

For the Love of God
Blessed Before God
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BLESSED BEFORE GOD **Psalm 84**

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Psalm 84. Words really cannot express how much I am enjoying reading, preaching and hearing preached multiple psalms every week during these six weeks. So we're halfway through our immersion in the Psalms. We have this week and then two more left during which we're looking at different psalms and different worship gatherings, oftentimes with different preachers.

I just had the privilege of preaching and leading us in prayer through Psalm 82, a psalm that pleads for God to show His justice in an unjust world, and we just spent the majority of our time in the 9:00 gathering praying for the poor, and the orphan, and the enslaved, and the persecuted and the unreached. So I want to encourage you to go back and listen, maybe, to the first part of that message. It was actually really short as far as the preaching, and let it lead you into, maybe, some extended time in prayer in your own life, family, this week to plead before God on behalf of those in need around us.

And now I have the privilege of opening Psalm 84, a psalm that is pretty well-known among the 150 psalms for its poetic beauty and personal longing for God. This psalm is going to, in a different way, lead us to pray specifically for those who are in need. So I wrestled with what to preach. All week long, I kept going back between Psalm 84 and Psalm 81. So I was studying both Psalm 84 and 81 like I was going to be preaching both. In the end, what set me over the top was some time in prayer and the Word with our elders, our pastors, this past Wednesday night.

Once a month, all of our pastors... There's about 30 of us, and we just affirmed nine more who begin their leadership in that position today, so about 39 pastors in our church. Once a month we all gather together and update one another on things going on across the church. We work through any major decisions that need to be made in the church, but the majority of our time on a consistent basis month after month is time spent gathering to devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. We dive into the Word together. We let it lead us into prayer, and then we help one another to think through how to lead the church accordingly—how to shepherd the church.

Recently, we've been considering specific issues in our faith family—specific struggles that members of our faith family may be walking through—because we want to shepherd you well in the midst of struggle. We want to devote ourselves to the ministry of prayer and the Word in specific ways according to the struggles you may face in your faith. So last month, for example—and really the last two months—we've spent concentrated time in prayer and the Word focused around marriages in our faith family, asking God to guard and protect and guide our marriages—your marriages—for us to fight for our marriages against the many threats that come against them. We've spent time in prayer and the Word and then helping one another think through how to shepherd marriages across this church with prayer in accordance with the Word.

And then, this last week, we spent time considering how to best shepherd members of our faith family who walk through various difficulties, and, specifically, various degrees of depression. Now, I want to be clear from the start, when I use the term “depression,” I’m not necessarily talking about an official diagnosis of clinical depression. That’s not something I would claim to be qualified to do, nor is my aim this morning to put various people either in that category or not in that category. But when I use that word “depression” or people who struggle with depression, I’m referring to men and women in our church who now—right now—or in the past or maybe in the future find themselves walking through difficult days that some have described as “the dark night of the soul.”

John Piper wrote a book called, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*, and in it he asked,

How can we help Christians who seem unable to break out of darkness into the light of joy? Yes, (he said) I call them Christians and thus assume that such things happen to genuine believers. It happens because of sin or because of satanic assault or because of distressing circumstances or because of hereditary or other physical causes.

So acknowledging different degrees of depression—different reasons behind depression—Piper goes on to conclude that, “For most people who are passing through the dark night of the soul, the turnaround will come because God brings unwavering lovers of Christ into their lives who do not give up on them.” And that is what we, as pastors, want to do for members in this church, to walk alongside you in unwavering love—for Christ and for you—and not to give up on you, even on days where you may want to give up on yourself. And not just as pastors, but as members of this body, we want to come alongside one another in this way.

As we talked and prayed about this on Wednesday night, I was convicted that, as a member and a pastor in this church, I’ve not loved and served people as well as I want to in this way. So there I was sitting with our pastors, talking about this issue in the church, and Tate Cockrell, our pastor for member care, is leading us through this time and quotes from Charles Spurgeon. This is what Spurgeon said:

I know that wise brethren say, “You should not give way to feelings of depression.” If those who blame quite so furiously could once know what depression is, they would think it cruel to scatter blame where comfort is needed. There are experiences of the children of God, which are full of spiritual darkness. And I’m almost persuaded those of God’s servants who have been most highly favored have never less suffered more times of darkness than others. No sin is necessarily connected with sorrow of heart, for Jesus Christ our Lord once said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” There was no sin in Him, and, consequently, none in His deep depression. (He continues:) So the way of sorrow is not always the way of sin, but a hallowed road sanctified by the prayers of myriads of pilgrims now with God—pilgrims who, passing through the Valley of Baca (literally “of weeping”) made it a well. The rain also filled with pools. Of such it is written: “They go from strength to strength, everyone of them in Zion appearing before God.”

Now, there at the end of that quote, what Spurgeon is referring to is Psalm 84. And so there I came into that elder meeting, working to prepare both Psalm 81 and 84, and during that meeting, with conviction in my own heart and clarity among our pastors, we said “Psalm 84 it is.”

So what I want to do in this gathering, believing that God has led us in this specific gathering to this specific text, is to show us what Psalm 84 says, specifically what it said in its original context when it was penned by its original author. And then I want us to take this text and the truth that it contains and apply it to all of us. Whether you're going through great days in your life or dark days in your life, there is so much for you, for me, for us in this psalm. But then I want us to pray specifically for those who are walking through dark or difficult days in some way.

So let's start by reading Psalm 84, and then we'll pray for God to help us understand it. Psalm 84:1:

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
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.
Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! Selah
Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.
O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah
Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!
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.
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.
O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!*

Let's pray.

O God, I thank You for how You've led us to this psalm at this moment. And, Lord, I have to say I don't know what's going on in lives, and minds, and hearts and families all across this faith family right now, but I know that You know. So I pray—we pray together—that You would take Your Word penned centuries ago and bring it to bear on circumstances all across this church today. We anticipate how You will serve us with this Word. Help my words, I

pray, to be only in line with Your Word. And we pray that You would bring life and light in the midst of darkness and difficulty, even now. Prepare our hearts for darkness and difficulty to come around the corner. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Okay, there are so many different ways to try to approach this psalm, but here's what I want to do based on something that's utterly unique about this psalm. So out of 150 psalms, this is the only psalm that uses this word, "blessed," three times like this psalm does. You might circle it in your Bible every time you see it.

Verse four, the psalmist says, "*Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!*" So that's number one. Then verse five: "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*" That's number two. And then last, verse 12: "*O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!*"

So three times the psalmist talks about how blessed different people are. I want to use these three acknowledgments of blessing for the outline of how we walk through this text. So if you're taking notes, I would title this sermon "Blessed Before God." This psalm is all about blessing, and the blessing revolves around being in the presence of God.

So let's start with what the psalmist was saying then. Our goal whenever we start in the Bible is always to start by stepping into the shoes of the original writer, the original readers, to discern what God was saying in His Word—what God's Word meant then—because that's going to drive and determine how we understand what God is saying in His Word, what God means for us to hear from Him today.

For the Psalmist Then ...

It was a blessing to work in the temple.

We'll start with what the psalmist was saying then about blessing. There are three things I think he was saying. One, the psalmist was saying it is a blessing to work in the temple. So this is the first thing. It was a blessing to work in the temple to the psalmist then. You will notice, and in order to get this you've got to look, even before verse one, at the ascription next to the number 84 in your Bible, where it says, "*To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.*"

That last part, "*A Psalm of the Sons of Korah,*" is critical to understanding the 12 verses that follow in this psalm. If this psalm was written by them or sung by them, then we need to know who they are. So this is where I want you to hold your place real quickly here in Psalm 84, and then turn with me back to 1 Chronicles 9. So you're going to take a left back—just a few different books—you'll come to 1 Chronicles 9. You'll hit 2 Chronicles and 1 Chronicles. If you hit Kings and Samuel, you've gone too far. Feel free to use the table of contents if you need to. But 1 Chronicles 9 because I want to give you a little context for Psalm 84...

This psalm is talking about being in the presence of God. And so throughout the history of God's people in the Old Testament, God had set up a physical place in the middle of his people that would symbolize His presence among them. It started with the Ark of the Covenant that was placed in the tabernacle, which was basically a tent that moved as the people of God moved and symbolized God's presence among His people. It served as the place where the people would gather together to offer sacrifices and sing praises to God. Then when King David came to Jerusalem on Mt. Zion, he brought the ark into the city, and

the tabernacle was set up there. Later, under King David's son, King Solomon, this was where the temple was built. So it was a more established place that signified God's presence among His people.

Now, when it came to the tabernacle, or the temple, God appointed different people from different families who would be responsible for all the work that would go on in or around the tabernacle and the temple, including: its construction, its maintenance, its operation in the worship life of Israel. So different people from different families had different assignments: some priests, some Levites, some others doing different duties. This is where the sons of Korah come in.

So look at 1 Chronicles 9 at this list of names and families. If you look real quickly at verse 10 it's talking about the priests. Verse 14 is talking about the Levites. Then you get to verse 17. Read what it says there.

The gatekeepers were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their kinsmen (Shallum was the chief); until then they were in the king's gate on the east side as the gatekeepers of the camps of the Levites. Shallum the son of Kore, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, and his kinsmen of his fathers' house, the Korahites, were in charge of the work of the service, keepers of the thresholds of the tent, as their fathers had been in charge of the camp of the LORD, keepers of the entrance.

Did you hear that? The Korahites, the sons of Korah, "were in charge of the work of the service, keepers of the thresholds of the tent." So this was the designated responsibility of the sons of Korah. They were gatekeepers, who stood at the threshold of the tabernacle. And that's where they worked. They worked as doorkeepers of the place that God had symbolized as God's presence in the middle of His people.

Now, understanding that, turn back to Psalm 84, and doesn't that just shed all kinds of light on what we just read? You know, you almost hear these words from a whole new perspective.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD ...
Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself ...
Blessed are those who dwell in your house ...*

Which is what they did! When he says, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness," at the end of verse 10, this is not a hypothetical; this is reality. He loves what he does. So this is different from other psalms, like Psalm 42 and 43, that expresses a psalmist's longing for the presence of God when he's away from the tabernacle or away from the temple. There's a reference to that later in this psalm, as the sons of Korah sing about those who don't have the privilege of dwelling in the tabernacle that they do. So we'll get to that, but, first and foremost, this psalm's a celebration of people who dwell in the very place that symbolizes God's presence. And they love what they do. They are not bored. They can't get enough of what they do.

Verse 10, "A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." So the psalmist here, representing the sons of Korah, is singing about how he loved to be in God's presence, how

much he loved the dwelling place of God, so much so that he longed, yes fainted, to be there. And this from a guy who's always there! He's talking about the tabernacle with language of love poetry. There's an appetite for God here that is insatiable. He wants more and more and more of God. And notice—this is key—it's not the place that he longs for as much as the Person whose presence dwells in that place.

Now, we've got to be careful—just a side note here—when we think about the tabernacle or the temple that symbolized the presence of God—not to think that God was only present there. That's not what the Old Testament teaches. Even Solomon, when he was dedicated in the temple, said, "*Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*" Then he goes on to pray (this is from 1 Kings 8):

... that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place ...

So catch this: the Bible talks about how God dwells in heaven. At the same time, the Old Testament talks about God's dwelling on earth in the tabernacle and the temple. And, at the same time, the Bible talks about God being omnipresent, dwelling everywhere on earth and in heaven. So when you think tabernacle or temple, don't think the only place where God dwells. Instead, think the place that God shows in the Old Testament to dwell in a particular, powerful way among His people. And if that's the case, this psalmist wanted to be there. He longed for communion with God in the courts of the tabernacle or the temple. He loved that place, because he longed for God's presence. He even looks up into the structure of this place, and he sees sparrows and swallows that have set up nests there. And he says, "That is best of all."

It's great imagery—the presence of God as the place where the humble find a home. The sparrow used throughout Scripture to describe a humble, lowly, common, seemingly worthless bird. Jesus pointed out in Matthew 10 how two of them are sold for a penny, yet this simple bird finds majestic meaning by having a house in the presence of God. It's really a great description, when you think about it, of the people of God: humble, lowly, common people who find majestic meaning in gathering before God.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, one-time pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, compared the church to sparrows like this. He said,

I look down some little street and see a humble chapel, where a group of simple people worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, despised and rejected of men, even as was their Lord, and I know that this is the rich reality of spiritual truth. Here are the sparrows who find their nest at the cross of Jesus Christ. Here is worthlessness that finds its worth because the Savior died.

And I think about what we just did in our last worship gathering for 30-40 minutes—just common people just falling on our faces before God, crying out for His justice to be shown in a world of injustice. The presence of God is a place where the humble find a home.

And where the restless find a refuge, a swallow, a fast-moving bird through the air, back and forth in different directions, wearing out anybody who tries to watch its movements. And yet, here in the presence of God, that same bird, a swallow, builds a nest and settles

down to rest with her young. It's a great illustration of what Augustine, a church father, said: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

So this psalmist, he loved to be in God's presence, and he loved to sing God's praise. His heart and his flesh sing for joy to God. And you look at that phrase in verse two, "*my heart and my flesh sing for joy.*" The Hebrew phrase that's translated "sing for joy" there is so much more than a simple song. One commentator said, "This is a distinctly inappropriate translation, because the language the psalmist uses here in the Hebrew is really a loud cry." It's a longing for God in the psalmist's heart, and his flesh just leaps, overflowing, and to cry out, not just in songs, but in shouts to God.

Now, here's the deal. A couple of weeks ago, on the day when we in this gathering studied Psalm 67 at 11:00 a.m., the 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. services studied Psalms 66 and 68, respectively, both of which talked about singing and shouting to God. And so I feel it necessary to let you in on what we talked about in the Word during those gatherings, because I don't want you to miss out.

One of my prayers in this immersion in the Psalms is that the Lord might teach us more through His Word about how to worship. One of the things I believe the Lord is teaching us about is to sing for joy. So we're commanded all over these psalms—all over Scripture for that matter—to sing to God. That's why we do what we do in our gatherings. I realize, to an outsider who may not be familiar with a church with a worship gathering, the scene might look a little funny. "What is this? A bunch of adults gathering together for a sing-along?" And the answer is yes!

There's a reason why we sing. There's a reason we come together every week and we sing. There's a reason why you should not just come together for a sermon, as if that's the main event and everything else is just a bonus. No, singing is a vital, biblical, pivotal part of worship. The people of God are singing people. We're a community that can't help but sing our praises to God. One of the ways we give worship to God is through singing and through shouting.

So Psalm 66:1 on that day said, "*Shout for joy to God all the earth!*" And the word that's used there is used in other places in the Bible as a cry of celebration, much like what we're seeing here in Psalm 84. So in the presence of God, this psalmist is just overflowing, "*Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!*" Not just talking about God's praise; not just thinking about God's praise; not just blessed are those who contemplate God. No, blessed are those who celebrate God, who sing with joy and shout aloud over God in His Word and His worship.

So, pastorally, I believe this is something we need to work on a bit—singing and shouting, contemplating God and crying out to God. So I just want to put this out there. Just as sure as you and I sing in our worship, we need to have the freedom to shout in our worship as well. To take it a step further, I actually, biblically, want to encourage you to shout every once in awhile.

You say, "What do you mean?" And there's a few different applications that come to my mind here. There's probably all kinds of ways this could play out, but just a couple—at least these. I mean, one, there are times when we are singing and the band gets going and voices are raised in song and worship, and I don't know about you but I'm standing over here singing and somewhere along the way my singing becomes shouting. There's a threshold that's crossed. "In Christ Alone"—where it's more of a shout than it is a nice song that's going on from my lips. So I'm yelling in worship, just giving God loud praise.

Now, that often leads to a second application during song—maybe even during verses of a song we’re singing—to shout out praises to God. So it’s thoroughly appropriate in the presence of God in worship of God not just to sing, but while we’re singing to shout, “Yes! God, You are all these things that we’re saying You are! We’re singing, ‘Hallelujah! He is saving!’” Just to go off, “Yes! I will praise Your name! You have reached down your hand into my life and saved me from sin and death. They reign no more in me due to You. Praise be to Your name!” That’s worth shouting about. So you have pauses even between verses where you just kind of let that soak in. Just shout out. So sing in between verses.

And then a third potential application—so not just in our singing in worship but in the preaching of the Word. As God’s glory is being revealed in His Word, it is okay to shout. An “Amen!” here or there would not hurt us in this house. It would probably help us, to help us get out of this spectator mentality where I’m just talking and you’re just listening. I mean, you guys can actually join in the talking, too. If I happen to say something that you think is true, or your heart resonates with, then shout out an “Amen!” or “Praise the Lord!” or “That’s right!” And then when somebody does that, don’t everybody look at that person and say, “Dude, just calm down! You’re distracting me.” No, he’s actually helping tune into the fact that there’s something being said here that we celebrate. So we obviously don’t do this to draw attention to ourselves, but to draw attention to our God because we love being in His presence in a particular way like this. So we have reason to shout, ladies and gentlemen. We have reason to shout.

I count in this psalm 12 different names and attributes and activities of God specifically mentioned here. And even as I was studying this psalm, again, as I was finishing this sermon, I saw more. But we’ll stick with 12 for now. You might write them down. We’re just going to go through them real quick, Secret Church style. Twelve of them.

First, God is the covenant-keeping Lord. God is the covenant-keeping Lord. Verse one: He is the Lord. You’ll notice the word “LORD” in all caps—“O LORD of hosts!” “LORD” in all caps. Whenever you see that in your Bible, you know this is Yahweh, the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses and His people. And He called them out to be His people and entered into covenant with Him. This is the God who reaches down His hand of mercy into sinners’ lives and commits Himself to them. He’s the covenant-keeping Lord.

Second, He’s the commander of heavenly armies—“O Lord of hosts!” So He’s not just the Lord; He’s the Lord of hosts—literally, “Yahweh of heavenly armies,” which points already to the security that’s found in His presence that the psalmist is later going to rejoice in.

Third, God is the living God. “The God I long for,” the psalmist says, “is not dead.” “My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God,” whose presence is active among His people. So you’ve got this grand picture of God’s greatness. He is the covenant-keeping Lord who commands heavenly armies at His side, who is living and active in the world.

Fourth, God is my king. Oh, don’t you love this? At the end of verse three, when he’s talking about the sparrow and swallow, he says, “[They] dwell at your altars, O LORD of hosts.” So he uses that term again—Yahweh over heavenly armies—and then he says, “my king and my God.” So number four, this God is my king. He is my king.

Fifth, this God is my God—my king, my God. This is awesome! I mean, just think about this, people of God. Put yourself in the psalmist’s shoes for a minute. He looks up. He sees the glory and the grandeur of God commanding armies in heaven, living and active all across the earth, and the psalmist says, “He is mine.” There’s almost a sense of pride in that, isn’t there? And a good sense at that. It’s like a wedding. It’s like me standing at the front of a

gathering, December 18, 1999, and everybody gets quiet. Music stops. And then, all of a sudden, the doors in the back swing open. Everybody stands up. Music begins. And we fix our attention on this bride walking into that room—my, my bride! And I'm thinking, "She's mine! Ha! She's mine. She chose me and none of you guys. Ha! Me! She belongs to me. Like I'm with her, and she's with me." It's a picture of God here. This covenant-keeping Lord who commands heavenly armies—He's mine. He chose me. He's with me. He's my God, my king.

Sixth, God is the only God. He's the only God. Verse seven uses another Hebrew word *elohim* to describe God as the one, true God. And then verse eight, *elohim* is combined with Yahweh. So we have "the Lord God over armies."

Seventh, God is the faithful God. In the second half of verse eight, He's the God of Jacob. He's the God who made promises to Jacob centuries before—promises He's still faithful to today. Just think about it. God has been making and keeping promises to His people for centuries, going all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He's the God of Jacob.

Eighth, God is the source of light and life to His people. You get down to verses 11, and the psalmist writes, "*For the LORD God is a sun...*" This is the only place in Scripture where God is ever explicitly called a sun. Usually Scripture shies away from identifying God with a sun because of pagan religions that worshiped the sun. But the psalmist looked up at the light and life the sun brings, and then this is the way he describes being in the presence of God. He shines brightly upon His people, which is going to have implications for when we get back to talking about darkness in our lives.

Ninth, God is the shield of protection and provision for His people. The Lord God is a sun and shield, a picture of protection for people who find their refuge in Him.

Tenth, God showers His people with His grace. The Lord bestows favor on His people, but they don't deserve it. This year, we've read enough of the Old Testament to realize that. This week, we've seen enough of our lives to realize that. And even though we don't deserve it, the Lord bestows favor. He bestows favor. He showers His people with His grace, which leads to number 11.

Eleventh, God surrounds His people with His glory. When verse 11 says, "*The LORD bestows favor and honor [on His people],*" the literal language is God bestowing grace and glory. And the picture, much like we saw with sun and shield, is God surrounding His people with His glory so that they dwell in it. This is what the tabernacle or temple was all about. This is what dwelling in God's presence was all about. It's why David prayed earlier in Psalm 3, "*You, O LORD, my glory and the lifter of my head.*" As we come into the presence of God, He bestows honor on us, surrounding us with His glory—a privilege, again, we don't deserve, but He gives it to us as a picture of His favor toward us, which all leads to number 12.

Finally, God shows His people all His goodness. The effect of being in God's presence is that the psalmist lacks no good thing. With God's grace on Him and glory around Him, the psalmist rests in God's goodness to him.

I mean, you put all that together and you realize why the psalmist longs to be in God's presence and why you and I, if we realize who God is, would love the presence of God like this. Just think about who we've gathered to worship—the God in whose presence we've gathered for worship is the covenant-keeping God who commands heavenly armies; the only God; living God; faithful God; source of light and life for people; source of provision

and protection for His people; who showers us with His grace; surrounds us with His glory; shows to us His goodness. This is my God; our God; my King; our King; and it is good to be before Him. It is good to sing and shout before Him day after day after day after day. That's the point of the first blessing in this psalm. It was a blessing for this psalmist to work in the presence of this God. It's a blessing to work in the temple.

It was a blessing to journey to the temple.

Okay, second blessing the psalmist writes about: it was a blessing to journey to the temple. So we're trying to keep ourselves in his shoes. It was a blessing to journey to the temple. So right after this first statement of blessing in verse four, he immediately goes into a second statement in verse five, where he writes, "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you. (And here's the key phrase) in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*" Now, Zion is a reference to where the tabernacle or the temple was in Jerusalem. So now the psalmist finds himself talking about people who are far away from the tabernacle or the temple but who find their strength by setting their hearts on the presence of God. Obviously, this was the majority of the people in Israel. Most people lived far away from Jerusalem. Only a relative few actually worked at the temple.

So the psalmist sets his gaze on the people of God who are scattered all throughout the country. And he gives us a picture of the road that leads to Zion and the strength that people find, though far away, when they set their heart's hope on the presence of God. He describes how hope in God brings strength amidst weakness. He describes how hope in God brings strength amidst weakness. Even those who are far away, "*blessed are those whose strength is in you.*"

Then in verse seven, he uses the imagery of traveling from wherever they are to the presence of God in Zion, saying, "*They go from strength to strength.*" So the picture is how the hope of God's presence makes the heart of God's people strong. And then comes this imagery that's so potent. He says in verse six, "*As they go through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.*" Now, "Baca" is a Hebrew word, meaning "balsam tree." It was a type of tree that was found in dry, arid landscapes. And the tree was such that resin, like sap, would just ooze out of it, almost like tears, which is why this noun, "Baca," sounds very similar to the Hebrew verb for weeping and which is why people refer to the Valley of Baca as the Valley of Weeping.

Now, this just brings verse six to life. So the psalmist is talking about people either on a figurative or a literal journey from where they lived to Zion—hearts on a highway that leads there, or maybe feet walking there—from where they are to the presence of God. And while they walk through the Valley of Baca—symbolizing dry and difficult days filled with hardship and hopelessness that causes one to weep—in the middle of that valley, what sustains them is the hope of God's presence. When they hold on to that hope, even this dry, desolate place becomes a valley of springs and pools from which they can drink and be satisfied.

So see it. The psalmist is not only describing how hope in God brings strength amidst weakness, he's describing how hope in God brings joy amidst weeping. Joy amidst weeping brought about by hope in God. Tears of sadness become springs of joy when the pilgrim looks to the presence of God. That's the picture here.

"It was a blessing to journey to the temple," the psalmist says, "both physically and spiritually, to set one's gaze in the presence of God, and even from afar to find strength in weakness and joy amidst weeping. All that leads to the final blessing in verse 12.

It was a blessing to live with trust in God.

It was a blessing to live with trust in God. So right after he talks about walking uprightly before God, the psalmist says in verse 12, "*O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!*" So wherever one lives—at the tabernacle or temple gates or far away from the tabernacle or temple gates—blessed is the one who walks with all of their trust placed in God.

Now, these are the blessings that the psalmist was describing in Old Testament Israel at a time when God was dwelling in a particular way among His people in Jerusalem in a tabernacle or a temple. But this psalm happens in the middle of this book, and there is more to come in the rest of this book that helps us understand how this psalm applies to our lives.

So I want to take you on a quick journey of what happens after this. Turn with me over—you can leave Psalm 84 now—go with over to John 1. It's the fourth Gospel, the fourth account of Jesus's life, and ministry, and death and resurrection. So we don't travel to Jerusalem today to worship at a temple. And for that matter, we don't set our gaze to pray in a certain direction. So why not? The answer to that question leads us to the startling truth of John 1:14.

John starts his Gospel very different from the other Gospel writers. He doesn't start telling us about all the circumstances that surrounded Jesus coming into the world. We don't have a manger here and a stable. We don't have some of the things that we see in other Gospel writers. Instead, John gives us a glimpse of the identity of who this Jesus is who is coming into the world.

Listen to what he says. John 1:14: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Now, in the very beginning of this chapter, we see the Word associated with God—identified with God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

So when you get down to verse 14, you see "the Word became flesh." The picture is God becoming flesh. And then when you get to that word, "dwelt," you might circle it. Maybe put a little note out somewhere in your Bible. Because that word, "dwelt," is the same word used in the Old Testament to describe the tabernacle. So you might make a little note, because it's literally saying, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." The whole picture is God coming, tabernacling among His people. This was the good news of who Jesus is. He was coming into the world, John says, to dwell in the middle of His people, and in Jesus we would see, "Behold! The glory of God!"

Which is why in the next chapter—look at John 2—Jesus was having a discussion with some Jews at the temple there in Jerusalem. And in verse 19, look at what Jesus said. In verse 19, Jesus said to them, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" "*Destroy this temple.*" So he's talking about the temple—this place which symbolizes the presence of God. He says, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" Then look at what happens in verse 20. The Jews said, "*It was taken forty-six years to build this temple, and*

will you raise it up in three days?" They're saying, "How could you do that?" In verse 21, it says, "But (John says) he was speaking about the temple of his body."

Jesus was telling the Jewish people that He was the temple. He's pointing forward to when He would die on a cross and three days later rise from the dead. He was saying to them, "I am the place where the glory of God dwells. I am the place that symbolizes God's presence among His people. I am the temple." It's why He says later in John 14:9, "*If you have seen me, you have seen God the Father.*"

Now, it gets better, even after this. Better than even God coming to dwell among us, turn over now to 1 Corinthians 3. First Corinthians 3—so you'll take a right; you'll come to Acts; keeping going to the right, you'll come to Romans; keep going to the right, you'll come to 1 Corinthians—First Corinthians 3. Now, keep in mind what we're turning past. We're turning past how Jesus died on the cross. And when He died, the Bible teaches us that the curtain of the temple that separated man from God was torn in two. In His death for sinners, God was making a way for man to be reconciled to God.

So let me encapsulate this, especially for friends who may not be Christians. This is the greatest news in all the world. You and I have sinned against God. We've all—in different ways, it looks different in each of our lives—we've all turned aside from God. We've rebelled against God. We've done things our own way instead of His way. We are separated from God.

The good news is God has not left us alone in our separation. He's not left us alone in the darkness of our rebellion against Him. The light of life has come. The Word became flesh. God has come to us. He has lived among us—a life of perfect obedience to God, with no sin. And then He died. And now death is the payment for sin. He had no sin. "Why then would He die?" I'm glad you asked. He died for sinners like you and me. He died in our place on a cross. He took the payment that was to your sin and my sin, and when He died—that's the symbolism behind the curtain in the temple torn in two—because when He died, He opened the way for sinners to be reconciled to God. He opened the way for you and I who've rebelled against God to be brought back into the presence of God.

So Jesus, the temple, the glory of God has come. He's made a way for you and I to be reconciled to God when we turn from our sin and trust in Him. So that's our invitation to every person who has not done that. We invite you in glory to turn from your sin. Trust in Christ—what He has done—and be reconciled to God today. And then—so follow this—then when you do, listen to what Scripture describes. First Corinthians 3:16: "*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*" This is not talking about Jesus as the temple, but you as the temple.

You keep going, 1 Corinthians 6, same thing on a more individual level here. First Corinthians 6:19, end of that chapter, in Paul's exhortation to flee from sexual immorality, he says in verse 19, "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*" Your body! When you turn from your sin and put your trust in Jesus and are reconciled to God, your body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, in whom His grace and glory dwells. Where is God's presence? Yes, everywhere. Yes, He dwells in heaven. But in a particular powerful way, He dwells in the hearts and lives of every single sinner who has trusted in Christ as their Savior. Your body's a temple where the Holy Spirit of God dwells in power.

This is an amazing, startling truth, and it's personal and corporate. So, Christian, your body, according to 1 Corinthians 6, is a temple of the Holy Spirit. And, church all together, according to 1 Corinthians 3, we're a temple of the Holy Spirit. So get this: we don't go to a designated place of worship like they did in the Old Testament, because we are the place of worship. We're the place! You're the place of worship! Individually, we're the place of worship. Corporately, for every Christian, God's Spirit dwells in you. For the church gathered together right now, the Spirit of God dwells in us.

For the Christian Now ...

It is a blessing to be the temple.

So now get the application of Psalm 84. You see, for the psalmist then, it was a blessing to work in the tabernacle or the temple. But you and I don't work as doorkeepers in the tabernacle or the temple. We've got something far better—something only the psalmist could have dreamed of. For the psalmist then, it was a blessing to work in the temple. Now, for the Christian, it is a blessing to be the temple—to be the place where the glory of God's presence dwells in your body. That radically changes the way we live.

You and I live with the presence of God in us. We wake up in the morning and rub our eyes with the presence of God in us. We walk through every detail of our day—at home, and at work, and the ball field, wherever else—with the presence of God with us. And we lay down at night with the presence of God in us. Blessed are those—not who dwell in God's house—blessed are those whose bodies house the glory of God!

And that's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6. This changes the way you live. It changes the way you act and you think. It changes the way you speak and you love—literally walking in the worship of God. And then, on a corporate level, when we gather together, there is indeed something unique—utterly unique—about this gathering, because God is among us, as the Church.

When we gather together as the people of God—as the temple of God—we're singing His praise. We're singing, shouting for joy to the living God. And so our hearts long for this. This is no casual thing we do once a week, certainly not once every few weeks. This is a blessing. Blessed are those who gather together as the temple to celebrate the glory of their God! So for the psalmist then, it was a blessing to work in the temple. For the Christian now, it's a blessing to be the temple.

It is a blessing to journey to heaven.

And then... So for the psalmist in Psalm 84 it was a blessing to journey to the temple. What about the Christian now? We're not going on any pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but does that mean the highways of our heart have no hope? No. So think about at least one more application of Psalm 84 to us today. For the psalmist, it was a blessing to journey to the temple. For the Christian now, it is a blessing to journey to heaven.

Now, it's not that this wasn't true for the psalmist then, but think about this in an even greater way, based on what we know in the rest of the Bible. So turn with me to one last book, the last book of the Bible, Revelation 21. Now, as you're turning, realize you're turning past verses like 1 Peter 2:11 that talks about how Christians are exiles and strangers on this earth. Hebrews 11 describes us, along with Old Testament men and women who went before us in the faith, as exiles and strangers who are looking for a homeland. We're desiring a better country. It is a heavenly one.

When you get to Revelation 21, you see that country. You see that homeland described. And this is what it says. Revelation 21:1:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem (Okay? Not Jerusalem of old, the new Jerusalem. Not Zion of old, the new Zion) coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Do you see what the distinctive feature of heaven is? Over and above all physical descriptions of the beauty of heaven that will be there, the most important thing about heaven is not what is there, but who is there. The dwelling of God will be with man in this city, which is why, later in this chapter, heaven is described with measurements that match the shape of the temple in the Old Testament. And the whole point is finally, finally all those who've trusted in Christ will be fully reconciled to God.

So is God with us right now? Absolutely, He is! Is God's presence dwelling in Christians? Absolutely! His Holy Spirit is in us, with us, right now, but we are longing for more. Aren't we? The highways of our hearts are set on the hope of a day when sin and suffering will be no more, and we will be with God in perfect, pure, endless joy forever and ever.

Now, in the meantime, on this earth we sometimes--maybe often--find ourselves walking in the Valley of Baca. On this earth, there is weeping, and there is dryness, and there is darkness at times. Spurgeon went on from his earlier quote to talk about how many of God's people find themselves traveling most of the way to heaven by night. There is real struggle in this world. There is fight for joy on some--maybe many, days—a fight with which many people among us are familiar. This fight may be in the past, or in the present or will be in the future.

So what do you do on those days? The answer that Psalm 84 gives us is to keep our hearts—to keep your heart—fixed and fastened on your hope in God. Even when the journey in the present seems bleak, to lift your eyes—to fight to lift your eyes—to the hope you have in God. It's exactly what Psalm 84 is teaching us.

Don't darkness and difficulty often come when we feel alone? Or isolated? And Psalm 84 says to the alone and the isolated, "You have a home with God." Aren't darkness and difficulty oftentimes associated with feelings of restlessness or maybe even worthlessness? And Psalm 84 says to the restless, "You have refuge in God." It says to the worthless, "You have worth before God."

And in the midst of darkness isn't our greatest need a source of light and life? In the midst of difficulty isn't our greatest need a shield of protection and provision? All of these things are found in God. So set your heart's hope on Him. This is where Psalm 84 left us. Last verse: "*O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!*" It is a blessing to live with trust in God, even in the midst of darkness and even in the midst of difficulty.

It is a blessing to live with trust in Christ.

But take that even a step further. So, yes, for the psalmist then, it was a blessing to live with trust in God. But, again, we know more. So for the Christian now, we know it is a blessing to live with trust in Jesus Christ. For God has sent His Son, Word made flesh to us, and He has identified with us. He was hurt as you hurt. He experienced sorrow as you experience sorrow. He knows what it's like to be abandoned, and He knows what it's like to feel alone. He knows what it's like to look to God the Father in the midst of utter darkness and ask, "Why?" He identifies with you, and He says, "Trust in me. Trust in me."

Trust in the one who has walked through the dark night and has come out on the other side in victorious light. He has conquered sin and sorrow. He has defeated death and hell, and He is coming back. Oh, He's coming back to bring all who trust in Him on this earth to glory with Him in eternity, where He will wipe every single tear from your eyes. And He will heal every ache in your heart. Put your hope in Christ.

Piper put it best. He said:

Every Christian who struggles with depression struggles to keep their hope clear. There's nothing wrong with the object of their hope. Jesus Christ is not defective any way whatsoever. But the view from the struggling Christian's heart of their objective hope is often obscured by disease and pain, by the pressures of life and by satanic, fiery darts shot against them. All discouragement and depression is related to the obscuring of our hope, and we need to get those clouds out of the way and fight like crazy to see clearly how precious Christ is.

That's my prayer. More than anything right now, that you will see and know how precious Christ is. You know, we didn't spend time with this back in Psalm 84, but in verse nine the psalmist prayed for God's favor on the king of Israel. The psalmist knew that God's protection with His people was tied to God's protection of the king who led them. So then the psalmist was praying for God's favor on an earthly king. But that earthly king in Israel was ultimately set up by God to point us to an Eternal King over all. And we don't find ourselves praying for an earthly king in that way, because now the Christian enjoys favor from God through our eternal King.

Let this soak in, whether things are going well for you right now, or you find yourself amidst difficulty and darkness, Christian, you have a King. He is your King. And He keeps His commitment to you. He has made a covenant—just see this—He has made a covenant of love with you that He will not break. He is the commander of heavenly armies. He is the source of light and life for you, a shield of protection and provision for you amidst whatever you are walking through. And His name is Jesus.

Spurgeon said,

I know, perhaps, as well as anyone what depression means and what it is to feel myself sinking lower and lower. Yet, at the worst, when I reach the lowest depths, I have an inward peace which no pain or depression can in the least disturb. Trusting in Jesus Christ my Savior, there is still a blessed quietness in the deep caverns of my soul. Though upon the surface, a rough tempest may be raging, and there may be little apparent calm.

Even for those who struggle with longing, I long that you would know the peace of Christ in the presence of God like that.

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