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- I. My notes... WWC message 09/23
- II. Series: A Summer of Psalms (Final)
 - a. Title: What Have We Learned?
 - b. Text: Psalm 92 CSB
 - c. Quote: "God not only loves me as I am, but also knows me as I am. Because of this I don't need to apply spiritual cosmetics to make myself presentable to Him. I can accept ownership of my poverty and powerlessness and neediness."
(Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out*, p.16, Multnomah, 2008)
- III. Introduction
 - a. We have come thru this summer. It has been full of opportunities and many wonderful times. As I wrap up this series, I have thought about the lessons, the messages, that have come through looking into the book of praise and worship in Scripture. It has been an incredible time of finding hope always, of seeing God's faithfulness, and of learning about the truth of worship. I hope that you have been able to see, that God loves you and He climbs right into the midst of your stuff, so that you can have the experience of intimacy with Him.
 - b. Now, I don't like to admit this, but my gardening skills aren't all that great. Most of the time I think I am the person that plants come to when they are ready to die ☹. Occasionally, though, I get it right – I do ok with something that I have planted and it begins to grow and flourish. I have these roses, in front of my home. I planted them almost 5 years ago. They get watered and nurtured and when they bloom they are incredible. It's like that in our walk. I have said for some time that we must understand who we are, as believers and in Christ, so that we can begin to take steps to fulfill what the Lord God has purposed for

our lives. The idea of being “planted”, of being nurtured so that you can grow and reflect the beauty and fragrance of our Lord to the world, is a fair assessment. As Christians, when we are fed and nurtured, when we begin to blossom, some amazing things take place and the beauty of the Lord God is there for everyone to see.

- c. Do you come to church with the idea that something good or beneficial will happen? Is gathering with your church family something you are passionate about? I get the impression that most people come into church like they are getting on an airplane. In some ways, they are ok with being there because it will get them, ultimately, to where they want to go. But then again, the flight, the process (if you will allow me some license here), is a whole other story. I have wondered what the flight staff thinks when they see the “congregants” coming onto the plane. Some obviously nervous and apprehensive, others giddy with delight, some caught up and focused on entirely other matters, and then there are some that... well, it's a wonder what they are doing and why they might have decided to be there.
- d. We have spent this Summer in the book of Psalms, looking at what it means to live a lifestyle of worship. I think about Psalm 5 and the famous chorus that came from this Incredible prayer and moment of praise. “Give ear to my words, O Lord; Consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry... My King and my God. For unto Thee will I pray; My voice shalt Thou hear In the morning. O Lord, in the morning, Will I direct my prayers, Unto Thee and will look up” (Bill Sprouse Jr., 1975). This is our chance to look up, to direct our prayers and praises – where they belong, and to take steps to worship and serve – to love and adore – and to walk worthy of that which we have called to do. Live consistent, love freely, and hold onto hope always.

IV. Text

- a. Psalm 92:1-15 (CSB)

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High, to declare your faithful love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, with a ten-stringed harp and the music of a lyre. For you have made me rejoice, LORD, by what you have done; I will shout for joy because of the works of your hands. How magnificent are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts! A stupid person does not know, a fool does not understand this: though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be eternally destroyed. But you, LORD, are exalted forever. For indeed, LORD, your enemies — indeed, your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. You have lifted up my horn like that of a wild ox; I have been anointed with the finest oil. My eyes look at my enemies; when evildoers rise against me, my ears hear them. The righteous thrive like a palm tree and grow like a cedar tree in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they thrive in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green, to declare: "The LORD is just; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

- b. God is... HE REIGNS... always has and always will... and He desires that His Creation (that's us) know Him and have an active relationship with Him
- c. "The whole point of the kingdom of God is Jesus has come to bear witness to the true truth, which is nonviolent. When God wants to take charge of the world, he doesn't send in the tanks. He sends in the poor and the meek." - N. T. Wright (Pastor, Theologian)
- d. As believers, we must come to understand what the Lord has done for us and in our lives
- e. Our purpose is to grow in intimacy with Him – to celebrate His faithful love and compassion on man.
 - i. Psalm 8:4 (NASB)

What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?

- ii. There are times, in the grand scheme of things, that we can feel insignificant. Yet, the Lord God holds us in high esteem
- f. If we are important, then it stands to reason that what we do has worth and meaning too.

V. Sing Praise

- a. Is there anything that happened to you this week that is worth giving God the glory and honor He deserves?
- b. Life happens and there are going to be challenges – that's no secret
- c. Our opportunity is to find the reasons to thank the Lord, to praise Him, for His consistent goodness and grace
- d. Our duty, our task, our testimony is wrapped in service – serving the Lord and others,
- e. The Apostle Paul gave us some guidelines for serving with the right attitude and action
- f. 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18 (Phillips NT)

Be happy in your faith at all times. Never stop praying. Be thankful, whatever the circumstances may be. If you follow this advice you will be working out the will of God expressed to you in Jesus Christ.
- g. Choosing joy (it is a choice we must learn to make), takes the burden – “the work” – out of service
- h. Ministry must grow out of an attitude of worship – our service is the action of thanking God for His demonstration of grace
- i. Otherwise, service has no heart and God is not honored
- j. Our lives, our walk, must be about honoring Him

- k. Learning to thank the Lord, in the middle of difficulties – no matter what, is a demonstration of faith and maturity

VI. Rise Above Circumstances

- a. We get to allow our lives to “brag” about the Lord God
- b. Vs. 4-5 state “For you have made me rejoice, LORD, by what you have done;
- c. I will shout for joy because of the works of your hands.”
- d. There is a story about an old dog that fell into a farmer's well. After assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the dog but decided that neither the dog nor the well were worth the trouble of saving. Instead he planned to bury the old dog in the well and put him out of his misery.

When the farmer began shoveling, initially the old dog was hysterical. But as the farmer continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck him. It dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back he should shake it off and step up. This he did blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage himself.

No matter how painful the blows or how distressing the situation seemed, the old dog fought panic and just kept shaking it off and stepping up! It was not long before the dog, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well. What seemed as though it would bury him, in reality benefited him—all because of the way he handled his adversity.

- e. It's the attitude we have when hard times arrive that reveal what we believe. The Lord wants us to experience blessings – His best. If we see difficulties as trials meant to harm or destroy us, we might just end up buried.
- f. Jesus said, “A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” (John 10:10 MSG)

- g. We have been planted in a place to flourish – to demonstrate the power of the Lord God to transform us... to bring us joy and peace in every circumstance
- h. It is because of His Love and Grace that we are able to become the people He has purposed us to be

VII. God Helps Us - Always

- a. We have more conveniences today than ever
- b. Drive thru – everything, instant delivery for almost anything, there is help in all kinds of places, from any number of places
- c. And, as believers, we ALWAYS have a place to turn to...
- d. Psalm 46:1 (CSB)

God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble.
- e. He is our shelter and our strength so that we aren't overcome and overwhelmed
- f. God is always there – there is nothing that can stop Him or separate Him from us (see Rom. 8: 38-39). Jesus said, He would never leave us. God has promised He is there for us
- g. Trusting the Lord is not a choice that shows weakness. It reveals a confidence that we have in the Lord and His promises for us
- h. This allows us to focus on Him and be able to praise the Lord, at every moment
- i. Feeling stressed -Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace... the name given by Gideon to the altar he built after the Angel of the Lord assured him he would not die as he thought he would after seeing Him. (cf. Judges 6:24)
- j. Dealing with illness – Jehovah Rapha, the Lord who heals... “I am Jehovah who heals you” both in body and soul. (cf. Ex. 15:26)

- k. Struggling with what to do – Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness...
God provides answers and hope (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21)
- l. We are covered by a Lord God who values and loves us above everything else. That's worth celebrating – that's worth shouting praise

VIII. Final Thought

- a. Amanda Todd became an unwitting spokesperson for despair at the age of fifteen after a predator had convinced her to pose topless for a photo, and then posted it online. With one keystroke, Amanda became a laughingstock. Already a fragile and private person, she retreated even further. She avoided friends, stayed home. Still, she couldn't escape the texts, calls, and stares. She changed schools, but the mockery followed. She descended into drugs and alcohol, and began cutting herself. She attempted suicide. Finally, in an act of desperation, she posted a nine-minute video on YouTube. Using flash cards, she recounted her months of horror, shame, and despair. One month after posting the video, she succeeded in taking her own life.

Does God have hope for someone like Amanda Todd?

Self-help manuals might get you through a bad mood or a tough patch. But what about an abusive childhood or a debilitating accident or years of chronic pain or public ridicule? Does God have a word for the dark nights of the soul?

He does. The promise begins with this phrase: "Weeping may last through the night" (Psalm 30:5).

Of course, you knew that much. Weeping may last through the night, and the next night, and the next. This is not new news to you, but this may be: "Joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Night might delay the dawn, but it cannot defeat it. Morning comes. And with it comes joy.

Do you need this promise? Mary Magdalene did.

In the forest of the Bible, she was the weeping willow. She had seven demons (Luke 8:2). Maybe she'd been abused, abandoned. Perhaps she was a recluse or a prostitute. The number seven is sometimes used in the Bible to describe completeness. It could be that Mary Magdalene was completely consumed with troubles.

But then something happened. Jesus stepped into her world and when he spoke, the demons fled. From that day forward, everywhere Jesus went, Mary Magdalene followed. She heard him teach. She saw him perform miracles. She helped pay his expenses. She was always near Christ, even at his crucifixion.

On that Friday, Mary Magdalene watched Jesus die.

On Saturday, she observed a sad Sabbath.

When Sunday came, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to finish the work she had begun when they lowered Jesus from his cross. She knew nothing of the empty tomb. She came with no other motive than to prepare his body for burial and say goodbye.

When she arrived at the tomb, the nightmare of the last three days grew even darker. Mary Magdalene "saw that the stone had been taken away" (Jn 20:1 nkjv). Assuming that grave robbers had taken the body, she hurried to find Peter and John.

They ran to the tomb, found it empty, then left to tell the rest of the disciples on what they had seen. We expect the camera lens of the gospel to follow them. After all, they were apostles, future authors of epistles. But, it doesn't. The story lingers with Mary.

Her face was awash with tears. Her shoulders heaved with sobs. "As she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (vv. 11–12).

Mary Magdalene mistook the angels for men. She had no reason to think angels would be in the tomb. Bone diggers? Maybe. Caretakers? Possibly. But her Sunday was too dark to expect the presence of angels. Her world had officially hit rock bottom.

Have you ever had a moment like this? A moment in which bad news became worse? In which you came looking for God yet couldn't find him?

Maybe Mary Magdalene's story is your story. If so, you're going to love what happened next. In the midst of Mary's darkest moment, the Son came out.

"Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (vv. 14–15).

She didn't recognize her Lord. So Jesus did something about it. He called her by name, and when he did, Mary recognized the voice that had first called her to freedom. In the time it took for Jesus to say "Mary", her world went from hopeless to hope-filled. Of all the people to whom he could have spoken, Jesus went first to Mary- the weeping, heartbroken woman who once had seven demons.

Why her? As far as we know, she didn't become a missionary. No epistle bears her name. Perhaps, Jesus wanted to send a message to all the heavyhearted people: "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

Watch for it. Expect it as you would the morning sunrise or the evening twilight. Keep coming to Jesus. You'll be tempted to give up and walk away. But don't. Even when you don't feel like it, keep walking the trail to the empty tomb. Open your Bible. Meditate on Scripture. Sing hymns. Talk to other believers. Place yourself in a position to be found by faith, and listen carefully. That gardener very well might be your redeemer.

Darkness comes, but so does the morning. Sadness comes, but so does hope.
Sorrow may have the night, but joy comes in the morning.

© Max Lucado, "Unshakable Hope: Building Our Lives on the Promises of God" (Thomas Nelson, August 2018).

- b. What have you learned?
- c. Let's Pray
- d. In every step, in each situation, may you discover a reason to celebrate God's love and care for you. May you learn that choosing joy is choosing to honor and glorify the One who gave us His all. And today, may His grace and peace fill your path, may you see His glory and adoration for you.