

Worship: Morning and Evening

Psalm 92

January 11, 2010

Scripture Intro: The Mishnah records that certain Psalms were prescribed for certain days of the week in Temple worship: Sunday, Psalm 24; Monday, Psalm 48; Tuesday, Psalm 82; Wednesday, Psalm 94; Thursday, Psalm 81; Friday, Psalm 93; and Saturday, the Sabbath Day, Psalm 92.¹ If you glance at v. 2, you will notice right away that the psalmist expects that his singers will be worshipping morning and evening. What motivation could possibly stir us up on a Sunday morning and rouse us again to return for worship in the evening? It is here in this passage. Let's look at it. . .

Reading of the Text

Introduction: Biblical-Historical Foundation (vv. 1-2)

The superscription to this psalm clearly identifies it as a song for the Sabbath day and v. 2 records the psalmist's delight in worshipping God on that day both in the morning and the evening. While he says it is a *good* thing to do, does the Bible teach us that it is something we *should* do? For there to be an *ought* in worship practice it needs to be *taught* in Scripture and reinforced by historical example. Let's look at the history of morning and evening worship and see if our forefathers can give us guidance.

First, think about the Old Testament sacrificial code. Of course the sacrifices are no longer incumbent upon us, however, the principles they represent are. God commanded the priests to make sacrifices every morning

¹ J.J. Stewart Perowne, introduction to comments on Psalm 92.

and every evening. Specifically they were to sacrifice one lamb with a grain and drink offering every morning and evening of the week. However, on the Sabbath day they were to double both the lambs and the drink and grain offerings (cf. Ex. 29:39,41; 30:8; Nu. 28:4,8) which indicated that it was a day unlike the rest. Throughout the Old Testament, references are made to the practice of morning and evening sacrifice (2 Ch. 13:11; Ez. 3:3; Da. 9:21; Ps. 141:2; cf. Ps. 34:1; 55:17; 119:164).² Though no explicit statement is made in the Old Testament about frequency of worship, there is ample circumstantial evidence that the New Testament Church viewed the whole day as belonging to the Lord (Acts 20:7; 1 Co. 16:2; Re. 1:10). There is never any debate among the Apostolic Fathers as to the appropriateness of the Church meeting for worship both morning and evening on the Lord's Day. Since the Old Testament commanded that sacrifices be made at the opening and close of each day, and since prayer is the New Testament successor to sacrifices, then it was clear to them that they must worship morning and evening. In fact there is no deviation from that commitment throughout the history of the Church except in the Middle Ages when the Church thought that God could not be properly worshiped except in the cloister.³

The Reformers and the Puritans liberated worship from its clerical bondage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ They too took seriously the Old Testament call to daily morning and evening worship and especially to such on the Lord's Day. By the practice of family worship morning and evening, the Puritans recaptured the daily

² Cf. John Calvin, *Commentary: Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, s.v. Second Commandment, p. 301.

³ Juan Mateos, "The Morning and Evening Office," *Worship* 42 (Ja 1968): 31-47.

⁴ Douglas F. Kelly, "Family Worship: Biblical, Reformed, and Viable for Today," *Worship in the Presence of God* (Greenville: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Press, 1992): 103-129.

reminder of the sacrifices that we belong to the Lord and depend on him all the day for his mercies. Matthew Henry wrote two classics to help Christian families worship morning and evening, *A Method of Prayer* and *Directions for Beginning, Spending and Closing Each Day with God*⁵. The *Westminster Directory for Worship*, a Puritan document in our heritage, prescribes family worship for “morning and evening.” Reflecting the doubled sacrifices on the Sabbath day, Puritan worship was intensified morning and evening of the Lord’s Day.⁶

Somehow Protestants and Evangelicals have by in large forsaken their tradition of morning and evening worship. The Episcopalians and Roman Catholics maintain it in their forms but not necessarily in their practice.

The biblical prescription and the historical practice of our forbears calls us to make morning and evening worship to be some part of our daily practice and especially our practice on Sunday. Those two would be enough to move us to the duty. But this psalm provides the most compelling motivation for worshiping God at the beginning and end of each Lord’s Day. It is found in vv. 1,2—God is good. God’s goodness is manifested in his love for us and faithfulness to us. And because he is so good, worshiping him is “good.” In fact the Hebrew is more colorful, indicating that it is “delightful” or “delectable” to begin and end one day in seven in corporate worship. As those who live on this side of the cross we are the more compelled to worship a good God whose love (Jn. 15:3) and faithfulness (Re. 19:11) have been incarnated in Jesus Christ.

⁵ See discussion of these books by Hughes Oliphant Old, “The Reformed Daily Office: A Reformed Perspective,” *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 12:4 (1978): 9-18.

⁶ J.I. Packer, “The Puritans and the Lord’s Day,” *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 241.

Throughout the centuries Christians have recognized from this and other passages that our focus in the morning and evening services is to be somewhat different. Let us look at what they are.

I. Morning (3-7): The psalmist tells us that we must praise him in the morning for his love. In Matthew Henry’s book *A Method of Prayer*, he outlines three areas that should be included in our morning praise. We must first praise God for the abundance of his gifts to us in the creation remembering the covenant with day and night he made with Noah. Secondly, we must pray for our families remembering each one by name like Job did. Thirdly, we must pray that God would strengthen us to perform all of our duties in every area including family and vocation.⁷

Now notice that these themes are captured in one way or another in the first half of this psalm.

A. Care through the night (3a): It is by his love that we are not consumed in the night and awaken in the morning. The Bible impresses us with the rhythm of life even in the creation account when it records the creation events by means of “evening and morning.” It seems to desire to impress upon us that the necessity of going to bed at night and rising in the morning to face our work means that we are constantly dependent on God. No one is strong enough to function perpetually without sleep, and no one awakens in the morning unless God allows it. Both the Apostolic Fathers and the Puritans saw the morning and evening as a representation of resurrection and death. We will speak more about the significance of the image of death for the evening when we come to the next point.

But for now, it is important to note that when we arise in the morning we must give praise to God for his loving

⁷ Old p. 15

preservation through the night. Anything could have happened—our house could have burned down, we could have had a stroke, someone could have attacked us—but God preserved us. .

B. Deeds (4-7): Further, we are struck by God’s love in the morning as we contemplate his deeds. The beauty of the creation and breakfast on the table should convince us of God’s loving supply. The very existence of the morning convinces us that God’s work of redemption is not complete. The regularity of the sun’s rising, the seasons, the stability of the solar system convince that what the psalmist says is true—God’s rational thoughts rule the works of his hands. On the Lord’s Day in particular we must give praise for God’s greatest work, Christ’s resurrection, which guaranteed our resurrection from the death of sin and guarantees our future resurrection from the grave.

These thoughts about God’s deeds must shape the way we pray for our own. We must pray that as God’s righteous thoughts shape his works so ours will make a difference in the duties we perform. Daily we must pray that God would make us faithful as husbands and wives, moms and dads, children and siblings. As well we must pray that we would be faithful in our jobs. The Puritans taught carpenters to pray for strength and skill to do their work well. They taught shopkeepers to pray for wisdom to set fair prices and displayed his goods.⁸ Among his collection of prayers, John Calvin wrote one for students preparing to go to school.⁹ On the Lord’s Day we should pray for the entire vocation of our lives to reflect our faith.

C. Joy (4-7): Looking over these verses once more we cannot miss that the whole section is characterized by

⁸ Old , p. 15

⁹ “Several Godly Prayers”

joy. The chief characteristic of morning devotions both individually and corporately must be joy. In teaching his people how to worship God in the morning, St. Basil said, “And let us not take anything into consideration before we are gladdened by the thought of God, as it is written: ‘I was mindful of God and was gladdened’ (Ps. 76:4).”¹⁰ One aid to our joy will to contrast our lot with that of the unbeliever who does not praise God because he has no reason to. He finds no real purpose to his life and work. The very possibility of being joyful should make us happy. Our joy in morning comes from the fact that we belong to him and that means that there is purpose to the day. The Lord’s Day morning in particular must be characterized by joy because we recognize on this first day of the week that our lives have purpose because they are centered on God.

In all forms of literature, morning light has always been a symbol of renewed life and hope. Specifically in the Bible it is the favorite image of new life that Christ the Messiah came to bring. Remember, Isaiah’s announcement to the people who sat in darkness, “A light has come!” Malachi promised that broken, sinful people would be put back together by the “sun of righteousness who would rise with healing in his wings.” And it is no accident that Jesus’ resurrection coincided with first light. The morning reminds us that the “Morning Star” has come and will return. And because it is so there is reason for praise and hope.

II. Evening (8-15): We must praise him in the evening for his faithfulness. As the Apostolic Fathers and Puritans found in Scripture three themes for morning prayer, so they found three for the evening.

¹⁰ Mateos, p.34

A. Care through the day (8-11): Evening prayers like morning were to be chiefly characterized by thanksgiving. As we reflect on the day, surely we will conclude that God faithfully protected us. In our psalm the writer remembers that he was protected from his enemies (9,11). He was also made strong in the battle against them and blessed before their eyes (10, cm. Ps. 23). Surely if we will pause and reflect we must conclude that God preserved our lives lethal disease, our vocations from insidious attack, our souls from damning compromise, and our bodies from deadly forces. We were only nourished and strengthened by our food because God made it so. And we were surrounded by his angels who preserved us from untold dangers that we never see. Sunday evenings provide us with longer occasions to reflect not just on our days but the whole of our lives. Part of Sunday evening worship should be spent in thanking God for his faithful protection from a lifetime of enemies.

B. Purposefulness (12-14): Further, the psalmist says something remarkably encouraging to us. He says that those who are regularly planted in his house worshiping and receiving instruction will never lack purpose. Those who live by God's rhythm worshiping him daily and twice on Sunday will inevitably grow and their lives as a consequence will produce more godly fruit than those who try to go their own way. Paul Alexander is a friend of mine and pastor of the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. He has been there for over forty years so he can speak with some authority about patterns. At his thirty-seventh year he reflected on those he had witnessed who followed a faithful rhythm of worship. Over the years of his pastorate 1000 souls had come and gone through his church. He said that among those who had been faithful to the morning and evening worship services there was a "remarkable record of family stability and spiritual productivity." In fact there had been only

three divorces among them.¹¹ The great pastor William Still who served his congregation in Aberdeen for nearly sixty years said that he never saw a child fail to walk with the Lord whose family regularly attended Sunday morning and evening services along with the midweek prayer meeting. Now one has to be careful with the kind of information I just gave you. It can be viewed as magical or mechanical. That is not my purpose. I hate legalism as bad as you do, but we should expect to see some visible fruit from doing things God's way, should we not? And is it far fetched to believe that parents and children who weekly remind themselves morning and evening that they belong entirely to the Lord will experience happier and more productive lives as a result?

We must not miss one other blessing in this section which is promised to those in their twilight years. No matter how old or infirm, the child of God can still bear fruit. The evening service reminds us that just because the sun is going down, it does not mean that we cannot praise God and accomplish something eternally significant. And just because the sun is going down on your life it does not mean you are useless.

In the last stages of Dr. Jim Boice's illness he was frustrated that he could no longer speak or write. At the same time I was reading J.W. Alexander's classic *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. In one of his letters to dying saints he reminded them that they could still serve God in an important way by praising him in the depths of their hearts. No child of God is ever useless. Spurgeon said, "The Lord's trees are all evergreens. No winter's cold can destroy their verdure; and yet unlike evergreens in our country, they are all fruitbearing."

¹¹ "The Importance of Sunday Evening Worship," p. 4.

C. Repentance (15): Finally, the psalmist recognizes that there is no wickedness in God which surely drives him to repentance. It was universally recognized by all practitioners of evening worship that confession should be a part. Each evening we must examine our consciences for how we have sinned that we might confess it and plead again the blood of Christ. It is because the Christian has this ready access to forgiveness that the Puritans also taught that he is able unlike others to lie down and sleep in peace. Even so in the evening service you must reflect not only on the sins of the day but of your past week that you might confess them, find forgiveness, and freshly endeavor to live above them in the coming week. As the Apostolic Fathers and Puritans saw each morning to be a reminder of our resurrection in Christ to a new life so they also saw each evening to be a reminder of our death to sin in Christ.

My friends, I wish this morning to challenge you lovingly to add Sunday evening worship to your practice. I would urge you to add morning and evening worship to your daily routine, but I realize that is a tall order for many of you right off the bat. So I implore you to begin with Sundays. Here is one day in seven God has given you for spiritual devotion to him. It is the biblical pattern and has been the almost unbroken tradition of the church. Never in history has it been easier to get oneself to church and yet the same technology that enables our ease also tempts us to an infinite number of other activities that matter little in view of eternity. I will tell you from my own experience the evening service helped me grow by quantum leaps as a young Christian. This is a busy and media-driven age. As a result you must give careful consideration to how you are really going to grow as a Christian by only spending one hour per week in worship. Finally, I invite you to come because I am convinced that you will conclude with the psalmist that God is good and worshiping him is delectable.

Conclusion: John G. Paton

As a passing thought last week I referred to Paton's autobiography as a treasury of illustrations on the Christian life. I thought I would prove my statement so I looked again at his early experience of worship both in his home and at church. He says that none of his ten brothers and sisters could remember a day that passed without morning and evening family worship. In fact in later years when they were spread across the globe it was their comfort that though they could not meet at the family table they all met at God's altar because all continued the same practice. Morning and evening worship on the Lord's Day was their custom as well. Paton is careful to state that it was never boring or legalistic. The kids were encouraged to take part and their father added to the celebration by acting out the Bible story or sermon with animated joy. Paton says that none of his siblings was ever heard to say that it was "dull or wearisome" because their worship was done by "love not by force."

Remember that the psalmist always mentions the wicked as a form of evangelism. It is his hope that something that is said or prescribed will also draw him to belief. Here the implicit hope is that jubilant morning and evening worship will result in conversions. This is doxological evangelism! Morning and evening worship conducted out of love for and delight in the goodness of God in Christ will not only endear our children to him, but draw others as well.

The Paton home realized this as well. A prostitute in the Paton's home town eventually came to Christ. Her testimony was that their worship was the only thing that kept her from suicide and Hell. On dark winter nights, seeing the light on in their window, she would creep

beneath it and listen to their father pray. He would pray that God would convert, the sinner from the error of wicked ways, and polish him as a jewel for the Redeemer's crown." She said, "I felt that I was a burden on that good man's heart, and I knew that God would not disappoint *him*." She said that thought led her to the Savior.

As we joyfully turn our hearts to Christ morning and evening may God not only transform our lives but the culture around us.