

Psalm 84

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Preacher: Stuart King

[0 : 00] Well just before we turn back to our passage in Psalm 84, we'll predominantly look at the whole of Psalm 84 this morning. But before we do, if we could maybe go to Genesis chapter 3.

Just very briefly, Genesis chapter 3. And I'll just read verses 1 to 10 there.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall you touch it lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

[1 : 07] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid himself from the presence of the Lord, the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.

So here we see Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, dwelling with God. We can see here that they're actually dwelling directly in God's presence at the time of creation.

[2 : 12] And they had a close, loving relationship with him. We're in fact told that Adam and Eve were well acquainted with being in the direct presence of God.

He walked with them in the cool of the day, as we heard. They were familiar with the sounds of God walking in the garden, showing us that we were indeed created to be in a close relationship with our perfect creator.

The nearness that we had to God in the beginning, however, was quickly spoiled. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, the glorious fellowship that they enjoyed with their creator ceased at that point.

We were created to be in relationship with him, yet now, as we see with Adam and Eve, we hide and try to avoid him. You might feel that the fall of man, I know I certainly did in my younger years, wasn't my fault, I didn't do it, it was Adam and Eve's fault.

But I think if we're honest, we see ourselves entirely in what Adam and Eve have done here, in hiding ourselves from God. Especially if we know that we've done wrong, or we try to hide certain things from God that we know are wrong.

[3 : 27] Many probably don't know, but I work in the health board, in the HR department, and a lot of the times we deal with poor behaviour from staff members. And often if I find myself walking through a specific ward or a department, if I've been dealing with a specific individual who maybe their poor behaviour has been magnified and it's been shown, they'll often try and avoid you thinking, this person knows some of the secrets about my behaviour.

So I'll often see walking around the hospital that there'll be people that will take a sharp right as I'm heading down the corridor. And it's just because they don't want to be seen in the bad light that they know they may beware at one point.

And it's the same with us. In our own fallen nature, we try to avoid and hide being in the presence of God. We as people run from God regularly and hide ourselves from Him.

And if not regularly, then it's more than likely on a constant basis that we're turning away from Him. Now we see here in Genesis that after sinning, both Adam and Eve hid themselves from God. In verse 8, they were walking in the cool of the day and God was walking in the cool of the day with them and He was looking for Adam. Yet after hearing that familiar sound, the familiar sound of being with God in His perfect presence, they were afraid and were found hiding from God.

[4 : 54] Adam's sin and Eve's sin and indeed our own sin has destroyed that perfect relationship that we have and that perfect nearness that we have with God.

Thank you though, our Almighty God is perfectly faithful to us and does not give up on us. Now Christianity as a whole is not about man searching for God.

It's the complete opposite. It's God searching for man. He is persistent in His pursuit for us to be in sweet fellowship with Him regardless of the sins that we have in our lives.

Now it reminds you, you don't need to go in your Bibles, but if we maybe skip forward into the Old Testament a little bit further, we think of when God's people or people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt.

God designs His own tent or the tabernacle for them. And that's a place where He can dwell in their presence. They built this tent or tabernacle among them as a reminder that God is indeed relentless in His desire to be near and dwell with His people.

[5 : 59] He wants to dwell and be with us even when we in our sinful ways try to run and hide from Him. He doesn't sit back and watch from a distance.

No, He opts to set up a dwelling place in the middle of His people like He did with the tabernacle in order to be near to them. Now you're probably thinking when are we going to get to Psalm 84.

We're shortly there so don't worry. But if we can maybe just cast our minds a little bit further before we come, or just as we come to Psalm 84, to when God's people enter into the promised land.

The tent or the tabernacle that they had then is now exchanged for a permanent fixture. It's a permanent, fixed dwelling where God wants to be among His people in the temple.

God created a place where He could permanently be near to His people and then also with Him. It was believed that Psalm 84 was written in the temple era, when God did indeed have a fixed place where people could dwell with Him.

[6 : 59] The Psalm itself showed a deep longing to be near to God. Even that first verse you can see there's a longing to be with God in this fixed place where He is found.

Thinking back to Adam and Eve, we were created to enjoy that sweet relationship with God. Yet our instant response is always to hide and to shy away from being with God.

We often in our own lives avoid being near God. Because the sin in our lives make it unnatural for us to want to draw near, because we're aware of the sin in our own lives.

So, just for this morning's service, I want us indeed to go through the whole of Psalm 84. Hopefully it won't take too long going through it. But there's really three areas that I want us to look at.

The Psalm itself is actually split into three sections. So, we're going to look at each of the sections and I've titled them as follows. So, the first one, the first section of the Psalm is about longing to be near God.

[8 : 04] The second section, we'll explore what it's like, journeying to be near God. And the final one is that we treasure being near God. So, just looking at the first section then.

I'll just read verses 1 and 2 again. 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.

And many of you will have probably been in a situation where you are craving something, or you're desiring something specific. So much so that it becomes a physical and not just an emotional feeling.

If you've ever been away from home, I know many of you will have been away from home, whether it's through work, if you're away on the boats, or if you spent most of your school term away in another island, then you will know what it's like to be homesick.

And it's not just an emotional feeling, but there's a physical feeling to that as well. There's a physical sickness that is felt. You want to be in that place. You want to go back to that place where you're longing to go back to.

[9 : 09] One of the commentators says about this first two verses, is that the word used for this longing is of a bereft parent crying out for the children whom she has lost.

The psalmist here is longing to be near God in his temple. Some translations have the word longing down as yearns, we yearns to be near to God. My soul here is of an intensity to that word.

There's a desperation to be in God's presence. It's not something that you're maybe just in the mood for. There's a physical feeling there that you desire to be near to God.

He longs to be with God so much that he even envies the birds, if we look in verse 3, where they nest in the temple. Even the sparrow finds a hole, and the swallow a mess for herself, she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

The psalmist here is saying that he even wished to be like one of the birds that was always near to God in the temple. He wishes he could also, he could not also just be near to God, but that he would indeed be blessed in that.

[10:18] In verse 4 it says, Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praises. He longs so much to be with God that he would rather be a nesting bird in the corner of the temple, just to be near to his God.

I suppose the question for us is, whether you're a Christian or not, do you long to be near God each and every day? Do you have a, is it a physical feeling that you have within yourself that you desire to be in God's place?

Whether it's coming to church, or whether it's going on to your knees and praying, do we have a yearning, longing to be near to God, and to be with him? More often than not, I think if we're honest, we'd probably say no to those questions.

We're probably not all like that every day and every minute of the day. We don't long to be with God as we should be. We let other things in our lives distract us, and take us away from the nearness of God.

Whether that's prioritising our pursuits of money, letting hobbies possibly take control of our lives, it could be phones, it could be anything that dictates what you want to do in your life.

[11:23] If something is taking you away from God, then we need to be mindful of it. These things in our lives, such as hobbies, are indeed gifts from God.

But when we fail to see God in them, they quickly become deadly substitutes for God. We're so often distracted, that physical longing for God, it's not something that we're familiar with, is it?

Excuse me, sorry about this. This man has longed to be with God more than he longs for anything else in the world. And it's something that maybe is quite a challenge to do, or something that we maybe need to think about ourselves.

Is that us? Do we look at ourselves and see that as well? Moving on to verses five and eight. We see us shifting into the second part of this man, where we're not saying longing to be with God, but it's a journey to be near God.

So verse five. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, and whose heart are the highways to Zion. Now Zion is the city of God, where God had made this fixed dwelling in the temple's file.

[12:41] So if we focus on the words in verse five, the psalmist is saying that blessed are those whose hearts are the highways to Zion. I want us to maybe think how easily accessible it is for us to have maps nowadays, whether it's on your phone or you've got various printed maps.

We're always able to find out where we need to go and how to get there. And it was just about a year ago I was in Aberdeen. It's not a city I know. Many of you probably do know Aberdeen.

But I was going there for a training course, and as soon as I left Inverness after a stop-off, I had to have my sat-nav on to show me where to go. I'd never been to the city before.

I didn't know where I was going. I knew the destination. I knew what the postcode was. But I had to rely on my sat-nav in order to take me there. Had I not had that assistance, then I would likely have been lost, or somehow, hours later, somehow managed to find my way there.

If I were on that training course was in Glasgow, for example, coming from Glasgow myself, I wouldn't have acquired a sat-nav. I was born and brought up in Glasgow, so they've had no problem navigating around that city.

[13:52] When you know a place by heart, you don't need directions in the way to go. Those who have the Lord in their heart know the way to Him, as they regularly come to Him in worship and in praise.

The way to God is emblazoned on their own hearts, knowing that He will supply their needs to them on the journey. We can see that then in verse 6 and 7. As they go through the valley of Baker, 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. We see that they go through the valley of Baker, and they make it to a place of springs.

Now, the exact location of Baker is unknown. However, one of the commentators explained that the word itself means weeping. And it means weeping as they move through the valley of weeping. It turns fertile as they near the holy place. So what we're told here by the psalmist is that those who trust in God will find refreshment in a dry and desolate place.

[15:00] What's even more amazing is what we read in verse 7. They go from strength to strength. We're strengthened on that journey by God. But I suppose the most amazing part is the last sentence there.

Each one appears before God in Zion. Each one appears before God in Zion. So those of us that trust in the Lord will find that he supplies their meat on the journey.

But he also makes the journey a successful one. How are we doing on the journey today? And I ask myself the same question. How am I doing on the journey today? Maybe you find yourself in a dry and desolate place this morning.

But we should be encouraged by these words. that each one will appear before God. These words here are a sure promise for your encouragement and mine that even in great hardship, God will provide refreshment and strength to those who put their trust in him.

Now we know the journey is not a nice straight tarmac road. It's full of twists and turns and there's potholes and there's challenges along the way. But God will provide for you at the point of your own need.

[16:13] We can be assured that we will make it successfully to our journey's end. You might feel weak and weary on the journey. Many of us do feel weak and weary on the journey. But we should keep on knowing that the Lord will give us the strength and that he will ultimately ensure that we make it to our destination.

So we then just move on slightly to the longer part that we need to focus on. It's the third section of the psalm here. So we've moved from longing to be near God to journeying to be near God and finally we need to explore a little bit about treasuring being near to God.

So I'll read verses 9 to 12 just to the end there. 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. Lord bestows favour and honour.

No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you. So it's a wonderfully challenging comparison that we have here in these verses.

[17:30] The psalmist would rather live one day in the courts of the Lord than a thousand days anywhere else. How can that be true? I suppose you're asking these, or you've obviously never been to Scalpy.

But it's a question we must ask ourselves as well. What's important to the psalmist here? It's nothing to do with length of life, having more days, make it up to a thousand. What's important to him is that he would rather spend one of those days in the presence of his Lord and his Saviour.

Indeed, our God is so unimaginably gracious and glorious that we must ask the question to ourselves, why do we run? And why do we avoid being in his presence?

Why do we distract ourselves with earthly and unsatisfying things? And why do we choose almost everything else in our lives before we choose to draw near to God? What we do when we're saying that is that if I spend a little bit of time with God over here, then I'm going to miss out on a lot of things over there.

So our very sinful nature means that we will so often choose the one thousand days anywhere else rather than the one day with the Lord. And we will hide from him and run from him.

[18:40] The Sabbath doesn't stop there though with this comparison. The rest of verse 10 says, For a day in your court 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.

He would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. It's far better for him to be at the edge, even the edge of God's house rather than be at the heart and the centre of the tents of wickedness.

And I don't know if you noticed here, but one of the words that the psalmist used to say, it's very cleverly worded. The doorkeeper is at the door of a permanent dwelling where God is.

Yet the wickedness he refers to here are in the centre of tents. The God's house, where God dwells in the temple, is a permanent place.

Yet the tents of wickedness are so temporary and fragile. And it's important for us to remember that that the elements that we maybe focus on in the world, they're fragile.

[19 : 49] They won't come with us. We need to be remembering that it's fractures to have things, to focus on things of this world and not laying up our treasures in heaven.

So I suppose the question we need to ask, are we choosing to be near God? Do we choose each and every day? And I ask myself, we can so often be distracted. I remember hearing a preacher say that there are 24 hours in the day and if any of us were to say, oh I didn't get the chance to pray today or I didn't get the chance to read my Bible today, it's not true.

If there's 24 hours, it can take a minute or two for us to open our Bibles. So we need to be sure that we're continually drawing near to God. Not only because we should want it, but because He wants it as well.

The study Bible that I used in my preparation says that the wickedness offers no reward that can even remotely compare to the joy and the pleasure of God's house. Remember, as the psalmist has said, so wonderfully here, it's better to be in the presence of the living God than to be anywhere else.

There's nowhere else that is better. It's better to serve God in solitude than serve in sin with the multitude. And we need to remember that. Now you might be listening to the message this morning thinking that it sounds very challenging, it's very onerous, it takes a lot for us to be able to continually draw near to God.

[21 : 13] You may even be one that wishes to remain a thousand days in the tents of wickedness. But we need to guard ourselves against that. You may be thinking you don't want to miss out on if it's your hobby, if it's your career, you don't want to miss out on that career.

If you follow Christ, then you're going to miss out somewhere else down the line. But I would draw your attention to the words in verse 11. The second half of verse 11.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord has brought his favour and honour. This part, no good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. No good thing does he withhold.

There's nothing to be missed out on in following Christ. You will receive rich blessing and strength if you long to be near God and indeed if you journey to be near to God.

We should treasure being near God knowing that he will ensure no good thing does he withhold from us. Nothing will be withheld. No good thing will be distant from us.

[22 : 19] And this time ends in verse 12 with a blessing. The Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you. Do you want to receive that blessing? Are you one that does receive that blessing and goodness?

If so, then we know ourselves it's not found in the text of wickedness but it's found only in the house of God where he is dwelling. So I suppose we look at this now and think, what now?

What do we do with this information? Now that we've gone through the psalm, where do we go?

What does it point us to? And of course, with most pages in the Bible it points us to the cross.

The wonderful psalm here finds its absolute fulfilment in Christ. When I was preparing for this message I found at least two ways in which this psalm is perfectly fulfilled by Jesus himself.

So I'll just briefly touch on those before we finish up. So the three points I had earlier were longing to be near God, journeying to be near God and treasuring being near to God.

[23 : 18] Each of these three items were carried out perfectly by Christ himself when he was here on earth. He lived out the very heart of this psalm so perfectly and far better than you and I ever will.

This is not, and what we want to do is maybe just go to Luke chapter 2. If you want to go to your Bible, Luke chapter 2, verse 43 to 46. Just very briefly, this short passage.

Luke chapter 2, verses 43 to 46. No, no, I'll just go from 41 to 46. This is when Jesus was in the temple.

It says, Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom, and when the feast was ended as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey. But then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

[24 : 28] After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. Now what we read here, that's not the work of a young, rebellious child, choosing to run away from home, and get away from their families.

This is Jesus fulfilling Psalm 84, in longing to be near to God. He wanted to dwell in the place where his father was. Jesus so often found in the New Testament, disappearing away, to be near to God, with perfect commitment.

Jesus was truly devoted to drawing near to God, and we shouldn't wallow in our own failings in that, because through his perfect righteousness, it was exchanged for our sin.

His perfect longing to be near to God, was exchanged for our pitiful efforts. The fulfilment of this Psalm is found in Jesus, in his flawless devotion on our behalf.

But the second way in which Jesus fulfills this Psalm, is that he now is the place that we go to dwell for. This dwelling we ought to long for, and rather spend one day in, rather than a thousand elsewhere, now is Jesus Christ.

[25 : 45] The earthly tents and buildings, where God once dwelt, are no longer required. Now you don't need to go in your Bibles, but I'll just read Matthew 27, verse 51. It says, And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

This is where Jesus died on the cross. The temple curtain was torn in two, rendering that temple obsolete. It was no longer required. We no longer need to have a temple on earth.

If we wish to draw near to God now, we do it so through Christ Jesus himself. He is the new meeting place to dwell with God. So we should be encouraged that when we long to be near God, we have a perfect Saviour to go to.

Who when we have faith in him, will allow us to draw near to God. Whether you are fulfilling this psalm or not, whether you are a Christian this morning or not, we can confidently draw near to God, knowing that we can, because Christ made us fit to do so.

Whether you know people in your own families that don't draw near to God, let us continually remind them how precious he is, and that they should be drawing near to him each and every day. We all need to look in with thee.

[27 : 02] Those that are here and those that aren't here, need to look in with thee and pray that we are each longing to be near God, journeying to be near God, and that we treasure being near to God.

So in closing, I just want us to think back to Genesis again. We were each created to be in perfect relationship with God. And now when we look to the cross on Calvary, we can have that relationship once again, because the sin that once separated us from God has been dealt with.

Like that bird in the temple, we found a home in Jesus, a nest for ourselves, so we may live in the presence of God. And it's something that we need to continually remember.

And it's something, as we were talking to the children, we need to share God's love. Although Firmager wasn't overly keen on sharing the M&M;'s, we need to share what we know about Christ. We need to share that with the people around us.

I remember reading a book where it said, if you fear sharing the gospel with somebody, then you fear them more than you fear God. And that fear in God is that we don't fear death, we don't fear going into a lost eternity.

[28 : 14] We shouldn't fear God. God will strengthen us on this journey. God will equip us. He continually does. So we need to make sure that we're sharing this glorious message with people.

And also being real with them, and that it's not an easy walk. It's not a straight path that we can walk down. There are twists and turns. But at the end of the day, in Psalm 84, as we read there, each one, sorry, each one will make it.

Each one appears before God in his eye of. Each person that puts their trust in Christ, nothing can snatch out of his hand. And that's something that we should remain confident in. And it's something that we should be sharing with as many people as we can.

So I pray that the Lord will bless that very short, low-struck reflections on his word. And I'll just say...