

Summer Psalms

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ESV)*

Blessed Are Those Who Dwell In Your House

September 8th, 2024

Psalm 84

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 84.

Over the past two Sundays we've been working through something of a mini-series on corporate worship in the Psalms. The first two sermons focused heavily on the "how" of our worship. We've considered the physical response that God's Word invites and the breadth of emotion and the content and the manner of our praise. But our Psalm this morning is going to cause us to spend most of our time thinking about the "why" of our worship.

Why do we do this?

Why do we gather to sing and pray to God?

Why do we surrender our lives to live wholeheartedly for Him?

Why do we worship?

We find an answer to that question in the passage before us. Psalm 84 is unique in its *sweetness*.

This Psalm is written by a brother who is convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that a life lived in worship is better than anything that this world has to offer. As we worship our way through this

Psalm, I pray that we would find his zeal to be irresistibly contagious. Look with me to Psalm 84.
Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

My Soul Longs for the Courts of the Lord
To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

84 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah*
⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
⁶ As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
⁷ They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.
⁸ O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*
⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!
¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
¹¹ For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
¹² O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you! (Psalm 84:1-12 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This is a Psalm that was written for the worshiper who was getting ready to make the trip to worship at the temple in Jerusalem – and this worshiper CANNOT WAIT to be there! He cannot wait to worship in the presence of the Living God!

But here's a question: What are we to do with this Psalm today? We don't make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to visit the temple, so is it appropriate then for us to pick up this Psalm about the temple and to apply it to our corporate worship gatherings in our local church?

It sure is! In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, and he asked them:

Do you not know that **you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?** (1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV)

That word “you” is plural in the Greek. We don't have a word for “you” in the plural here in Canada, but my cousins in the south would translate Paul as saying that “y'all are God's temple”! In the same way, he wrote to the church in Ephesus and reminded them that they were:

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, **grows into a holy temple in the Lord.** ²² In him you also are being built together **into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.** (Ephesians 2:20-22 ESV)

You see, the temple was the unique place where God's presence was made manifest in the world. But now, because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice that made us holy, God dwells IN His people. Therefore, WE have become the temple! Did you know that? When we come together – each of us filled with the Spirit – each of us members of the body of Christ – we ARE the temple of the living God! Not the building. US! The world now encounters the presence of the living God in and through US!

So, to return to the question: Is it appropriate then for us to pick up this Psalm about the temple and to apply it to our corporate worship gatherings in our local church? Absolutely it is! In fact, everything that the Psalmist loved about the old temple has been EXCEEDED by what God has accomplished in Christ! Not only can we sing with this Psalmist, but we should sing so much LOUDER!

So, let's look to Psalm 84 and ask the question:

What Does Psalm 84 Teach Us About Worship?

First, it teaches us that:

1. **Worship refreshes our weary souls**

Look with me again at verses 1-2:

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
² **My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;**
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God. (Psalm 84:1-2 ESV)

Let me ask you, have you ever heard anyone talk about corporate worship the way that this Psalmist does? I can happily report that I had a conversation this past week with a brother and – while the language that he used wasn't as flowery – the sentiment was the same. It was the first time that I had heard someone speak this way in a long time, and it really encouraged me. He's a new believer, and the beauty of God's church is still a new delight in his world. In my experience, newer Christians are more likely to speak this way.

But then, somewhere along the way, many of us seem to lose this delight. We develop nit-picky, consumer attitudes that were never a problem in our early days. When we were first saved, we were like beggars who couldn't believe the free bread that we had received! We were just so thankful and excited! But somewhere along the way we transformed into food critics jumping from church to church to find bread that better suits our preferences.

While that sad transformation is common, it is not inevitable. The Apostle Paul NEVER lost this longing throughout his ministry. He wrote to the church in Rome and said:

For **I long to see you**, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, **that we may be mutually encouraged** by each other's faith, both yours and mine. (Romans 1:11-12 ESV)

This is a very helpful passage because – not only does it *demonstrate* Paul’s longing – it also sheds light on one of the purposes for his longing. He wants to worship with the church in Rome “that we may be mutually encouraged.” Paul and the Psalmist are longing for the same thing! Encouragement! Refreshing! Both Paul and the Psalmist are keenly aware of their spiritual need, and both recognize that the means God has provided to meet that need is the local assembly.

These brothers needed the church! And if THEY needed the church, then you and I most certainly do as well. Which is why we are commanded in Hebrews 10:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV)

We touched on this last week, but let’s receive this reminder once again. We NEED each other! We need to point each other back to the gospel. We need to sing together, and to pray together, and to learn together, and to fellowship together, and to bear with one another, and to forgive each other.

We leak! Our souls grow weary! I read my Bible and pray every day, but I still find in myself that by Friday I am often running on fumes. Then Sunday comes, and I come to God’s temple – that is, I come to worship with all of you, wherever we might be gathered – and God REFRESHES me! Is that your experience? I pray that it is. It certainly was for the Psalmist.

Worship refreshes our weary souls. That’s the first lesson that we learn in this Psalm. Second, we learn that:

2. **Worship includes the least of these**

I love this. Look with me at verses 3-4:

³ **Even the sparrow finds a home,**
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,

my King and my God.
⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah* (Psalm 84:3-4 ESV)

Here, the Psalmist is imagining the courts of the temple in his mind, and as he looks up, he can see a nest up in the rafters. The thought of it fills him with wonder. The temple is the place where we meet with the Living God! The Consuming Fire! The Holy, Holy, Holy One!

And yet, in His presence, even the sparrow finds a home. What's the point? Charles Spurgeon explains:

The tender care of God over the least of His creatures is here most touchingly alluded to.¹

God cares about the least of these. Even the insignificant sparrow is permitted to come into His courts. The ones who are often written off – the ones who are altogether forgettable in the worlds' eyes – matter to God.

The older I get, and the more of the world I see, the more I come to appreciate this truth. There is no room for *elitism* in the temple of God. In James 2, for example, we are warned:

My brothers, **show no partiality** as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, **has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom**, which he has promised to those who love him? (James 2:1-5 ESV)

In the family of God, the poor brother has just as much right to be here as the rich brother. In the same way, Jesus challenged the common thinking in his day that devalued children. In Matthew 19, we read:

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people,¹⁴ but Jesus said, "**Let the little children come to me and do**

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 7.

not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 19:13-14 ESV)

In the family of God, the children have just as much right to be here as the mature believer. And, in the same way, Jesus challenged the common thinking in his day that disqualified people who were guilty of particularly grievous sins. In Luke 5, we read:

And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.³² **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**” (Luke 5:30-32 ESV)

I LOVE this! In fact, this might be the area where I see the beauty of God most clearly on display as we gather week after week. Here, in this place, we have people experiencing homelessness worshiping next to business tycoons. We have toddlers praying with seniors. We have former drug addicts, thieves and adulterers worshiping next to former pharisees, legalists and hypocrites. And ALL of us belong! ALL of us entered through the same door – that is, faith in Jesus Christ. ALL of us were washed clean by the same blood!

As the Psalmist marvelled at the sparrow in the rafters, I marvel at each and every one of the faces before me – and I marvel most of all at myself. How can it be that the Holy God has chosen to reside in people like us? And yet, here we are! WE are the sparrows! The least of these! Made full partakers in the family of God!

Any church that loses sight of that truth is a church that has lost the gospel all-together. Worship includes the least of these.

Third, we learn in Psalm 84 that:

3. Worship sustains us in dry places

Two weeks ago, we looked at Psalm 95 and saw that worship is a test. Sometimes, we find ourselves in places where there is no water, and we face a real temptation. Will we grumble and withhold worship? Or will we trust the Lord? Here in Psalm 84, we catch a glimpse into the life of a worshipper who chooses to worship even in the seasons of drought. Look with me at verses 5-7:

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
⁶ As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
⁷ They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion. (Psalm 84:5-7 ESV)

Commentators debate how “the Valley of Baca” should best be interpreted. Some understand it to be a literal valley that pilgrims would have passed through on their way to Jerusalem. It was a dry valley where water was scarce – however, rainfall would often create pools for travellers to quench their thirst. Other commentators suggest that “Baca” is a play on words, as it sounds very similar to the Hebrew word for “weeping.” The New Living Translation reads:

When they walk through the Valley of Weeping,
it will become a place of refreshing springs. (Psalm 84:6a NLT)

Either way – whether this refers to a *real* dry location, or a *figurative* place of weeping – the point is the same. The Psalmist celebrates that God provides for him – even in dry places.

And look again at what the Psalmist says in verse 5. This is beautiful:

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion. (Psalm 84:5 ESV)

Even though this worshipper is passing through a difficult valley, he has strength because there is a MAP in his heart. He KNOWS where he will find refreshment, and he knows how to get there. Therefore, even in the Valley of Weeping, there are springs of refreshment! As one commentator explains:

...though glory awaits at the end of the road, yet the sense conveyed throughout is that every step of our pilgrim path is touched with his glory²

There is glory – even in the Valley of Weeping. There is peace – even in the trial! This sounds an awful lot like the Apostle Paul who could say:

² Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 242.

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (Philippians 4:11b-12 ESV)

Some of you may be walking through the deepest trial of your lifetime. You're in the Valley of Weeping. You're wondering how you will put one foot in front of the next. This morning, I want to point you to the provision that God has provided for such a time as this.

Worship. Praise Him in the Valley. Give thanks in all circumstances! It is a tremendous test of faith, but I promise you that God will carry you through it. Choose to worship, and you will soon discover springs and pools to sustain you! Choose to worship, and you will notice that the highways to Zion – the paths that lead to life – are graven on your heart! Choose to worship, and you will find that even in your weakness you are carried from strength to strength – from one degree of glory to the next! Matthew Henry is right when he says of true worshipers that:

Having placed their happiness in God as their End, they rejoice in all the ways that lead to him.³

Worship sustains us in dry places. And that flows naturally into the final lesson that we learn in Psalm 84:

4. **Worship results in a blessed life**

We see this in verses 8-12:

⁸ O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*

⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!

¹⁰ **For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.**

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

¹² O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you! (Psalm 84:8-12 ESV)

³ Matthew Henry as quoted by W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 795.

The word “blessed” here could also be translated as “happy.” God has so structured the universe that as we bless the Lord – we experience true happiness. Christian, can you testify to this?

The devil fights so hard to conceal this truth. In the opening pages of the Bible, the devil fought to convince Adam and Eve that God’s way did NOT lead to life, and that God was withholding from them. When the Israelites were making their way to the promise land, the enemy was whispering in their ears that they would be happier if they simply returned to their slavery in Egypt. In our world today, the enemy pushes the narrative that a life lived for God is a life of burden and restraint.

But everyone who has surrendered to Jesus knows that this could not be further from the truth! As Jesus taught us:

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33 ESV)

When we put God first – and that’s ultimately what worship is, isn’t it? – when we declare with our words and with our actions that God is FIRST and CENTRAL and LORD – then everything else falls into place! It is only when we put God first that we can enjoy God’s good gifts without destroying them.

For example, think about the gift of children. If God is not first in my life – if I place my children at the center of my universe – then what will happen? I will CRUSH them! I will expect from them a perfection that they are not capable of, and I will ask them to heal things in me that they cannot possibly heal, and I will expect them to satisfy longings in me that they could never possibly satisfy. Because my children are not God! I will RUIN them if I worship them.

But when I put God first – when I look to Him for perfection and ask Him for healing and bring Him my deepest longings – suddenly my parenting comes to life! Because I can enjoy my children as the gift that they are without expecting them to be the gods that they are not. This principle plays out the same way as we apply it to our careers, or our marriages, or any of the other good

things that we are tempted to worship. The only way to live a blessed life – a truly happy life – is to live a life of worship to God.

This is the main theme in Psalm 84. Three times, the Psalmist celebrates what a blessed life it is to serve and worship the Lord!

Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! (Psalm 84:4 ESV)

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion. (Psalm 84:5 ESV)

O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you! (Psalm 84:12 ESV)

The Psalmist has experienced the blessed life, and he refuses to settle for anything else. Therefore, he can say in verse 10:

For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (Psalm 84:10 ESV)

The ascription at the beginning of this Psalm tells us that this was written by one of the sons of Korah. In 1 Chronicles 26, we read that the sons of Korah were in fact the gatekeepers at the temple. They were responsible for security and for maintenance – not exactly a glamorous position in the world’s eyes. But this gatekeeper recognized that he wouldn’t trade his lowly position in the temple for the most celebrated position in the world!

That is the conviction of a true worshiper. It reminds me of the call to discipleship that we find all throughout the New Testament. Jesus calls those who worship their money to sell all that they have and give to the poor, and only then to follow him. He calls fishermen to leave behind their boats, and tax collectors to leave behind their trade and he says that anyone who would follow after him must first deny themselves and take up the cross. Why?

For whoever would save his life will lose it, **but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** (Matthew 16:25 ESV)

The Psalmist knew this to be true. He believed that a day serving as security in the temple of the Lord was better than a lifetime indulging in the best that the world has to offer. Do you believe that? Charles Spurgeon was right when he said:

Every man has his choice, and this is ours. God's worst is better than the devil's best.⁴

Young people, many of you are being confronted with this choice even now. The devil is whispering the same thing in your ear that he whispered to Adam and Eve. He would convince you that God is withholding. He would convince you that you will never find a truly fulfilling life until you break free from the moral restraint that Jesus has tried to bind you with.

Believe me when I tell you this morning, the devil is a liar!

Blessed – HAPPY – is the person who trusts in God! Happy is the person who puts God first! Happy is the person who knows that the temporary pleasure of this world is fool's gold and that it PALES in comparison to the life lived in obedience to God!

Hear the testimony of Psalm 84 – hear the testimony of your brothers and sisters gathered here this morning – a life lived in worship to God is a BLESSED life! Every person has their choice. God's worst truly is better than the devil's best. Choose today who you will worship.

Let's pray together.

⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 8.