

Today we're going to look a bit at Psalm 92 and about going to church. I sometimes find myself talking to people who say that church isn't for them – they're spiritual, or religious, or even Christian but they see nothing in church that appeals to them. I find that disappointing, partly because of what it says about congregations but also what it says about those individuals and their understanding of church.

Maybe they, and we, do need to stop going to church. God's highest calling isn't to go to a destination, but to be conformed to the image of Christ, not to go to church, but to be planted in the church, to be the church, a light shining into a dark world. God's highest calling is never to go to a church, but to be planted in the house of God, then sent out into the world. Maybe instead of going to church, it's time instead to be planted in the house of God. Psalm 92:12-13 *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 righteous are going to flourish – that's not a word we use often, especially in church. We usually respond, "I'm fine" rather than, "I'm flourishing." I took to saying it for a while, partly because that's how I felt, and partly because I was so fed up with all of my colleagues moaning. It's about growing, prospering, thriving, and being a blessing to others.

The Psalmist then compares God's people to two trees, the cedar and the palm. The cedar tree is known for its durability, they are known for being pleasant to look at, and also pleasing to smell. For example, when Solomon built his temple, he made the columns, the posts, the beams, and the roof out of cedar because his building was designed to last for centuries. Cedar is durable. If you have a cedar chest, it's attractive and it smells good. We're being compared to flourishing like a cedar that's durable, strong, and lasting, and also like a palm. What was the palm branch of the palm tree was always symbolic of triumph and victory. We're flourishing, we're triumphant, and we are victorious. In the Corinthian Olympic games, whenever someone would win the games, they would be presented with the palm branch. Congratulations, you are the champion. It was the equivalent of the gold medal. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, it was

known as the triumphal entry. Here comes the king, and so they waved palm branches at him. The righteous will flourish.

So, when someone asks how you are the answer might be: I'm flourishing, I'm growing, I am blessed, I am strong, I am stable. Both trees are evergreens all year long. There's life, there's strength, there's victory, there's fruit. People like that attract others. How you doing? I'm flourishing, I'm blessed, I'm prosperous, I'm growing.

But who exactly is it that will flourish? Those who are planted in the house of the Lord. Scripture doesn't say those who are going to church will flourish, but those who are planted in the house of the Lord will flourish in the courts of God. I love the imagery. Psalm 92:14-15 *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 every year goes by it is encouraging to know that there is fruit to bear even in old age!

Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, they're flourishing, they're blessed, they're prospering, they're connected, they're emotionally engaged, they're making a difference, they're fulfilled. Unfortunately many of us, if we were using that language, wouldn't use the word flourishing. Instead of saying I'm spiritually flourishing, we might say well, honestly, I'm spiritually dry. Instead of saying I'm thriving emotionally, some would say I am emotionally withering. Instead of saying I'm connected relationally, some would say I'm relationally barren. Instead of saying I'm prospering financially with breathing room to be a blessing, so many would say financially I'm hurting, and restrained. Instead of saying I'm fulfilled spiritually, making a difference, full of joy, so many people say I'm still searching, longing for that thing, that hit, that buzz, that relationship, that job, that whatever it is that I don't have that would fulfill what I'm missing on the inside. I go to church, but I'm not flourishing. Those who are planted are those who flourish. What do we need to recognize? We need to recognize that our life is a seed. Your life is a seed.

A seed has tremendous potential. A seed has the potential to grow, to thrive, to multiply, to produce fruit, to be a blessing to others, but a

seed that's not planted has the potential to lie dormant, unproductive, unfruitful, and dissatisfied. Your life is a seed. Let me give you a couple principles about planting, and the seed. The first one is this, A seed can only grow if it's planted. Who flourishes? Those who are planted in the house of God. In fact, Jesus told a really powerful story, known as a parable, in Matthew's gospel, Matthew 13. He was talking about a farmer. He used the word sower, a word that his contemporaries would have understood. He said a sower went out to sow, or to plant, some seed, and the sower threw seed out, and some of the seed fell on a path, on hard ground, and since that seed couldn't ever take root, birds came along and stole the seed. That seed never reached its potential. Some seeds fell in shallow soil, and so it spurted up, but because the roots never grew deep, whenever the sun beamed down, it withered up, and died immediately. Some started to grow, but then some other plants with thorns choked out the life of that little emerging plant, and Jesus said it was the worries, and the concerns of this life. Do you see the metaphor? Some people, they have potential, but they never go anywhere. Some start to grow, but then they fade away. Some start to thrive spiritually, but the worries, and concerns, and the bills, and the struggles of life choke out the spiritual growth, but then, Jesus said, a seed that falls on good soil, it multiplies, it multiplies 30 times, 60 times, 100 times. That one seed becomes a massive blessing because it was planted in good soil. Who is it that flourishes? Those who are planted in the house of the Lord. A seed can only grow if it's planted. Second thing I hope to understand is this, that going to church isn't the same as being planted.

The Greek word translated as church has great meaning. It's the word ekklesia and it means two things, it means both gathering, or assembly. In other words, if you listen to a preacher's podcast, that's good, and I recommend you do that, but that's not the same as being planted in the house of the Lord. In the same way, I don't want to have relational connection with my children when they listen to a voice message that I send them. I want them assembled in my house, because I am the father, and I love my family gathered together. It's the assembly, it's the gathering, but the word ekklesia, ek means out, klesia comes from the word kaleo, which means called. It very literally means the called out ones. In other words, we gather together to be unified, we gather together to honour our God, we gather

together to corporately hear the Word of God, we gather together to use our gifts, and as we are strengthened, it's not what happens inside the building, it's that we are the church, and we go into the world. The church does not exist for us. When we're followers of Christ, we realize that we are the church, and we exist for the world. There's a massive difference between going to a building, and being plugged into a calling, a movement, a mission. We're planted in the house of God. Let me give you two scenarios. This happens all the time. Let's take person A and person B. Which one are you? Person A goes to church, and the version of the story is kinda different like, oh my gosh, I came, I didn't expect that, and there was this song, and oh, this song spoke to me, or the message was just like it was just for me, or someone was so nice, they loved me, and I felt so guilty, but then I felt loved and accepted. Some version, I felt empty on the inside, and I recognize I had a spiritual need, so I called out on Jesus, and my life is changed. Then what doesn't happen in person A is they don't ever really connect with other believers. They never really take on the mission of the church for themselves. They still go to church, but they kind of watch worship, there's no contribution, there's no real giving, there's no real serving, there's no real emotion behind it.

Person B goes to church, some version or sort, message speaks to me, song, person, God answers a prayer, I need Jesus. Then instead of not connecting, person B develops some relationships, and someone else is praying for them, and they're praying for someone else, and they recognize that God has given them gifts, and instead of just going to church, they use their gifts in the church, and suddenly the church isn't a destination they attend, it's an identity they embrace. I am a part of the family of God. Then the roots grow deeper, and suddenly life's not perfect, it's not always great, but when the storms come, the tree can withstand the storms, because the roots are deep, and we stay connected to God. There's a big difference between going to a building, and being planted in the house of God. What happens when you're planted? Let me give you two things. Number one, when you're planted your roots grow deep. Jeremiah 17:8 *They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.*"

Redwood trees are the tallest living things on planet Earth. They can literally grow to be 30 stories high, and they can be three stories wide. How in the world does a tree grow 30 stories high? I'll tell you how, their roots grow deep. Their root system can go out 100 feet, to up to 150 feet down, and what happens is you've got this one 30 story high tree with roots going way out and way down, and then over there you've got another 30 story tree, with roots going way down and way out, and what happens is their roots actually intertwine, and beneath the ground, where nobody sees, there is a support system that sustains the strength and the growth above the ground. This is what we need in the body of Christ, we need each other. Here's what I can promise you. I promise you this week you will face opposition. You will face a trial, you'll have a struggle, you'll have a set back, you will interact with a crazy person. If you don't interact with a crazy person, I'll lend you three of mine. They're everywhere, okay? You will face some sort of opposition, and if you face it alone, you are more vulnerable. I don't think the Devil minds at all if you just go to church. The only one who wants you to think you shouldn't be planted is your spiritual enemy who wants you to be isolated, because when you're isolated, you are vulnerable. We need the family of God. I need you, you need me.

The other thing is that these trees never stop producing fruit. It's not our own natural fruits, it is a spiritual fruit that comes from God. In other words, when we are connected to the spiritual vine, God produces spiritual fruit that Paul said would be love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness, and goodness, and gentleness, and faithfulness, and self control. When you're planted, all these good things come up, even if you're in a very difficult time, even if you're in a very difficult season, love still comes out, joy still comes out in the middle of a trial. You can consider pure joy whenever you face trials and difficult times because you're planted, and God is doing something special in you, and then you recognize these fruits are not just for you, that your love blesses other people, and your joy is contagious, and your peace is attractive, and your faithfulness builds relationships.

I don't go to a church building, I am the church, and so are you. I am God's ambassador in this world, and so are you. We assemble, and then we go out strengthened, planted in the house of the Lord.

It takes time for a tree to grow. It takes time. What else does it take? Five things for a tree to flourish. It takes soil, it takes light, it takes water, it takes temperature, and it takes time. It takes soil, good soil, your heart. It takes light. The Word of God is a lamp unto your feet, a light to your path. It takes water. Jesus is the living water who washes and renews your soul. It takes temperature. The fire of the Holy Spirit warms the seed planted in your heart, and it takes time. When is the best time to plant a tree? The answer is 20 years ago. When is the best time for you to have been planted in the house of the Lord? 20 years ago. When is the next best time? The next best time is now. Now is the time because God wants you to flourish like the evergreen, stable, strong cedar, or the victorious, triumphant palm. Only those who are planted in the house of the Lord are those who truly can flourish in all God has for you.