

Exposition on Psalm 92

by St. Augustine

The sermon teaches us to find our rest in God, to confess our sins and thank Him for His mercy and truth, and to seek eternal life by joining ourselves to His eternity.

Scripture: Psalm 91:2

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of understanding the true essence of being a Christian, emphasizing that present blessings should not be expected solely due to one's faith, but rather gratitude should be shown in all circumstances, whether in consolation or chastening from God. He delves into the concept of Sabbath, highlighting the need for inner tranquility and peace in one's heart, regardless of external observances. The sermon also addresses the tendency to blame fate or God for one's sins, stressing the significance of confessing to the Lord both in sins committed and in good works accomplished.

Transcript

1. ...We are not Christians, except on account of a future life: let no one hope for present blessings, let no one promise himself the happiness of the world, because he is a Christian: but let him use the happiness he has, as he may, in what manner he may, when he may, as far as he may. When it is present, let him give thanks for the consolation of God: when it is wanting, let him give thanks to the Divine justice. Let him always be grateful, never ungrateful: let him be grateful to his Father, who soothes and caresses him: and grateful to his Father when He chastens him with the scourge, and teaches him: for He ever loves, whether He caress or threaten: and let him say what you have heard in the Psalm: It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord; and to sing praises unto Your Name, Thou Most Highest Psalm 91:1.

2. This Psalm is entitled, a Psalm to be sung on the Sabbath day. Lo, this day is the Sabbath, which the Jews at this period observe by a kind of bodily rest, languid and luxurious. They abstain from labours, and give themselves up to trifles; and though God ordained the Sabbath, they spend it in actions which God forbids. Our rest is from evil works, theirs from good; for it is better to plough than to dance. They abstain from good, but not from trifling, works. God proclaims to us a Sabbath. What sort of Sabbath? First consider, where it is. It is in the heart, within us; for many are idle with their limbs, while they are disturbed in conscience....That very joy in the tranquillity of our hope, is our Sabbath. This is the subject of praise and of song in this Psalm, how a Christian man is in the Sabbath of his own heart, that is, in the quiet,

tranquillity, and serenity of his conscience, undisturbed; hence he tells us here, whence men are wont to be disturbed, and he teaches you to keep Sabbath in your own heart.

3. ...Accuse yourself, and you receive indulgence. Besides, many do not accuse Satan but their fate. My fate led me, says one when you ask him, why did you do it? Why did you sin? He replies, by my evil fate. Lest he should say, I did it; he points to God as the source of his sin: with his tongue he blasphemes. He says not this indeed openly as yet, but listen, and see that he says this. You ask of him, what is fate: and he replies, evil stars. You ask, who made, who appointed the stars; he can only answer, God. It follows, then, that whether he does so directly or indirectly, still he accuses God, and when God punishes sins, he makes God the author of his own sins. It cannot be that God punishes what He has wrought: He punishes what you do, that He may set free what He has wrought. But sometimes, setting aside everything else, they attack God directly: and when they sin, they say, God willed this; if God had not willed it, I should not have sinned. Does He warn you for this, that not only He may not be listened to, to keep you from sin, but even be accused because you sin? What then does this Psalm teach us? It is a good thing to confess unto the Lord. What is to confess unto the Lord? In both cases: both in your sins, because you have done them; and in your good works, confess unto the Lord, because He has done them. Then shall you sing unto the Name of God, the Most Highest: seeking the glory of God, not your own; His Name, not yours. For if you seek the Name of God, He also seeks your name; but if you have neglected the Name of God, He also does blot out yours....

4. To tell of Your mercy early in the morning, and of Your truth in the night season Psalm 91:2. What is the meaning of this; that the mercy of God is to be told us in the morning, and in the night the truth of God? The morning is, when it is well with us; the night, the sadness of tribulation. What then did he say in brief? When you are prosperous, rejoice in God, for it is His mercy. Now, perhaps you would say, If I rejoice in God, when I am prosperous, because it is His mercy; what am I to do when I am in sorrow, in tribulation? It is His mercy, when I am prosperous; is it then His cruelty, when I am in adversity? If I praise His mercy when it is well with me, am I then to exclaim against His cruelty when it is ill? No. But when it is well, praise His mercy: when ill, praise His truth: because He scourges sins, He is not unjust....During the night Daniel confessed the truth of God: he said in his prayer, We have sinned, and committed iniquity, and have done wickedly. O Lord, righteousness belongs unto You: but unto us confusion of face. Daniel 9:5, 7 He told of the truth of God during the night-season. What is it to tell of the truth of God in the night-season? Not to accuse God, because you suffer anything of evil: but to attribute it to your sins, His correction: to tell of His loving-kindness early in the morning, and of His truth in the night-season. When you do this, you always praise God, always confess to God, and sing unto His Name.

5. Upon a psaltery of ten strings, with a song, and upon the harp Psalm 91:3. You have not heard of the psaltery of ten strings for the first time: it signifies the ten commandments of the Law. But we must sing upon that psaltery, and not carry it only. For even the Jews have the Law: but they carry it: they sing not....And upon the harp. This means, in word and deed; with a song, in word; upon the harp, in work. If you speak words alone, you have, as it were, the song only, and not the harp: if you work, and speakest not, you have the harp only. On this account both speak well and do well, if you would have the song together with the harp.

6. For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Your works; and I will rejoice in giving praise for the operations of Your hands Psalm 91:4. You see what he says. You have made me living well, You have formed me: if by chance I do anything of good, I will rejoice in the work of Your hands: as the Apostle says, For we are His workmanship, created unto good works. Ephesians 2:10 For unless He formed you to good

works, you would not know any works but evil....Because you can not have truth from your own self, it remains that thou drink it thence, whence it flows: as if you have gone back from the light, you are in darkness: as a stone glows not with its own heat, but either from the sun or fire, and if you withdraw it from the heat, it cools: there it appears, that the heat was not its own; for it became heated either by the sun or by fire: thus thou also, if you withdraw from God, wilt become cold; if you approach God, you will warm: as the Apostle says fervent in spirit. Romans 12:11 Also what says he of the light? If you approach Him, you will be in light; therefore says the Psalm, Look upon Him, and be lightened; and your faces shall not be ashamed. Because therefore you can do no good, unless lightened by the light of God, and warmed by the spirit of God; when you shall see yourself working well, confess unto God, and say what the Apostle says; say unto yourself, that you be not puffed up, For what have you that thou did not receive? 1 Corinthians 4:7 ...

7. That wretched man who does good, and suffers evils, sees him, becomes disturbed, and says, O God, the wicked, I imagine, please You, and Thou hatest the good, and lovest those who work iniquity....The Sabbath being now lost in the inner man, and the tranquillity of his heart being shut out, and good thoughts repelled, he now begins to imitate him whom he sees flourishing amid his evil deeds; and turns himself also to evil works. But God is long-suffering, because He is eternal, and he knows the day of His own judgment, where He weighs all things.

8. Teaching us this, what says he? O Lord, how glorious are Your works: Your thoughts are made very deep Psalm 91:5. Verily, my brethren, there is no sea so deep as these thoughts of God, who makes the wicked flourish, and the good suffer: nothing so profound, nothing so deep: therein every unbelieving soul is wrecked, in that depth, in that profundity. Do you wish to cross this depth? Remove not from the wood of Christ's Cross: you shall not sink: hold yourself fast to Christ. What do I mean by this, hold fast to Christ? It was for this reason that He chose to suffer on earth Himself. You have heard, while the prophet was being read, how He did not turn away His back from the smiters, and His face from the spittings of men, how He turned not His cheek from their hands; Isaiah 50:6 wherefore chose He to suffer all these things, but that He might console the suffering? He could have raised His flesh at the last day: but then you would not have had your ground of hope, since you had not seen Him. He deferred not His resurrection, that you might not still be in doubt. Suffer then tribulation in the world with the same end as that which you have observed in Christ: and let not those who do evil, and flourish in this life, move you. Your thoughts are very deep. Where is the thought of God? Rejoice not as the fish who is exulting in his bait: the fisherman has not drawn his hook: the fish has as yet the hook in his jaws. And what seems to you long, is short; all these things pass over quickly. What is the long life of man to the eternity of God? Do you wish to be of long-suffering? Consider the eternity of God. For you regard your few days, and in your few days thou dost wish all things to be fulfilled. What things? The condemnation of all the wicked: and the crowning of all the good: do you wish these things to be fulfilled in your days? God fulfills them in His own time. Why do you suffer weariness? He is eternal: He waits: He is of long-suffering: but you say, I am not of long-suffering, because I am mortal. But you have it in your power to become so: join your heart to the eternity of God, and with Him you shall be eternal....

9. For this reason, after saying, Your thoughts are very deep, he at once subjoins: An unwise man does not well consider this, and a fool does not understand it Psalm 91:6. What are the things which an unwise man does not well consider, and which a fool does not understand? When the ungodly are green as the grass. What is, as the grass? They flourish when it is winter, but they will wither in the summer. Thou observest the flower of the grass? What more quickly passes by? What is brighter? What is greener? Let

not its verdure delight you, but fear its withering. You have heard of the ungodly being green as the grass: hear also of the righteous: For lo. In the mean while, consider the ungodly; they flourish as the grass; but who are they who understand it not? The foolish and unwise. When the ungodly are green as the grass, and all men look upon the workers of iniquity Psalm 91:7. All who in their heart think not aright of God, look upon the ungodly when they are as green as grass, that is, when they flourish for a time. Why do they look upon them? That they may be destroyed for ever. For they regard their momentary bloom, they imitate them, and wishing to flourish with them for a time, perish for evermore: this is, That they may be destroyed for ever.

10. But You, Lord, art the Most Highest for evermore Psalm 91:8. Waiting above in Your eternity until the season of the wicked be past, and that of the just come. For lo. Listen, brethren. Already he who speaks (for he speaks in our person, in the person of Christ's body, for Christ speaks in His own body, that is, in His Church), has joined himself unto the eternity of God: as I a little before was saying unto you, God is long-suffering and patient, and allows all those evil deeds which He sees to be done by wicked men. Wherefore? Because He is eternal, and sees what He keeps for them. Do you also wish to be long-suffering and patient? Join yourself to the eternity of God: together with Him wait for those things which are beneath you: for when your heart shall have cleaved unto the Most Highest, all mortal things will be beneath you: say then what follows, For lo, your enemies shall perish. Those who now flourish, shall afterwards perish. Who are the enemies of God? Brethren, perhaps ye think those only enemies of God who blaspheme? They indeed are so, and those wicked men who neither in tongue nor in thought cease to injure God. And what do they do to the eternal, most high God? If you strike with your fist upon a pillar, you are hurt: and do you think that where you strike God with your blasphemy, you are not yourself broken? For you do nothing to God. But the enemies of God are openly blasphemers, and daily they are found hidden. Beware of such enmities of God. For the Scripture reveals some such secret enemies of God: that because you know them not in your heart, you may know in God's Scriptures, and beware of being found with them. James says openly in his Epistle, Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? James 4:4 You have heard. Do you wish not to be an enemy of God? Be not a friend of this world: for if you are a friend of this world, you will be an enemy of God. For as a wife cannot be an adulteress, unless she be an enemy to her own husband: so a soul which is an adulteress through its love of worldly things, cannot but be an enemy to God. It fears, but loves not: it fears punishment but is not delighted with righteousness. All lovers of the world, therefore, are enemies of God, all the curious after trifles, all consulters of diviners astrologers, and evil spirits. Let them enter, or not enter, Churches: they are enemies of God. They may flourish for a season like grass, but they will perish, when He begins to visit them, and pronounce His sentence upon all flesh. Join yourself to the Scripture of God, and say with this Psalm, For lo, your enemies shall perish Psalm 91:9. Be not found there, where they shall perish. And all the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed.

11. ...But mine horn shall be exalted like the horn of an unicorn Psalm 91:10. Why did He say, like the horn of an unicorn? Sometimes an unicorn signifies pride, sometimes it means the lifting up of unity; because unity is lifted up, all heresies shall perish with the enemies of God. And mine horn shall be exalted like an unicorn. When will it be so? And mine old age shall be in the fatness of mercy. Why did he say, my old age? He means, my last days; as our old age is the last season in our lives, so the whole of what the body of Christ at present suffers in labours, in cares, in watchings, in hunger, in thirst, in stumbling-blocks, in wickednesses, in tribulations, is its youth: its old age, that is, its last days, will be in joy. And beware, beloved, that you think not death meant also, in that he has spoken of old age: for man grows old in the flesh for this reason, that he may die. The old age of the Church will be white with good works, but it shall

not decay through death. What the head of the old man is, that our works will be. You see how the head grows old, and whitens, as fast as old age approaches. Thou sometimes dost seek in the head of one who grows old duly in his own course a black hair, yet you find it not: thus when our life shall have been such, that the blackness of sins may be sought, and none found, that old age is youthful, is green, and ever will be green. You have heard of the grass of sinners, hear ye of the old age of the righteous: My old age shall be in the fathers of mercy.

12. And My eye has beheld on mine enemies Psalm 91:11. Whom does he call his enemies? All the workers of iniquity. Do not observe whether your friend be wicked: let an occasion come, and then you prove him. Thou beginnest to go contrary to his iniquity, and then you shall see that when he was flattering you, he was your enemy; but you had not yet knocked, not to raise in his heart what was not there, but that what was there might break out. My eye also has looked upon mine enemies: and mine ear shall hear his desire of the wicked that rise up against me. When? In my old age. What is, in old age? In the last times. And what shall our ear hear? Standing on the right hand, we shall hear what shall be said to them that are on the left.

13. The grass withers, the flower of sinners dies away: what of the righteous? The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree Psalm 91:12. The ungodly are green as grass; The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. By the palm tree he signifies height. Possibly he had also this meaning in the palm, that in its extremities it is beautiful: so that you may trace its beginning from the earth, its end in its topmost branches, wherein its whole beauty dwells. The rough root appears in the earth, the beautiful foliage toward the sky. Your beauty too, then, shall be in the end. Your root is fixed fast: but our root is upward. For our root is Christ, who has ascended into heaven. Humbled, he shall be exalted; he shall spread abroad like a cedar in Libanus. See what trees he spoke of: the righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree: and shall spread abroad like a cedar in Libanus. When the sun has gone forth, does the palm-tree wither? Does the cedar die? But when the sun has been glowing for some hours, the grass dries up. The judgment, therefore, shall come, that sinners may wither, and the faithful flourish.

14. Such as are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of the house of our God Psalm 91:12. They shall be yet more increased in fruitful old age, and shall be quiet, that they may show it forth Psalm 91:13. Such is the Sabbath, which but a little while ago I commended unto you, whence the Psalm has its title. They shall be quiet, that they may show it forth. Wherefore are they quiet that show it forth? The grass of sinners moves them not: the cedar and palm-tree not even in tempests are bent. They are therefore quiet, that they may show it forth: and with reason, since at present they must show it forth even unto men who mock at it. O wretched men, who are lovers of the world! Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, show it to you: those who praise the Lord with song and lute, in word and deed, show it forth to you, and tell you. Be not seduced by the prosperity of the wicked, admire not the flower of grass: admire not those who are happy only for a season, but miserable unto eternity....If you wish to flourish like a palm-tree, and to spread abroad like a cedar in Libanus, and not to wither like grass when the sun is hot; as those who appear to flourish when the sun is absent. If then ye wish not to be as grass, but as the palm-tree and the cedar, what will you show forth? How true the Lord my strength is: and that there is no unrighteousness in Him. How is it there is no unrighteousness? A man commits so great crimes; he is well, he has sons, a plentiful house, he is full of pride, is exalted by his honours, is revenged on his enemies, and does every evil deed; another man, innocent, attending to his own affairs, not robbing another's goods, doing nothing against any one, suffers in chains, in prison, tosses and sighs in poverty. How is it that there is no unrighteousness in Him? Be quiet, and you shall know: for you are disturbed, and

in your chamber thou dost darken your light. The eternal God does wish to shine upon you: do not then make you cloudy weather from your own disturbed mind. Be quiet within yourself, and see what I say unto you. Because God is eternal, because for the present He spares the bad, bringing them to repentance: He scourges the good, instructing them in the way unto the kingdom of heaven: There is no unrighteousness in Him: fear not....What, if He leaves this man unpunished now, because he is doomed to hear, Depart into everlasting fire. But when? When you shall be placed at the right hand, then shall it be said to those placed on the left, Depart into the everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. Let not therefore those things move you: Be quiet, keep Sabbath, and show how true the Lord my strength is: and that there is no unrighteousness in Him.

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