

Psalm 84 // Part Two: The God who brings us Home

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[0:00] Today's reading is Psalm 84, which you can find on page 595 of your Bibles.

Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young, a place near your altar.

Lord Almighty, my King and my God, blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty. Listen to me, God of Jacob. Look on our shield, O God. Look with favor on your anointed one.

[1:22] Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those whose way of life is blameless.

Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you.

Thanks, Matt, for reading that.

If you could keep your Bibles open, that would be a great help. Psalm 84. Psalm 84. And there's an outline on the notice sheet. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to your word now eager to hear you. We long to respond rightly to you and what you say to us.

[2:29] To be changed by your word. To meet you through your word. And so we ask, may the words of my mouth and the reflections of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight.

O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. Well, we're doing two weeks in the one psalm. Last week we got halfway through Psalm 84. So we're on a journey together through the psalm.

Looking around, what's backfired for me is that I'm not sure all that many of you were actually here last week. It was a different crew. Some of you were here. But what we'll do is have a longer recap than usual.

Which hopefully is helpful for those of us who have been in the psalm last Sunday as well. But for those of you who haven't yet caught up on the website and weren't here, this might help you get up to speed.

We're spending a bit of time in this psalm. It really is a wonderful psalm. An absolute belter. Here's Charles Spurgeon. I partly put this picture up because you can play a game I've been playing all week.

[3:31] Which of my colleagues looks most like Charles Spurgeon? I think up to three of them bear a striking resemblance. But anyway, Charles Spurgeon, 19th century minister, the prince of preachers.

He said of Psalm 84, it is the pearl of the psalms. No music could be too sweet for its theme. And it makes us think about home.

The writer is longing to be home in the presence of God. Verse 1. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty. My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. So for the writer of this psalm, to be home is to be with God. Three times in the psalm we find the promise of being a blessed person.

Of being a happy person. And the first one comes in verse 4. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. So as the astronaut Jim Lovell was with his two friends in the small lunar module of Apollo 13.

[4:41] And they were 200,000 miles from Earth. And they could see the universe all around them in all its brilliance. But they looked at planet Earth and they knew it's the only place in the universe that is home for us.

We've got to get there. So for us, we were made for God. And to be with him is the one place that can give us rest, satisfaction, life. God isn't just better than anything the world can offer you. God is better than anything else he could offer you. Then we thought about the journey last week. The writer in verse 5 gives us the second way we can be blessed. It's when we treat our lives in this world as a pilgrimage with our hearts set on where we're going.

Verse 5. Blessed are those whose strength is in you. Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. So however much God blesses you with good things to enjoy in this world, in this life.

We're ultimately never to feel fully at home here. We are exiles. We're strangers in this world because we're citizens of heaven. And we're on the way back home.

[5:48] And if we live like that today, with our hearts set on our future with God. What we'll find is that we become people who refresh those around us.

That's the springs of verse 6. Where it talks about passing through the valley of Baca on their pilgrimage. Which was a wilderness place of despair. But when pilgrims pass through the valley of tears.

Verse 6. They make it a place of springs. And it says verse 7. And they go from strength to strength. Till they get to God in Zion. And we talked last week about how for the Christian, when we read a psalm like this.

And it's talking about seeking the presence of God. That is for us both a future hope and the present reality. A future hope because we're not in heaven yet.

But a present reality because in our times, God has now made his home with us. The spirit that Jesus promised has come and lives in us.

[6:47] So God the Father and God the Son are in the lives of every believer dwelling with us. And Jesus has done everything for us so that we can draw near to God every day without fear.

And we'll find rest and delight when we do that. But it's up to us to take hold of that. Earlier this year in a seminar we had as a church, we thought about union and communion.

And you can see it on the screen there. That union is talking about our union with Christ. For every believer, when you trust Jesus, you're united to him. In relationship with him.

And that brings you benefits in terms of how God relates to you. That are fixed and permanent. But your communion with God is your experience of your walk with God.

Your experience of his goodness. Of that reality of going through life with him. So, if you're a Christian, how does God see you today? Well, the answer to that is all down the left hand column.

[7:51] It's about your union with Christ. God always looks on you as perfect. He has declared that you are holy. You are right with him. You're clean. You're devoted to him.

You're secure. That will not change. But when we think about our own experience of knowing God's blessing and his presence, that's impacted by things I do or don't do.

So, if I get caught up in sin. If I feel guilty or ashamed. If I'm going through hardship. If I'm just not making time for God in my life. I'm not opening my Bible day by day.

I'm not praying. These things are going to hold back my experience of being a child of God. Now, sometimes in the Christian life we get in a muddle because we forget the left hand side.

The union with Christ side. And then we drift into thinking that my own performance affects what God thinks of me. So that I, you know, have a good day and I think, oh, God must be really glad that I'm on his team.

[8:54] Or I have a bad day. Perhaps we're more aware of those. And we think, God must be really angry with me. If you're a Christian, on your best day and on your worst day, you are still a forgiven child of God.

Because it's not about your performance. It's about the work of Jesus for you. But sometimes we get hold of that and we forget the other side. That if I'm actually holding back things from God in my life, I'm not obeying him, I'm not making time for him.

Or I just love other things more than I should. Then I will miss out on communion with God. My relationship with God will get clouded over.

So as we read Psalm 84, as New Testament believers, the Psalm is urging you and me, seek God. Pursue God. Make time in your life to enjoy him.

John Piper wrote a book, *God is the Gospel*, where he says this, Behold, your God is the most gracious command and best gift of the gospel. The ultimate good of the gospel is that we would see and savor the beauty of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[10:05] We covered all of that last week. And today we've got three parts to the rest of the Psalm. There's a prayer in verses 8 and 9. There's a choice in verse 10. And then the truth in verses 11 and 12.

So first of all, the prayer. And it's an unexpected prayer. So far in the Psalm, we're tracking this band of pilgrims singing on their way up to Jerusalem. But then apparently from nowhere, look at the prayer in verse 8.

Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty. Listen to me, God of Jacob. Look on our shield, O God. Look with favor on your anointed one.

In verse 9, the way the poetry works, it means we can take it both of those lines are about the same thing. So look on our shield, O God. A prayer for protection that God will deliver them safely to him. How will he do that the second half? He will look with favor on his anointed one. Literally, he will look with favor on his Messiah. Why?

[11:09] Why would they pray that? Well, this is the strange thing. Psalm 84, written originally by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for a festival.

But in the collections of the Psalms, it's been placed in book 3. The Psalms are divided into five books. And book 3 is the section that smells of the exile.

This is the collection of songs that the people of God were to use as prayers and sing when they were in Babylon, far from home. They'd been taken away from the promised land.

And Jerusalem is now a city in rubble. The temple has been destroyed. What they know, that as they pray this prayer and yearn for the presence of God, what they need is a whole new rescue by a God who will bring them back into the promised land and give them his presence again.

And God has promised through his prophets that he'll do that through the prophet Isaiah and other prophets. He'll bring about this great new exodus rescue for his people, bringing them out of exile to himself through his Messiah, through his coming anointed king.

[12:25] And it's going to be a better rescue than they've ever had. Because when the Messiah comes, his spirit will come in them and give them a new heart so that they'll love him and want to be faithful to him.

So, we've had a longing to be home with God in verses 1 to 7 of the Psalm. And then it becomes a prayer that God will bless his Messiah in verse 9.

So, just think about what Psalm 84 is doing for how we think about our lives. In the first half of the Psalm, it's taking all of your unfulfilled desires, all of your sense in life that there's something missing, that we've got a homesickness in us for a place that we've never been.

And it ties them up to the presence of God and says, God is what you need. Don't settle for too little in life. You were made to be with God. You're right not to feel satisfied.

And you will find soul rest and delight and satisfaction in God alone. God wants to reshape our desires so that he can satisfy our desires.

[13:34] And then here in verse 9, the Psalm takes that reshaped desire for him, for God. And God says to us now, tether your heart for God to his plans for his Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

When God keeps the promises that he has made to his Messiah, his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he'll bring you home. Those promises are woven through the Bible.

God promised to King David that in 2 Samuel 7, that in his royal line will come a king who reigns forever. The prophet Daniel in Daniel 7 has a vision of the son of man, this Messiah, coming into the presence of God, the ancient of days, and being promised your kingdom will stretch to the ends of the earth and it will never end.

In Psalm 110, which Jesus takes and explains it about him, it says, The Lord God says to the Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

And then lots of us are familiar with how the Bible ends in Revelation 21. It pictures the new creation and the Apostle John who had the revelation. He has this announcement, Behold, the dwelling place of God is now with men.

[14:58] He will be with them and they will be his God. He will be their God, they will be his people. And he will wipe every tear from their eyes. So that's Revelation 21.

But for that promise to be fulfilled, that God finally and fully dwells with his people, we have to have the events of Revelation 19, where the Apostle John saw the return of Jesus.

And he says, He saw a rider on a white horse with eyes like blazing fire and crowns on his head.

And the armies of heaven are following him, dressed in fine white linen, clean.

And he comes and he judges the world with justice and he defeats his enemies. So that's been promised by God the Father to his son. And we've heard those promises.

And verse 9 of Psalm 84 is telling us, The very best thing that could ever happen to you is the best thing that could happen for our world. It's that God keeps the promises he's made to his son, the Lord Jesus.

[16:03] And if your heart longs to be with God, you need to tether your soul to God's plans for his son. And it means our best prayers for ourselves are our prayers that God would keep his promises to his son, Jesus.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, it's not that the first three lines are kind of, Oh, I've got to get out of the way. And then I get to the bits that are for me. Forgive me and give me my daily bread. No, when we pray to God, Your kingdom come, we're praying for the very best thing that could ever happen to us.

That at last the waiting will be over and we'll be with God forever. So that's the prayer, the unexpected prayer. And then we get the choice in verse 10, the extraordinary choice.

In verse 10, the writer of this psalm makes two great comparisons. First, we're invited to consider the offer of a thousand days in the most pleasurable surroundings the world can give us.

And he says this, verse 10, For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I saw an advert this week for a holiday that said this, Experience the epitome of indulgence with sensory.

[17:23] Every aspect of your holiday is meticulously crafted for your enjoyment. Opulent rooms, serene views, lavish spas, a seamless blend of luxury and tranquility.

Five star, all inclusive. We redefine the meaning of relaxation. Now breathe that in. Okay? And if sensory is not your dream holiday, think of what would be.

And now imagine that someone said to you, I'll cover for you, you can have four weeks of that next year. Just choose, you can spend four whole weeks there a month.

And you can have four weeks of it the year after that. And the year after that. Every year, a month that's sensory for the next 35 years.

That's a thousand days. Right? And the writer of Psalm 84 is saying to us, Say no to that if you could swap it for just one day with God.

[18:28] Enjoying the presence of God. Then we're to imagine life in the tents of the wicked. So verse 10 going on. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

Now, I don't know if you're a happy camper. We've been on a number of camping holidays. And when you're in a tent on a campsite, sometimes there are guys on the campsite who stay up after 11 p.m.

and they keep you awake, chatting and drinking, sometimes singing, laughing. And that's what I always think about when I read in verse 11 here about the tents, in verse 10, about the tents of the wicked.

I've met those, I've seen those tents. I've heard those people. But that is actually not what this is about. That's not the picture.

In Psalm 84, the tents of the wicked are royal tents. The canopies of the lavishly wealthy. What he means is picture the best that life could ever be without God.

[19:39] The best of the comfort, the friendships, the experiences, and the effortless wealth that this world could offer you. And the believer here makes this very startling choice.

He says, I would rather give all of that up if I could have the lowliest place in God's service. A doorkeeper.

Verse 10. If I was just asked to be on duty on one of the very outer gates at the very edge of God's house, I would take that instead.

Why? Well, effectively, what he's saying and what the Christian says with this choice in verse 10 is, the world is not enough for me. My desires are too great to settle for that.

And I've found something more satisfying. Such that even if all the living God was willing to offer me was that I would be his lowliest servant, so I would gladly spend my life there that I might one day,

from a distance, glimpse the face of Jesus and God's glory in his face.

[20 : 57] So the question becomes, are you able to make that choice in your life today? to say, it would be better to be a humble servant of God than be the right-hand man of the world's most powerful king.

The truth is, whenever we hold something back from God, it's because we don't believe that. We think the godly life, the life serving God, being obedient to him, being generous to him, that's going to spoil our fun.

And what would really make me happy is to satisfy my sinful desires. So what does that show us about the writer of Psalm 84? Here is a man who has been set free, he's been liberated from the chains of sinful pleasure, from the best that life could offer you without God.

And if we don't feel like that, then let what he writes next recalibrate your heart. That's our third point, the life-changing truth in verse 11.

So have a look with me at verse 11. For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those whose way of life is blameless.

[22 : 15] I take it when he talks about the person whose way of life is blameless there, he's talking about the person who is faithful, not sinless, not perfect, but trusting God's promises, so looked on by God as blameless.

And so as we read the images of verse 11, we're hearing, God is above you, illuminating your life, he's the sun. God is before you, protecting you, a shield.

God is for you, dignifying. He bestows favor and honor. And God is with you, extravagantly generous. No good thing does he withhold from those who trust him.

Now what do you think of that last promise? Do you really think that's true? Strangely, it's a promise in the Bible that is of most comfort in the seasons of life when it most seems not to be true.

And it can be very striking when you hear the story of someone who's been through the valley of tears in their life and still believes that that is true. I asked a friend about this.

[23 : 22] Bob has spent most of his life in, most of his adult life in full-time gospel ministry. And as a young adult, Bob met a godly Christian woman, Heather, and they fell in love.

And when they got married, they sang Psalm 84 at their wedding service. They didn't have children, but they had plenty of plans for their future.

And those plans always involved them thinking they would be together. But a few years ago, they got the devastating news that Heather had a cancer that was aggressive, rare, and incurable.

Within 18 months, Heather was in a hospice. One day, Bob was with her for the day, and in the evening as he left Heather to go home, he said, I love you, and Heather said, I love you too.

And that was their last conversation. Had Bob not prayed for Heather's healing? Of course he had. Had Heather not prayed for that? Of course she had.

[24 : 21] Their church family had prayed. So two years on from that, I asked Bob how he feels about this promise that he sung at his wedding, No Good Thing Does God Withhold.

And he wrote me this. He said, I realized during Heather's illness and then my grief that God really was real and the gospel was true.

Over the last two years, God continues to be faithful and the gospel remains true. I can't explain it fully, but my approach to life has changed.

Very few things are all that important, but those things that are important are very important. God has been good to me. He has been good to Heather.

He has not withheld any good thing from either of us. I have experienced the reality of verse 12. Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.

[25 : 20] That's how our psalm ends. If we look there at verse 12, the third promise of blessing is that it comes from trusting the Lord. Trusting these promises.

Even when you're going through a valley of tears. One writer puts the lesson of Psalm 84 like this. Psalm 84 reminds us that the good life is not about having everything you ever wanted.

The good life is about having God, even if it's in the midst of nothing you'd ever wanted. And we folks have more reason to trust God than the writer of this psalm did.

Because it's through Jesus that the promises of verse 11 are now so deeply true for us. The Lord God is above us, a son, enlightening us, and he sent Jesus now, the light of the world, to give us the light of life, life with him, life knowing God.

And Jesus could only give us that light because on the cross he endured darkness. Our darkness. Then God is before us, a shield, and in Christ we're now perfectly safe.

[26:33] He stood between us and the holy wrath of God that we deserved so that we're shielded from that. And he says, I'm the good shepherd, I give them eternal life, they shall never perish, no one will snatch them from my hand.

Verse 11, the Lord bestows favor and honor. Well how does God do that? How does he dignify those who don't deserve it? Well in God's eyes we stand clothed in Jesus.

God approves of you, he delights in you, he gives you a royal crown of righteousness, he dresses you in white robes, washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

And we can trust the second half of verse 11, no good thing does God withhold. Because whenever our circumstances would leave us doubting that, the Apostle Paul in Romans 8 would point us back to the cross and say, look there, he didn't spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

So how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? So let me ask you, could the truths of verse 11 and 12 persuade you to make the choice today of verse 10?

[27:55] Every man and woman must make their choice and this is ours. God's doorstep is a happier resting place than a lifetime of luxury without him.

And whatever we face in the term ahead, let's make this a season where we aim for God. Make him your home and your hope, your strength for the journey, your delight and your treasure so that you can pray this prayer that the day of Christ will come soon.

You can make this choice. One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere and you trust this truth that Christ is above you, the son, he's around you, a shield, he's for you and he's with you.

As a response, I thought it would be good for us to say Psalm 84 together. So let's have a moment of quiet first, a chance just to reflect ourselves with God on what he's been saying to us and then I'll invite us to stand and say the psalm together.