

Longing for Your Presence

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Well, after being away from our Tuesday study for the holidays, it's wonderful to be back together again in the middle of the week. It always seems like something is missing when we're not together on this evening in the week, and it's a delight to be able to return to our study of the Psalms and our Psalm for this evening is Psalm 84. I invite you to turn there with me. Psalm 84.

As you're turning there, we all know something about the nature of longing for someone who isn't with us, don't we? Especially the older we get in life, maybe we're separated by a loved one through a trip or someone has gone away, moved away, moved to another part of the country, even the absence that we feel when a loved one has passed on into eternity, we all know that sense of longing for a presence that can't be fulfilled and there's just that sense of desire, wanting to be there, wanting to be with that person whatever the cost of that may be. Well, here in Psalm 84, what we find is the Psalmist longing in an even greater way for a higher presence, the presence of the Lord himself.

Let's read the Psalm and then unpack it as we go through it verse by verse here this evening. Psalm 84:1,

1 How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. 4 How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah. 5 How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion! 6 Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; The early rain also covers it with blessings. 7 They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before God in Zion. 8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah. 9 Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed. 10 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk

uprightly. 12 O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!

There is something very refreshing about this Psalm in that it is not a Psalm of complaint, it is not a Psalm longing for vindication against enemies, it's not a Psalm looking for strength in trial, this is a Psalm, a love Psalm, you could even say, a love Psalm from the Psalmist to the God of his salvation, the God of the covenant, the God of Israel. It's a Psalm that is attributed to the sons of Korah, we see in the inscription, and these descendants of Levi were the gatekeepers and the musicians in the temple at Jerusalem, you can see that in 1 Chronicles 36 among other places. These men were set apart for the worship of God, they were set apart for the service at the temple and, therefore, they had a particular place of access, you might say, a particular closeness to the worship of God and the Psalmist here is longing for that. He seems to be, as we'll go through and we'll see this, it seems as though he is separated from it. Why? We don't know but he doesn't have that privilege of access that they do right now and he misses it. He misses it. The worship of God, the presence of God was precious to him. It was something that he desired and when it couldn't be fulfilled, he had that sense of longing and separation that led him to these prayers of adoration, this prayer of worship to God.

Now, just to give a little bit of an overview of a couple of the themes of the Psalm before we dive into it, you see him addressing God as the LORD of hosts four different times in this Psalm. Look at verse 1 with me, "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts!" Verse 3, "Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God." Verse 8, "O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer." And in the concluding verse, verse 12, "O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!"

Now "hosts" is a term that identifies God's angelic armies and LORD of hosts, therefore, is identifying God as sovereign over all the powers in heaven and in over all the powers on earth. He is supreme over all. As you contemplate that and you contemplate the longing nature of worship that he has, is that you're seeing him express not only God's sovereignty and his rule over the unseen and seen realms of everything in creation, he is also the Lord, the Master, the God over the inner desires of his heart. He is stating forth that, "God, You are the highest aspirations. You are the Lord and the Master over every desire of my heart. You are my highest good." And that is a wonderful place to be and this purity of worship, this purity of devotion, this purity of focus grabs our attention as we start.

You know, we're blessed to have a God that welcomes our prayer, who tells us to cast all our anxieties upon him because he cares for us in 1 Peter 5, and we love him for that and we depend upon that and we go and we ask him for our daily bread, we ask him to forgive our sins, we ask him to deliver us from evil, and there is that sense of dependence that we bring in our prayer lives, especially as we're going through difficult trials in life, that it is our privilege as believers. I don't want to diminish that or marginalize that or make that sound as anything less than the obedient kind of prayer that our Lord himself called us to, but that's not what tonight's text is about. That's not what we're talking about tonight. Tonight we lay aside our needs, our dependence, the things that we are

concerned about, the burdens on our heart, and we come back to that which is central, we come back to that which is sovereign over our hearts, that which is supreme in our affections. And it is not the fixing of our earthly problems, it is not the setting aside of earthly difficulties, for the true believer in Christ, the ultimate good, the ultimate affection, the ultimate priority is the Lord God of hosts himself. Heaven and earth can pass away but his word does not pass away. Heaven and earth can pass away, our lives can and will pass away, but enduring through all of that is this surpassing value, this surpassing worth of the God of Scripture, for us in the New Testament era, revealed and known to us as the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who gave himself on Calvary for our sins. Psalm 84 reminds us, helps us to cultivate a sense that he is our highest good, he is our highest affection.

As the Psalmist said in Psalm 73, the nearness of God is my good. In fact, let's just look over at that by way of just a little bit of a cross reference and a reminder of what's been said in other parts of the Psalter. The surpassing desire, and Psalm 73, of course, is the opening Psalm of Book III in the Psalter and, therefore, sets a tone for the books that follow, Psalm 73-Psalm 89 in all of Book III of the Psalter. I need to be careful here not to preach on Psalm 73 when Psalm 84 is my text, that would be rather silly, but we see set forth in close proximity to this Psalm the surpassing affection, love and devotion that the true believer gives to his God.

Look at verse 25 of Psalm 73. "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works." As for me, the world may go other directions, the world may have other affections, the world may consume themselves with passing matters related to this world and love sin, love self, love all manner of unworthy objects, what the Psalms call us to is to recognize the surpassing, the infinite worth of God himself, the infinite worth of our Lord Jesus Christ and to set our affection on him, on the one who is unchanging, on the one who loved our soul like no other, and to return to him the love that he first gave to us. "We love because he first loved us," 1 John 4:19.

So we see as we come to this Psalm, we see as we see its setting in its place in the Psalter, we see that it is calling the believer and expressing for the believer the ultimate affection of his heart and, in that way, challenges us to examine what it is that we love, challenges us to take a close look at what it is that we get upset about, what we get angry about, what it is that we abuse other people over, and to call us away from all of that grime and all of that corruption that's in the world and in our hearts, and call us to highest place that our affections could ever reside and that is on the Lord God himself, on our Lord Jesus Christ. So we see God being exalted as sovereign over the desire even of the human heart.

It always fascinates me to think about it in this way, we know God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, we know him in that exalted way, we know him and Scripture

portrays him as sovereign over every realm of creation in this great macro sense, we look up at the skies and we see his exalted majesty on full display for anyone that will stop and look and ponder, and he's sovereign in that majestic realm and yet his glory and his majesty and his sovereignty is also meant to reign over the inner sanctum of your heart; that through trials and tribulations, through change and death and sickness and life, through joy and sorrow, adversity and pleasure, through all of that the anchoring surpassing affection of your heart would be in the God who first loved your soul. Psalm 84 points us in that direction and points us to the loftiest theme that the human heart could ever dwell on.

Now, what can we say about the one who so loves the Lord God like that? Well, what we find also in addition to this theme of the LORD of hosts, you also see the theme of "blessed" used three times in this Psalm, Psalm 84, going back to the real text for this evening. Psalm 84:4, "How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You." Verse 5, "How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!" Verse 12, "O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!" And this idea of blessedness is more than just the temporary emotion of happiness, we talked about this in the context of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes many months ago, the idea of blessed means that the person who is blessed, in a biblical sense, it's not primarily a subjective sense of happiness as much as it is a declaration, an objective declaration that he is on the receiving end of divine favor, of divine grace. It is an objective declaration that that man is in a position of having been blessed by God.

Now when you are in a position of having been blessed by God, that may often spill over into feelings of well-being and happiness and contentedness, but the one who has been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ is blessed whether he feels it or not, right? So we want to have that sense in mind that this idea of blessing is that I am on the receiving end of favor from God, the one who Psalm 84 describes, and in its immediate context, Psalm 84 is expressing the blessedness of the believer who journeys to the temple to worship the Lord. As you know, the Jews in the Old Testament were often scattered about and from time to time they would gather and they would go to Jerusalem for the appointed times of worship. They would come from a distance and gather in Jerusalem at the temple for worship and this Psalm pictures the sense of being away and moving in the direction of Jerusalem to join in the appointed place of worship. Let's see what it has to say for us in its context verse by verse.

First of all, if you're taking notes this evening, we see the Psalmist expressing a longing for God's presence. A longing for God's presence and I've assigned the title for tonight's message "Longing for Your Presence," indicating that this is the second person, "Your," indicating the vertical aspect, the prayer. It's an address to God as we see in the first two verses as it opens up,

1 How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Now God manifested his presence at the temple in the Old Testament after Solomon completed its construction, and what the Psalmist is expressing here is this when he says, "How lovely are Your dwelling places. My soul yearned for the courts of the LORD," the courts being the area where the worshipers met in the temple precinct proper, but understand this, beloved, what sanctified the temple, what made the temple precious was not the building, was not the structures, were not the stones which were raised up in order to make it a building, he's not longing for physical material obviously, he is longing for the God who revealed himself in the temple. The temple was the place where God's presence was manifested and he longed for that glory. He longed for that appointed worship that God had called his people to and so that's what he's after and what we see is that all of his faculties, all of his being, all of his inner man is swept up in this expressive desire.

Look at verse 2 with me, "My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God." He's indicating that his whole man is swept up in this desire for worship, this desire for the presence of God and it's mindful, isn't it, of what Jesus expressed as the greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. This inspired Psalm is another way of expressing that in different words, soul, heart and flesh joined together, unified in an undivided desire to be in the presence of God and to worship him. So what he is expressing here is how beloved God's presence is to him.

Now you know something of that, don't you, as a believer? You know something of that. You've known foretastes of that in your Christian experience, a foretaste of looking forward to being with God's people in a worship on Sunday morning, a foretaste of the word of God either in private or in public being illuminated to you by the Holy Spirit and your soul just wrapped up with the recognition that God's truth is coming with power to your heart, unveiling Christ to you, making him known, making him sweet. Don't you know this longing also in another way, in a higher way as well? Isn't it true in your better moments, isn't it true that when you're thinking rightly, that the greatest aspiration of your heart, the thing that you really long for as a believer is to one day be at home with him in heaven? Not in a physical temple on earth but in the heavenly temple where Christ is and to be with him and to be with his manifest presence there in heaven where he now dwells? When you're thinking rightly, isn't that the thing that you most want? Don't you have a sense within your heart that that's where home truly is? Isn't that where the longings go of a man or a woman beaten down by the trials of life, the physical afflictions of life, suffering in relationships, having been betrayed by friends and there's just this groan that says, "O God, I just want to be with you because I know being in your presence like that will make all these other things go away and I just long to be where you are in that perfection of bliss for which Christ purchased my soul and which he has appointed to be the fulfillment of my eternal destiny!" Longing for his presence.

Well, this Old Testament saint didn't have the full benefit of all of the New Testament things that we know, didn't have the fullness of the revelation of the coming of Christ and all of the glories of heaven, that we see him in the realm, in the dispensation given to

him, longing for God in that same way. You see, beloved, one of the marks of you as a true believer is that you have affections that transcend this world. That's one of the marks of a true believer is that we love things that we can't see, we long for things that are not yet. And when you see it from this perspective, you start to realize how much loftier true Christianity, true biblical Christianity is than some kind of legalistic set of rules about what you should or shouldn't do in life. You know, I mean, come on, things that are destined to perish with the using, Paul said in Colossians 2. Well look, when you understand something of the nature of your sin, you understand something of the nature of your sinful nature and your sinful choices, you realize that you were an object of wrath from God, you realize that you had sinned and fallen short of his glory, that there was nothing good in you, that in that miserable condition Christ loved you nonetheless, Christ came and gave himself up for you, took your burden of sin on his shoulders at the cross and endured the wrath of God on your behalf so that you might be saved, you start to recognize the loveliness of who Christ is and you love him because he is someone greater, infinite, loving, merciful, gracious to you in a way that no one on earth could ever be and the love of your heart, the affection of your heart is directed toward him in a way that is exclusive, that belongs to no one else. It's that kind of surpassing desire we see expressed in Psalm 84 and he's expressing just how lovely God's presence is to him. This is a love song to God, you could say, worthy of the believer's meditation today.

Now, he's stated his desire plainly in the first two verses, he goes on to illustrate it. You know, Psalms, of course, are filled with great poetry, filled with great poetic statements but this one may be among the tops of my personal favorites, what we're about to see here. Having stated his desire plainly, he illustrates the desire, he illustrates what he's talking about, what it is that he wants, and in verse 3 he says this, he says,

3 The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My
King and my God.

Do you know what he's saying here? He's expressing envy, a sanctified envy, for the birds of the air who are able to set their nests and to build their nests somewhere in the area of the temple. He's not there and so the birds have a privilege, the birds whose nests are there in the temple precinct area, have a benefit that he doesn't have right now, they are near this place that he longs to be. They are near the manifest presence of God, and as we said, he's not longing for the building, that's not what he wants, but what he's saying is, "Father, these birds have a proximity to Your altar that I don't enjoy right now. I would trade places with them if I could." He's simply saying, "I long to be there. I want to be there. I'm not. I'm jealous. So much do I want to be there that I'm jealous of the birds that have the privilege of being so close to Your altar." And it's just a poetic expression of some of the loftiest desires that we could see in the Psalms anywhere. He's saying, "God, I desire Your presence above all else. I desire to be where You are, where You are made manifest," and it is the consuming desire of his life.

So he goes on and he says in verse 4,

4 How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You.

A recognition that there were dwelling quarters for some of the temple workers there and that they had a benefit also like the birds that their position in life required them to be right there and he says how blessed they are. They have been on the receiving end of a special measure of your favor for that to be that which occupies their very life. How good the birds have it that nest there. How good the temple workers have it that are involved there. They have a special place of privilege. To be set apart as the temple workers were for God's praise was a very high calling. He said to have a life devoted like that, God, that would be wonderful. How blessed they are to be like that and to be in that position.

So he expresses this longing for the presence of God in high and lofty and poetic terms. Now secondly, we find him now describing people traveling to God's presence. Traveling to God's presence and what he does here is he progresses beyond the external realm of the temple, beyond the external manifestation of the presence of God in those days to the internal reality of faith. He's expressing in what we're about to see the internal reality of faith.

Look at verse 5 with me now. He says,

5 How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!

He was talking about the temple, he was talking about the dwelling places of God in the first section, now he's changed his focus and he's looking at the inner man, he's looking at the man of faith and saying something about his inner nature, his inner man, his inner priorities and affections. What he's saying is this, he's saying that those who trust in the Lord have a life principle, have a life vitality that transcends man. To live life from a position of faith is a great blessing compared to those who worry and stand alone.

Now think about this, you know, when I did my series on the anxiety trap a year or two ago, I did a Google search on how to deal with anxiety. You do a Google search of how to deal with anxiety and you'll get millions upon millions of hits returned back. I haven't done it recently. The first time I did it 10 years ago, it was like 2 million hits; the next time that I did it a few years later just to update my research, it was something like 10 million hits just in general terms. It's just a simple marker, a simple measure of the dominating controlling effect of anxiety and worry on the human mind on people throughout the world that there is so much on the internet geared to help them deal with this problem. Drugs and yoga and meditative breathing and all kinds of junk like that.

Well, for those of us that truly know Christ, for those of us that know something about having a sovereign God who loved us to the point of giving himself for us at Calvary, who loved us and gave himself up for us, the one who says, "Look, my heavenly Father knows when the bird of the air falls to the ground. He feeds the birds of the air. Don't you understand that He'll care for you and feed you also when you belong to Him? Don't you

understand that He who clothes the lilies of the field with great beauty will take care of you even more? Don't you realize," in the words of the Apostle Paul, "that this God who delivered you from sin, who has justified you, who has declared you righteous, who has set you on a path that leads to heaven is going to so work in every detail of your life that it will all work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose?" Do you realize, beloved, that if you're a Christian and you know this true God, you know this true Christ, do you realize that to have a life that is rooted in those spiritual truths, those spiritual realities, that which is real, that which is according to the way that things really are as God has made it and God has defined it for his people, to live a life in that realm as opposed to the 10 million Google hits on how to deal with anxiety, none of which have any value whatsoever, none that provide any lasting help to the restless human heart, don't you realize that to be in the realm of those who trust in the Lord is a great great blessing?

That's what this Psalmist is saying in verse 5, "How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!" Now this "highways to Zion," Zion being a poetic reference to the city of Jerusalem, this "highways to Zion" is referring to the fact that people would make these pilgrimages to worship at the temple in Jerusalem and he's making a very, it's almost a very subtle point but one that's obvious once you recognize what he's saying. Where does a trip like that start? You have a Jew living a long way away from Jerusalem and he starts this journey, where does that start? You say, "Well, it starts when he leaves his house." Yeah, maybe. Not really. It starts further back, doesn't it? Where that trip starts is with a heart desire to be there, a heart desire for obedience, a heart desire for the presence of God and he says, "Oh, it's time to go. I want to be there." And then you start making your plans and you move accordingly into that realm. Those trips to worship at the temple in Jerusalem start first, started first with that impulse in the heart, that longing in the heart that you want to be there, "In whose heart are the highways to Zion." "I want to be there. I want to get on the highway and go to where the temple is," and he's expressing this heart desire.

"In whose heart are the highways to Zion," he wants to be on the highways and to get there, and what we find is love for God leads to worship. It leads to obedience. Obedience, true obedience, true biblical obedience is rooted first and foremost in a love for God and biblical obedience, it's not too much to say, biblical obedience is only fulfilled when the external action is joined together with the attitude of the heart that says, "God, it's a delight for me to do what You tell me to do. It is a delight for me to open Your word and read it. It is a delight for me to gather together with His people and to hear His word taught. It is a delight for me to speak of Christ to those who don't know Him. It is a delight for me to trust You when I can't see the outcome. It is a delight for me to find my comfort in You when earth has let me down." And in all of these things, these heart desires being a reflection of a prior work of grace, those heart desires being reflective of the inner man and leading to this expression of love found in the context of this Psalm, in the worship at the temple.

Now, that trip to Jerusalem would take them through some barren land, some desert lands in Psalm 84:6,

6 Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; The early rain also covers it with blessings.

The commentators are not sure where this valley of Baca may be. The term "Baca" itself has been connected with the idea of weeping or perhaps a balsam tree. The underlying idea seems to be this, that this valley would be a desolate place as the progress, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was being made, and these pilgrims go through the desolate place on their way to Jerusalem. Picture a desert area, those of you that know something about California, Death Valley and the desolate deserts that you drive through in eastern California that looks like you've landed by mistake on the moon some place, rocks and sand and not much else. Well, what he's expressing here, it seems to be as I understand it anyway, is that valleys like that are transformed, transformed not necessarily physically but they go from being a place of desolation to being a place of joy because of the pilgrimage of the joyful pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem who are anticipating the fulfillment of their desire to be in the presence of God. "Oh, we're on our way to Jerusalem, we're on our way to worship!"

There's a song in our hymnal, I don't know if we sing it, I'm not even sure ultimately how good the lyrics are, but sometimes hymns pop into my mind from many years ago. "We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion. We're marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God." And that sense of joy and anticipation would transform those around them, would transform the area. This is no longer a place of desolation. "Even though outwardly it's a place of desolation, I'm joyful anticipating being in the presence of my God. I can't wait to get there." And suddenly the external physical desolation is transformed by the inner joy that is there.

You know something about that too, don't you? You know, it's a pretty special thing to see, it's a great aspiration for our hearts to set our minds on when life has gone astray, when life is difficult, when we haven't gotten our way sometimes on petty things, sometimes on bigger things, haven't you met at times Christians who you knew were in those situations and yet somehow they were bubbling over with joy? They were not swept up in the difficulty of the desolation of their earthly circumstances but instead they were consumed with their love for Christ? There was a bubbling out of them an aroma of Christ, an anticipation for him, a love for him that transcended the desert of the circumstances? I want to be a Christian like that, don't you? Don't you want to be like that? "Yeah, life has hit me hard but do you know what? Praise be to God, I belong to Christ and that's the highest joy that I could ever have. I'm singing while I go, singing in the midst of sorrow."

Christians can be like that. Christians are supposed to be like that, transcendent joy. In fact, look over at 1 Peter 1 with that thought in mind. 1 Peter after the book of Hebrews, after the book of James. The Psalmist talking about joy in the midst of desolation, Peter talking about the spiritual reality of this to persecuted suffering believers under the hand of Nero, wicked Nero in the city of Rome in the first century and what does he say to them? He's praising God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who

according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He opens his letter with this burst of praise that is reminiscent of Ephesians 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has caused us to be born again. We have a living hope. "To obtain," verse 4, "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." We're being swept up to glory. We're being swept up on a chariot of the fire of faith carrying us into heaven even as we read this now, "reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Singing as we go.

He says in verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials." The trials are not defining the nature of your attitude, are not restricting your worship. Your worship is unrestricted. Your worship is well-grounded, well-formed, and vibrant even though you're distressed by various trials. Even though you're passing through this desert of discouragement, these spiritual realities rooted in the presence of God now and yet to come in the future in that inheritance that is reserved in heaven for you, oh beloved believer, you have every reason to rejoice and you should. You should. We should.

Verse 8, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him." Do you see the affections, the priorities here? "Though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

You know, if you wanted to bow your head in just a brief moment of repentance over some of your sour attitudes, that would be alright. That would be a worthy response to the magnificent truths that we're seeing here. You know, are those close to you, those that you've interacted with, have they been on the receiving end of this kind of joyful overflow of a worshipping heart from you or have they been on the receiving end of your bitter barbs and criticisms? Your naggings? Your complaints? Beloved, we should be living at a higher level than that, shouldn't we? When we have this presence of the living God both now and to come that's defining the very nature of our existence? Sure it's convicting but the Lord convicts us simply to rid us of those unworthy things and to replace it with the kind of joy that is described in 1 Peter 1 and in Psalm 84 and in multiple other places in Scripture.

Now going back to Psalm 84, what we find is this, we find that that joy of God's people simply brings an aroma of life to everything around them. Verse 7,

7 They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before
God in Zion.

They go from strength to strength in this way, beloved, and this is the picture of it, is that they have this understanding of truth, they have the reality of true salvation as their starting point, as their firm starting point. As they grow in that, as they develop, as they move closer to Jerusalem, the joy increases. It abounds. It overflows even more. Oh sure,

the journey in those days to Jerusalem might be physically taxing but the anticipation of temple worship which prompted them to go on the journey to begin with, helped them to persevere, and what started in that early desire, "Oh, it's time for the appointed worship. It's time for the feast. Let's get up and go!" Their joy only increased the closer that they got because fulfillment was closer now than it had ever been before.

I don't think that it's stretching the application in these New Testament times to realize that the older we get, the more our joy should be abounding and increasing, rather than discouragement and complaints over the limitations that later years of life bring and the health troubles that it brings, and some of the challenges and family disappointments that it brings, and nothing goes the way you want it to. I get all of that but when that is depressing us and turning us into sour people, you know, we've really missed something fundamental here, we've missed something really really important. Every one of us that are in Christ have reason for greater joy today than we did yesterday. Why? Because we're one day closer to glory. We're one day closer to heaven and this journey that we're going through, passing through, it's just a little further down. The heavenly Jerusalem is just a little further on and the more that we go and the more that we walk and the more that we have the presence of God blessing us day by day, the greater our anticipation.

2 Corinthians 3:18, they go from glory to glory. We grow in glory. We grow in sanctification as we move closer to the final destination. Isn't it true when you go on a trip, a long planned vacation, maybe you're flying to a favorite destination or you're just going home to see loved ones and all of a sudden you're just a few minutes away, you can see the water out in front of you as the plane is coming down for a landing, or you can smell the aroma of food in the kitchen as you start to open the door, and the joy just bursts and grows even more the closer you get. That's the sense of what the Christian life is meant to be for us. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, we grow in the understanding that heaven is our home and we're closer than we've ever been and the joy magnifies when we go from one position of strength, one position of joy that we knew in our earlier days, it's even greater now from strength to strength, from strength to greater strength, from joy to greater joy because fulfillment is just that much closer now than it was before.

This is the truth for everyone in Christ and I just want to go back and say, you know, it's really important for you and I to look at ourselves in the mirror, to contemplate our lives, to think about what's been animating the attitudes of our heart, to think about what's been coming out of our mouths, to think about what we've been doing, and to let the magnitude and the glory and the joy of these things sanctify that which has been unworthy that we would not go back into those things ever again, and to let this permanently transform us, to permanently sanctify this to the good of our souls, right?

So when they arrive at the temple, they're going to be filled to overflowing. Now thirdly, we saw them longing for God's presence, we see him traveling for God's presence, to God's presence, finally point 3, worshiping in God's presence. Worshiping in God's presence. Upon arrival, the pilgrims turn to prayer. Verse 8,

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob!

They are now in worship and they are turning to prayer in response and here in this Jewish context in this Old Testament context, they pray for God's blessing upon their King. This isn't quite as evident in a first superficial reading but in verse 9 it says,

9 Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed.

The shield and the anointed are a reference to the King, Israel's King. Beloved, it's hard for us in this 21st century mindset where we've grown up assuming democratic institutions and the politics of our days, it's hard for us to fully identify with this, but to the faithful Jew, their king was a symbol of God's reign on earth. The well-being of the king affected all the people of the nation and so, as such, the Psalmist is asking the king who was their shield, who was their earthly defender as the leader of their armies, who was God's anointed leader to them, the Psalmist is asking God to look upon him with favor, to look upon him and to bless him. "Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed," because the favor of God in worship, the favor of God with his people, was superior to every other possible blessing.

Look at verse 10. He says, "For," giving the ground for his prior prayer for God's blessing on the king and there through the king upon all the people. He says in verse 10,

10 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

What's he saying? Remember he's longing for God's presence, he's longing for temple worship, he's longing to be with the people of God in worship, and what he's saying here is a total abandonment of earthly motivations. He says, "It's better for me, I prefer to be on the threshold of the temple than to share ill-gotten gains with the wicked. I would rather simply be on the threshold of Your presence than to have everything that the wicked have to offer in this life."

Now why would you say that? You know, the truth of the matter is that this is one of the surest distinguishing marks of a redeemed heart versus that which is unredeemed, perhaps someone just living in a delusion, self-deception. To have a sense, and I'm speaking very metaphorically here, I always try to be careful when I'm saying that, things like what I'm about to say. I would rather dwell in the most remote corner of heaven than to have the greatest palace on earth. The true believer understands that. The true believer identifies with that. "Well, of course!" There would be no other way to think about life. To be in the corner of heaven would be to be in his presence even if it seemed remote, even if it seemed to be a humble corner that you were assigned. Again I'm speaking very metaphorically here. But to compare that to being an unbeliever, lost and condemned in a mortal life in the highest palace, there is no comparison. Give me the corner of heaven over the mansions of Bill Gates any day. Any day.

You see, this is defining priorities, this is defining affections, and when your affections are clear in your heart, then life starts to make some measure of sense and you go from strength to strength with the ability to view this life, to hold this life, to hold your position, to hold your affections, to hold the people that you love, to hold them with a little bit of a loose hand. I can let this go. I can let this person go. I can let this opportunity go. I can let this job go and not be dislodged from my position of joy and confidence and faith. Why? Because I have a permanent possession that no one can take away and in that certainty, in that foundation, I have my place to stand.

So for those of you that are facing, you know, immediate change in your life, it's just around the corner. Here's your stability, here's that which anchors your heart even when everything else is going to change and it seems like you're losing everything earthly, in a sense I understand that but understand that in an ultimate sense, nothing's changed. You're not losing. You're not losing your Christ. You're not losing your hope. You're not losing the love of the one who gave himself for you on the cross. All of that goes with you. You carry all of that with you because you're in the hand of a Christ who will never let you go.

So what we see here is this in verse 11. Why is it better to have these heavenly riches? Why is it better to have the presence of God than everything the world has to offer? Why? Why? Why? What is it that the world can't see that's just so clear and obvious to us? Verse 11,

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

This is a great God. He is the sun of our life. He is our shield and defense. He doesn't withhold anyone who walks with him in humble obedience. To the humble believer in Christ, today there is nothing being withheld from you that would be for your good. God is so completely sovereign and so completely wise and so completely loving over every detail of your life that you can have a perfect confidence that even though you don't understand, he is acting as your defense, your provider, your redeemer and your friend in the midst of it all.

That's a blessed place to be as the Psalmist says as he closes in verse 12,

12 O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!

What we've seen here is this: the Lord is transcendent, the sun and shield, and yet he is good to his people; he protects them; he provides all that they need. And how do we access that? What links us to that? What joins us to that? No merit of our own. No works or rituals could ever merit that. The Psalmist says, look in verse 12, where is this joy, this provision, this care, this soul-satisfying love to be found? "O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!" It is faith in this God that links us to all of these blessings. It's a free gift, a gift of grace, a gift of love from a gracious Father to his unworthy children.

Just a last word of New Testament application here. I've already said a lot of these things but do you know what? Some things are worth saying 2 or 3 or 4 times even in a single hour. Those of us who know Christ, we're in an even superior position to what this Psalmist perceived his position to be. Oh, I'm not saying that he was not saved, far to the contrary, we just have more revelation upon which to base our faith. Faith in Christ links us to his righteousness. Faith in Christ joins us with his salvation. We are brought into a perfect union with him where everything that belongs to Christ is now shared with us. That is how great the fullness of God is. We live in the reality of a greater fullness that has been given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his coming, in his redemption, in his ascension and his intercession for us on high. We have so so much that tongue can't describe it. There aren't words, there aren't human words outside of Scripture to begin to speak of the majesty of the glory that is our position in Christ.

I think you're still in Psalm 84, I was turning away to something else. Let me just point one thing out to you here as we're about to close, at the end of verse 11, Psalm 84. The Psalmist as he was writing some, let's say 1,000 years in rough terms, before the coming of Christ said this, "No good thing does [God] withhold from those who walk uprightly." Oh, do you want to know how full that statement was? He was speaking beyond what he could have known at the time as the Spirit gave him utterance. In Romans 8:32 it says this, "[God] did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" The great Good One is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater good than him. There is no one better than him. There is no one who transcends him. He is the highest, the ultimate, the great good Incarnate himself and God did not withhold him from us. He sent him. Christ gave himself for us, freely gladly in love gave himself. The ultimate good in Christ and God did not hold him back from us. He gave him over for our salvation.

And you can go further. You can go further than that. What do we have also as New Testament believers? Every one of us in Christ have the presence of Christ dwelling within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. We don't need a temple. We don't need an earthly temple anymore to know the presence of God, the presence of God has come to us in the Holy Spirit. Christ came, he sent the Spirit and the Spirit indwells every believer, Romans 8:9.

Beloved, do you see the magnitude of your salvation? Do you see the greatness of what God has done? And we have even more as I've been saying. Our ultimate worship is not a temple on earth, it's a temple in heaven where the Lord God himself is the light which illumines everything around it. We'll worship in heaven not for a time, not at a day's long feast in Jerusalem, we'll worship forever in that temple where Christ dwells with him face-to-face. No wonder Scripture tells us to set our desires there, Colossians 3, don't set your mind on the things of the earth, set your mind on the things of heaven where Christ is.

Oh beloved, I understand that you may go through times of unfulfilled desire, I know that you may be in those times right now and life, it seems, has won and you've lost when

you're looking at it from an earthly perspective. Let me encourage you to go back when you go home tonight if that's you, go back to Psalm 84 in light of the coming of Christ because Psalm 84 encourages you to look to your Christ, to know that God has withheld no good thing from you. If you have Christ, God hasn't withheld anything from you. Then from that renewed heart that Psalm 84 has led us to, trust your God, trust your Christ to fulfill and to finish that great work which he has begun in you.

Let's bow together in prayer.

O great God of highest praise, we thank You for our Christ. We thank You for the unfathomable incalculable grace that You have shown to us. It truly is amazing, Lord. We've used that adjective so many times that we start to run out of adjectives that give us a fresh expression to the wonder that is in our hearts as we contemplate Your goodness to us. So Father, rather than looking for mere human words that could never do what's in our hearts justice, we just appeal to Your knowledge, Father, we appeal to You who knows all things. Look into our hearts, Father, though they are tainted with corruption with Peter we say, "Look at our hearts and know that we love You. Know that we trust You. Know that we thank You for this wonderful blessing that is ours to be in Christ, to be known by Him, to belong to Him and to have a destiny that is wrapped up with Him." Indeed, it's so certain that we can say that we have died and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. That is wondrous. That is great, our Father, and we thank You for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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