Good News at God’s House

Final in the Sept. 2019 series “God’s Good News for Today”

# Scripture: Psalm 96:1-9; Psalm 84:1,4-7,10-12

# Key Thought: As we worship in God’s house, **He shares His abundant gifts with us.**

# Intro:

## Our area needs to understand the blessings of God’s House

According to statistics on the Barna website, overall, 38% of Americans are active churchgoers. However, this percentage varies greatly from region to region in our country. The highest church attendance (percent of people have been to church in the past 7 days) is in Chattanooga TN and Salt Lake City – both at 59%. The most unchurched places in our country (percent of people who have not been in church in at least six months not counting funerals and weddings) are San Francisco area at 60%, Reno, NV at 59% and Springfield/Holyoke Mass at 57%. So statistically, fewer people in our area seem to understand the blessings that come from being in God’s house than is true in the rest of the country.

So, it’s up to us in God’s family to review the blessing that come in God’s house and teach those who don’t know.

## It is good to be in God’s house

I would like us to think about the fact that there is a strong relationship between what we do in God’s house and what we receive in God’s house. Lest we be misled, it is certainly not because of our good deeds or our meticulous liturgies, fine singing or nice prayers or anything like that. Instead we find that we receive from God here because of who God is and because when we come apart to God’s house, we spend time with him in a place He has chosen to put his name. We fulfil the first half of the promise recorded in James and God honors the second part.

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you!” James 4:8 NRSV

In the Psalms that we read this morning; we can see that David understood the blessings that come from worshipping in God’s house. David wrote:

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere! Psalm 84:10 NIV

So, this morning I propose to highlight three of the many benefits we receive as we worship together using the two Psalms we read for our resource.

# We worship God for His strength, and we receive strength.

## Human strength is more than physical

First, everyone knows that human strength is so much more than simply physique and general health. There are powerful components related to diet and rhythms of life. And there are also huge components that correlate to motivation, spiritual resources, and attitudes.

If you have never thought about the spiritual component of your strength, you are missing out. The Apostle Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus,

 "I pray that out of his glorious riches [God] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being."Eph. 3:16NIV

There are tremendous resources of spiritual strength and power available to us as followers of Jesus.

## We benefit from steering into God’s Power

I love the illustration of a boat on a river. Classic writer S. D. Gordon put it this way.

Have you noticed how much the current of the stream will do for you if you are out in a rowboat? All you need to do is keep up enough motion to hold the boat within the sweep of the current. Then your chief task is steering. You are not concerned about power; only about the steering. There is more power in the current than you can ever use. Your one concern is to keep out of the shallows and sucking side eddies, away from snags and rocks, and in the current. The power is in the current. Right steering brings all that power to bear on your little boat.

Now, power here is a matter of steering, so far as our part is concerned. We steer to get into the current of our Lord Jesus’ will, and, by his grace, we use all our willpower in keeping in that current, and out of the shallows and suction eddies at the side.

Power is the Lord Jesus in action, and the action is always through [someone's] life. We steer so as to keep in touch. He acts through the one in touch. (S. D. Gordon in Quiet Talks on Following the Christ, pp. 102, 103)

When we bring ourselves into God’s house to worship and pray, we steer our minds and hearts and bodies into a physical location, a spiritual place, and a mental setting where we can receive power from God. The Psalm writer said;

You are awesome, 0 God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people**.** Psalm 68:35 NIV

When we come into God’s house, we are receptive to God’s work in our spirits; we allow God to cleanse the dirt that holds us back, and we are open to receive God’s encouragements. It’s not that we have to be in God’s house physically to be encouraged or to receive God’s strength; we don’t. But, unless we come apart, we tend not to take the time to reach out to God like we do when we are here. So, when we come aside to God’s house we can find a new confidence because we know that the strength is not from us but from God! Paul prayed for his congregations;

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, Eph 3:16

God desires to strengthen you and me as well if we will take the time and put ourselves in the place physically and spiritually where it can happen.

This was illustrated this past week in my own life. As I announced last Sunday, Pastor Chris Yount in our district has an organized ministry going from church to church praying for the churches and the pastors. This last Wednesday his ministry came to our church. Now he doesn’t come unless the pastor of the church invites him. I never had because I was afraid I would feel like I had to take every Wednesday morning and go somewhere else which I didn’t think I could do. But at the urging of your prayer chairman, my wife, I signed up and Pastor Chris and four other pastors came last Wednesday along with my wife and Judy and Mary from our church to pray. I have to say that it was a blessed time. I felt strengthened, encouraged and renewed by that hour of prayer. I praise God for it. And even though I pray at home, it is just not quite the same as when brothers and sisters in Christ gather together in God’s house to pray.

# We praise Him for His mercy and His favor, and He gives grace.

Part of our worship each week is to celebrate the grace of God in our lives. We do this in singing, with words of praise and testimony, and even through our offerings. We celebrate the truth of what John wrote and we participate in the process he described.

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth**….**From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.John 1:14,16 NRSV

In the same context where we find the wonderful promise;

Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4:8 NIV

We also find the short promise;

He gives us more grace. James 4:6

The most common greeting in apostolic letters was “Grace and peace to you” (Examples Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2).

Grace was also mentioned in benedictions. For example,

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Cor 13:14

According to the book of Hebrews, when we pray, we do not come to God’s throne only to obtain grace for forgiveness, though that is important and God graciously offers it to all who confess their sin; we come also to receive help for other needs.

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb 4:15 NIV

So, as we praise God for his favor, we receive more of his grace. This is one reason why some of the activities of worship such as sacraments are called means of grace. As we participate in acts of worship that affirm our trust in Jesus, that acknowledge our humble position before God and then we open our hearts to God; God opens his storehouses of blessing, sending grace for our needs.

# We give God glory, and He shares His glory with us.

## We give God glory

Finally, and most surprisingly, God says in his Scripture that he is willing to share his glory with us when we come apart to meet with him. When we give God glory, it’s as if his glory flows toward us. Psalm 96 praises God this way;

Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ps 96:6-7 NIV

What is the meaning of the phrase “glory in the sanctuary?” I don’t think the writer is referring to a light or an aura. Rather the idea is the reputation, honor, exalted standing ascribed to God.

Because of this, some honor also comes to be associated also with God’s sanctuary, especially in Israel where the presence of God manifested between the cherubim and God was described as “enthroned between the cherubim” (1 Sam. 4:4; Psalm 80:1)

Thinking about our own day, perhaps this association between the glory belonging to God and the place where He is worshipped is one reason why churches easily become landmarks or historic places. The honor of the Christ and the Christian faith that he founded is represented in them.

But in our text today, David is not talking about the building itself. He's talking about something that comes to God's people when they are in the sanctuary - like strength.

The word glory is used twice in those two verses.

In verse 6, the word translated glory [Hod] has the connotation of splendor, majesty, authority

In verse 7, the second word [kabod] has the connotation of honor, abundance, weight, reputation.

And both of them can be translated as “glory” which is what we find here.

Now we usually associate glory and majesty as belonging to God. God’s Word has weight and authority. Honor belongs to Him.

As the hymn of praise given by the creatures of heaven says in the book of Revelation,

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.” Rev 4:11NIV

## God shares his glory

But what can the Psalmist mean when he says,

 “Strength and glory are in his sanctuary.” Ps. 96:6

In what way can glory come to us? I would submit to you for your thinking this morning that there are three ways that the God shares his glory with us when we worship him together in his house.

### By association

Do you remember what the leaders of the Jews said when they questioned Peter and John after the healing of the man by the temple gate as recorded in Acts?

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 NIV

The reputation of Jesus had rubbed off on them. They had caused others to praise God for the healing of the lame beggar and now God was causing others to respect them.

So it is that when we spend time in God’s word, when we spent time in God’s house, the character and attitude of Jesus rubs off on us.

This may cause some to persecute us as they did Jesus. But it will also cause others to honor us and respect us as happened with the Apostles.

When we are close to Jesus, things happen because God is at work through us. Let me quote S.D. Gordon again. He is writing about how we should follow Jesus closely.

Power is a matter of position. The man close in behind the Lord Jesus doesn't need to be concerned about power. In fact he isn't concerned about it, only concerned with keeping close in touch. All the rest comes without our being concerned. It comes from him, the man ahead. There is far more power, the very power of God, softly flowing and flooding its way in and through and out, then you are ever conscious of. . (S. D. Gordon in Quiet Talks on Following the Christ, pp. 101)

### By reflection

Another way that God’s glory is shared with us is by reflection. When we draw close to God, our lives become like a mirror reflecting some of the light, the majesty, the glory that comes toward us from God out to others.

Paul wrote;

We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:18 NIV (84)

Paul says that as the glory of God shines on us, we reflect that glory to others. They see the image of Jesus taking shape in us. They see the character of Jesus being molded into us. They see us learning to do the deeds of Jesus.

The verse is referring to the incident in the OT when Moses received the Ten Commandments. The Bible says that when he came down from Mount Sinai, his face was radiant. It shone literally with the glory of God, but Moses was not aware of it. Apparently, this was a problem, so Moses had to put a veil over his face except when he went into God’s house pray.

### By the Holy Spirit shining through

Another way to express this is that when we spend time with God, the light of God’s presence in us shines out to others through the Holy Spirit. Paul discourses on this subject in Ephesians 5. He tells us that the people will be able to recognize the presence of God’s Spirit in us, not by some unearthly light that they can see physically, but by the deeds we do, deeds which reflect God’s holy work of transformation in our lives.

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Eph 5:8-16 NIV

And in 1 John the Apostle John warns us that anyone who claims to be walking in God’s light but at the same time hates their brother or sister, is still in spiritual darkness (1 Jn. 2:9). So, we can conclude that the evidence that God shares his glory with us is our good deeds causing praise to God; it is shown when people recognize that our lives are being changed so that we act like Jesus.