

## Vision 5: Celebrating the abundant life of God (Psalm 63, Mark 2:1-14)

Recap wks 1-4 – value of vision, abundant life, seeking it, sharing it – this week celebrating it.

TURN TO NEIGHBOUR – memorable celebration

Maybe a significant date like birthday or anniversary, or significant achievement. (Me- KP May 2016. ) How many of you referred to something that took place in church?

Christians have lots to celebrate – yet ironic that one of traditional stereotypes of Christians is that they're uptight and miserable. How did we let this happen? (Yes, struggles in life – need to avoid 'relentless joyfulness' that masks pain – but equally, doesn't help us if all we're known for is being killjoys.)

*Key question: how can we be people who celebrate the abundant life of God more completely? What would a culture of celebration look like?*

**Simple point: key to celebration is remembering.** We are what we remember. Our outlook is shaped by how we carry our past into our present. May say: 'I can't change the past, so I can't help what I remember.' And at one level that's true – we all have pain in our past and we can't pretend that didn't happen. But I also want to suggest that you can choose what you focus on.

Seems to be a facet of human nature that we remember the bad things and forget the blessings. Time and again in the OT, the people of God are told off for forgetting. It was often their neglect of remembering that led to their sinful ways. Remembrance is in fact mentioned in no less than 22 Psalms: in 16 God remembers, in 11 we remember (so both in 5). Thing is: God doesn't have a problem with remembering – but we often do.

'Tell me the old, old story, for I forget so soon, the early dew of morning, has passed away at noon'

Word remember literally means 're-member' – member = part of body - literally putting flesh and bones on our memories, bringing them alive again.

So what should we remember, what can we choose to focus on that will help us to remain joyful in the midst of trial, that can keep us as people of celebration?

### **Remember who God is, and remember what God has done**

Ps 63 – deliberately chose this for its location: NOTE. Tackle this issue head on – easy to praise God when things going well, but what about tough times? Need to tread carefully – there are seasons in church's life. Need to 'weep with those who weep, mourn-mourn'. But at the same time, we're not to be people entirely driven by our circumstances, God desires in us a consistency of character and fortitude, and a capacity to give thanks in all circumstances. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit for the whole of life. So how does David manage it, stuck out there in the desert?

**He remembers who God is: READ v6-7** – note he chooses an inconvenient moment to do this – 'watches of night', but he reminds himself of unchanging facets of God's character – his faithfulness – 'you are my help'.

Not just his faithfulness, his love – READ v3. Love this phrase ‘your love is better than life’. Our life goes up and down, there’s good bits and bad bits – but God’s love isn’t like that, it never changes, it is constant, unconditional – so it is better than our uppy-downy life.

And that’s why, out on his own in the desert, when David remembers God’s love he can do this: READ v4-5. His life is in pieces, but his ‘soul delights in the richest of foods’. David knows the secret to a celebratory life. When things turn sour, go pear shaped, head south, all go a bit Pete Tong, he turns back to 2 things which never change – and first is this – who God is. His constant, faithful, unconditional love, the love which is better than life. And so he celebrates, on his own, in the desert, singing his latest praise songs.

It’s not escapism because it’s grounded in the deepest reality – ‘the love that will not let us go’ (as old hymn says it). He’s not ignoring his problems, he’s setting them in a new, eternal perspective – the bigger picture of God’s eternal love for us. God’s abundant life remains as real in the desert as in the sanctuary. (e.g. of funeral – how best ones balance pain and grief of loss with celebration of life)

2<sup>nd</sup>, **remember what God has done**. As I said to SM and AS last week, we all have a testimony, often more than we realise, things we can give thanks for, stories of his work in our lives. Question is, how often do we choose to remember them?

David does: READ v2. He’s reminding himself, isn’t he: he’s thinking about those times when he has seen the reality of God’s presence, which is as much to say he’s seen his power and glory. Stories of God’s intervention inevitably lead to praise, don’t they? Look at Mark 2, how crowds who witness the healing of the paralysed man praise God: ‘we’ve never seen anything like this!’ But key is whether we can go back to those memories a year, 2 years, a decade later. That’s where so many of Jesus’ contemporaries fell down, and we recognise that we do that as well. We forget!

Not saying that live in past, and of course it’s good to have recent testimonies to remember, not just ones from years ago. But even so, most of us have those moments like David, and we mustn’t forget them. It reminds us that God is real, and gives us hope and the capacity to celebrate.

And at a bigger level, it’s not just personal testimonies. We have the biblical record of what God has done, especially in Christ. The incarnation, the miracles, and above all the cross and resurrection. These are facts of history, they can’t be undone. *Every testimony we share is like a faint echo of God’s great saving act*, as the salvation/healing of the world is made real in the saving or healing of one person.

And – as in Mark – that praise, that celebration draws people in and leads to obedience. The crowds follow Jesus and Levi becomes a close follower. Praise energises people, that’s why it’s so vital. Permit me a tangent on rhythm of spiritual life: Quote William Barclay (forgive language):

*‘The Christian life is a continual going from the presence of men into the presence of God, and then from presence of God to presence of men.’*

Can be vicious cycle or virtuous circle. If our worship (personal and corporate) isn't energising it leaves us malnourished for living out our faith, we get discouraged, and arrive in presence of God in a bad shape and then leave no better and so on.

Or, if our time in presence of God nourishes us, we can serve God effectively out in the world, and see him at work which in turns generates more praise in presence of God and then energises us to go out into world, and so on.

Not just corporate worship, personal too. David was in desert and his praise life was energising him. Sundays should feed us most, but one meal doesn't feed you for a week – so our personal time with God each day energises us during week as well.

Reminds us of value of capacity to praise, to celebrate – energises people and draws people to us. Culture of celebration is energising and often self-reinforcing – more we do it, more we want to do it, and more people who join us.

So if bedrock is remembering, especially remembering who God is and what God has done, how can we build this into our lives and community so that we are better at celebrating abundant life?

**Tips:**

One idea – wake up in morning and before do anything else, thank God for 10 things. Be surprised how easy that is to do, and reminds us of God's love and blessings especially in tough times

Building testimony into our lives – regular feature of church life, is there a way to make it a regular feature of personal life? Recommend journaling – I'm an infrequent journaler, but then tend to splurge (e.g. of this week). In past keep a list of miracles or words of knowledge – remind myself of seeing God at work. Point is, testimony creates memories, and remembering is key.

Memory joggers – things to remind you of God's love and faithfulness, to encourage that celebratory spirit (as shared last week) wristband, screensaver, memory verses.

Can't manufacture celebration – know what forced celebration at office feels like, or party for your most unlikeable relative. So need to earth it in real life, part of our way of being.

Link between hospitality and celebration. There in Psalm – v1 thirst, v5 richest food – metaphorical but often literal. So make enough space to share hospitality, as individuals, groups and community. Hospitable community is usually the celebratory one.

After intercessions, lead this morning into 2 celebratory acts – communion what God has done, and praise (who God is, and what done). But may the art of celebration grow in all of our lives, in our church, and may it draw others to the one whom we celebrate. READ v3. Amen.