and **judge the earth**.

There will be days, seasons, generations when it seems the wicked triumph, but you're only seeing one episode, not the whole season or series. The LORD knows, and He will judge.

If you fall into the same trap as the wicked and think God's not paying attention, then you can feel like you're all alone here. All alone to navigate the mess of this life. All alone to fight off the things that you feel threaten you and your family and your way of life. You're not. God knows. And He wants you to know that He knows and to trust Him.

Look with me at:

Ps 94:12 Blessed *is* the man whom You instruct, O LORD,
And teach out of Your law,
13 That You may give him rest from the days of adversity,
Until the pit is dug for the wicked.
14 For the LORD will not cast off His people,

Nor will He forsake His inheritance.
15 But judgment will return to righteousness,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.

So there's our phrase, this is why we're here this morning - *Blessed is the man who...* what?

You instruct, O LORD,
And teach out of Your law,
13 That You may give him rest from the days of adversity,
Until the pit is dug for the wicked.

So again, the blessed life, the joy-filled life, the happy life you want to have, involves seeing things from God's perspective *in days of adversity*.

Those days are going to come. I wish I could tell you otherwise. I wish I could tell you that everything is going to be fine. That utopia will come. That the economy will always grow without leaving anyone behind, I wish I could tell you there will be universal health coverage, and no one will ever need it because we've conquered all disease, that people will treat each other with kindness regardless of the color of their skin, where they were born, or what language they grew up speaking.

I can tell you those are good things, but they're never going to happen durably, sustainably, and inclusively on this earth. Here we will experience days of adversity. Days of affliction, and here we will at times suffer under the hands of wicked people, and at other times we will be wicked and mistreat others ourselves.

Why? Because here we struggle with sin – the desire that rises up in each one of us to put myself, my desires, my wants, my views, my opinions, first. And that always, always, leads to conflict with other people sooner or later.

Which is why God calls us to stop putting ourselves first, and to find unity by putting Him first. To love God and love others.

Now, doing that doesn't make evil go away. It doesn't mean the wicked stop ruling or having influence, but it does give me the chance to find rest.

Some of you have been very worked up over issues lately. You can't believe this is happening or this is happening again. You feel like something must be done. This thing or these people must be stopped. And maybe you're right. I don't know exactly what your hot-button issue is or exactly what side you take, but let's just say you're right. Does reading one more article about it, watching one more video about it, posting one more comment about it give you any rest?

Look with me again at this Scripture:

Ps 94:12 *Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD,*

And teach out of Your law,
13 That You may give him rest from the days of adversity,
Until the pit is dug for the wicked.
14 For the LORD will not cast off His people,
Nor will He forsake His inheritance.
15 But judgment will return to righteousness,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.

I want you to see that Scripture is giving you a way to say, that is wrong. That is wicked. That leads to adversity for others. And then rest, because you know God has it all under control.

He hasn't cast you off, He hasn't forsaken you, He knows and He cares about the issue, in fact, [a pit is being dug for the wicked](#). And listen, maybe God still wants you to fight. Maybe your cause is just. Maybe there is action you should take, conversations you should have, maybe you should go somewhere and march. *But can you also rest?* The blessed life involves both - action and rest. *Does yours?* Do you trust God? Even with this?

Look at the effect that knowing and trusting God has on the Psalmist. He's aware of all the problems in the world. He's aware of what's happening and what's being said. He is not immune to the suffering, opposition, and adversity of his day, but he trusts God to defend him, protect him, and carry him through it all. Knowing God makes a difference:

16 Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?
Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?
17 Unless the LORD *had been* my help,
My soul would soon have settled in silence.
18 If I say, "My foot slips,"
Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up.
19 In the multitude of my anxieties within me,
Your comforts delight my soul.

Here's another one of those verses that needs to be starred, underlined, highlighted, marked somehow somehow in your Bible so that you can find it again when you need it. You might even want to write the reference on one of the blank pages in the front or back of your Bible so you can find it quickly.

Because, notice, both things are true: I feel anxious, really anxious, in fact, anxiety is multiplying within me, BUT God's comforts delight my soul.

Listen to how the various English language Bible translations attempt to phrase this truth:

NIV: When anxiety was great within me,
your consolation brought me joy.

NLT: When doubts filled my mind,
your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.

ESV: When the cares of my heart are many,
your consolations cheer my soul.

NASB: When my anxious thoughts multiply within me,
Your consolations delight my soul.

Each of these translations emphasize two things that are true. First, you're aware of what's happening, experiencing what is happening, and it makes you anxious, which may then manifest as anger, depression, confusion, hopelessness, or doubt, BUT THEN, [Your comforts delight my soul](#). You're blessed because you receive instruction and perspective from God. You see the exact same events from the heavenly perspective. You know that God knows, and that He will judge. Justice will prevail, no one ever truly gets away with anything. You can rest. You can go from anxiety to rest.

There's a lot of talk these days about mental health – it touches on everything from discussions of police violence, to the suicide epidemic, to drug use, to joblessness. There is even talk of the coming wave of mental health care needs caused by COVID and all the time spent at home or in isolation in an effort to contain it.

When you hear about mental health, you often tend to think of the most extreme cases, things like diagnoses of bi-polar, or schizophrenia, but well over 90% of all mental health is an experience of some form of anxiety or depression.

Scripture says that's real. Anxiety is real. Feeling like your anxieties are multiplying is real. And maybe you do need to go and seek professional help with that, maybe you should place yourself in the care of a trained and skilled professional, but along with that, and for many of us, instead of that, we should find our comfort and consolations in Scripture and in relationship with God and fellowship with the body of Christ.

You need to know the power of "Yes, but..." You need to learn how to tell yourself *yes*, all of that is true, *but*, this is also true about God. Yes, that's real, or yes, that might happen, but this is also true about God. There is tremendous power in this little spiritual prescription, and you can take it as often as you like. Yes, but.

There is nothing wrong with you if you feel anxious. It doesn't mean you're broken. It doesn't mean your prayers aren't working. It doesn't mean you're doing church or this whole God thing wrong. It means you're aware of some pretty awful stuff in the world, whether it has actually happened or you're just afraid it might.

But there is a profound blessing that comes when you invite God into your concerns. When you bring all the stuff you're worried about before God and let Him remind you that He knows, that [a pit is being dug for the wicked](#), and that one day He will rise up and judge.

Listen to the Psalmist say, I had nowhere else to go, no one else to defend me, but the Lord is my strength:

16 Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?
Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?
17 Unless the LORD *had been* my help,
My soul would soon have settled in silence.
18 If I say, "My foot slips,"
Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up.
19 In the multitude of my anxieties within me,
Your comforts delight my soul.

Christian, you're not crazy. Both things are true: life is hard, and God is good. He knows. And He's got you. When you feel anxious, turn to Him, find truth, and rest.

Look with me at how the Psalmist ends by reminding himself of all these things:

Ps 94:20 Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law,
Have fellowship with You?
21 They gather together against the life of the righteous,
And condemn innocent blood.

I say it again: bad things are happening. Evil people are in power, they're actually legislating evil things. They condemn the innocent, they gather together against the righteous. All of these things are true and real, and yet:

22 But the LORD has been my defense,
And my God the rock of my refuge.
23 He has brought on them their own iniquity,
And shall cut them off in their own wickedness;
The LORD our God shall cut them off.

I know what *is* happening, but I know *will* happen too. I know where this is headed, because I know my God, His promises and His character, His justice, His power, His righteousness and His love.

Christian, I want you to walk out of here this morning knowing that your anxiety is real and you have real reasons for it, but also knowing that joy and blessing are possible when you see things from God's perspective, when you turn to Him, receive instruction, assurance, and guidance from Him, when you put your trust in Him, *even in the days of adversity*. I want you to know the power of saying "yes, but" because it will bring a blessing into your life, even in the days of adversity.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Studies in the Psalms Keys to the Joyful Life 6

Summary: The joyful life involves seeing things from God's perspective in the days of adversity.

- Is it disturbing or hard for you to think of God as the God of vengeance? Why, or why not?
- - Is it easier or more difficult for you to think of God as a God of Love?
 - How well do these two aspects of God's character fit together for you?
 - Have you ever felt a desire for vengeance or to protect someone you loved?
- In what ways do people suffer when wicked people rule? How does this play out in different settings such as on a team, or in a school, or in a family?
 - What advice would you give a friend who was in a position under a wicked leader?
 - How would you incorporate the truths found in 1 Peter 2:13-3:17?
- How can the condition of the vulnerable serve as an indicator of the character of leaders?
- How do people sometimes mistake God's patience for His permission?
 - Read 2 Peter 3:8-9. What do you learn about God's patience?
 - Why do you think God does not cut off the rule of the wicked before they have a greater impact?
- In verse 22 the Psalmist says God has been his defense and rock of refuge. What other defensive, protective analogies of God come to your mind from Scripture?
- How does knowing God's Word, promises, and character help you to battle against anxiety? How do you use the power of "yes, but"?
- Have you experienced rest from God during or after a season of trials (vs 13)? What did you learn from that? How can you apply your previous experience to your present or future troubles? How can you encourage others by sharing your testimony of rest?