

My Soul Yearns for You!

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[0 : 00] Alright, if you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to Psalm 84. We're going back to the Old Testament this morning. And we'll also have it on the screen.

Psalm 84. And I'm going to begin just by reading it through from start to finish, and then we'll have some thoughts about it.

Psalm 84. For the director of music, according to Gittith, of the sons of Korah, a psalm.

How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young, a place near your altar.

[1 : 13] Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Bacca, they make it a place of springs.

The autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty.

Listen to me, God of Jacob. Look on our shield, O God. Look with favor on your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield.

[2 : 21] The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Do you long to be with God? Do you long to be with God?

This ancient Hebrew song was written well over 2,000 years ago. Exactly who wrote it and what it sounded like and when it was sung.

It's lost to us today. But the cry of this song, the desire, the feeling of this song captures so well what many of us still feel today. The sons of Korah, to which this song is attributed, they were singers and musicians who contributed to the worship in the temple of Yahweh, the temple of the Lord.

And even though the circumstances of this song are lost to us today, the words of the song paint a picture for us of someone who has found the greatest of joys in the presence of God.

[3 : 57] Things were very different back then in Israel. Today, those of us who belong to Christ can easily take this for granted. How did God live with his people in those days?

Well, if we go back and read through the Old Testament, we see that it was at the temple in Jerusalem that God chose to put his presence among his people in a special way.

It was there at the temple in Jerusalem that God lived among them. It was there that the sacrifices were offered to the Lord on the bronze altar.

It was there that God's Ark of the Covenant came to rest behind the curtain in the most holy place. And of course, God is everywhere at all times, in all places, but this was the place where he made his presence specially felt and his power known and his glory to be seen.

Three times a year, God required the Israelites to celebrate all who were able to to celebrate special festivals or feasts.

[5 : 12] There was the festival of unleavened bread which coincided with the Passover. There was the festival of harvest later known as Pentecost. And there was the festival of ingathering which was also known as the feast of tabernacles or booths.

Now, we're not going to get into all the details of these festivals this morning. The point of them was to meet with God, to worship God, to bring sacrifices and offerings to God.

These were occasions for great celebration. The people would remember God's great salvation from slavery in Egypt at Passover.

And they were to thank God and to bring offerings to Him as a token of their praise and thanksgiving for His gracious provision at harvest in the fall festivals.

And everyone who was able from all over Israel was to come together. And it wasn't just about reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances from faraway places, though that did happen.

[6 : 21] It was to come and meet with God was the purpose. to worship the Lord Himself in His temple.

And so three times a year in Israel, all roads led to Jerusalem and the roads were busy. They were filled with travelers making their way to the one and only temple of the God who created the heavens and the earth.

the God who set His love on Jacob and His descendants. These are some of the facts that undergird this song that we're looking at this morning.

These facts make it understandable to us today. But it's the song itself that gives us the feeling of what it was like for people in the midst of this in those days.

The first four verses of this song express the longing of the songwriter to be in those temple courts again. How lovely is your dwelling place Lord Almighty.

[7 : 30] My soul yearns even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. The language here is the language of the heart.

The songwriter longs to be in that place where the Lord dwells. In the courts of the temple which surround that place where God has chosen to live among His people.

And the desire is strong. It says my soul yearns even faints with longing. My desire is to get there and I want it so much it's like it wears me out.

I faint for it. And it's not just to be at the big party with all the people. It's not just because the temple is quite the sight to see with its wonderful architecture and golden overlay.

No, the reason He wants to be there is because God is there. He says my soul yearns even faints for the courts of the Lord.

[8 : 36] My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. it's you God my heart desires. I want to be in your presence.

At this point the son of Korah who wrote this seems to reflect on previous times when he was there at the temple. He remembers seeing the birds flying about and he notices or remembers noticing that the birds had built nests in and around the temple area.

Even the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may have her young. A place near your altar Lord Almighty my King and my God.

Now it's difficult all these years later with the time gap and the translation gap to know just what he means by all this about the birds nesting near the altar. Different things have been suggested is it that the birds though lowly creatures that even they know intuitively how good it is to be near God? Or is it that they recognize the peace and the safety of this place the temple where God lives? Is it that the songwriter wishes that he himself had wings with which to fly to this place and the opportunity that the birds have to make his own home right there near the presence of God?

[10 : 12] Whatever the case he makes clear his heart's feeling in verse 4 he says blessed are those who dwell in your house they are ever praising you like that would be the ultimate place to live he says right there in the house of the Lord in the temple to be able to worship you continually God day after day and not just for one week and then go all the way back home oh happy blessed is the one who gets to live in your presence always says the psalmist if only so what does the psalmist do?

he does what almost everyone else in Israel had to do he packs his bags he makes his provisions ready and he goes on the journey from wherever he lives when the appointed times draw near the next three verses verse 5 to 7 poetically describe the journey the pilgrimage that most must make three times a year blessed are those whose strength is in you whose hearts are set on pilgrimage as they pass through the valley of Bacca they make it a place of springs the autumn rains also cover it with pools they go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion so there's a blessing from God for those who choose to make the Lord their strength and set out on this

journey to meet with God and worship him in his holy temple and this journey is not easy it requires strength to get there the valley of Bacca is thought by most to refer to a dry and dusty valley where not much grows but the picture here is beautiful as the people travel together and are joined by others from the towns and the communities all around they bring life even to the dusty valley of Bacca you can almost picture it in your mind a parched cracked ground where only a few hardy shrubs managed to eke out their existence and where no one lives but then suddenly out of nowhere this joyful procession of people burst forth bringing life to the whole area just like springs of water would or autumn rains would transforming this place into an oasis as they go by you can hear the sound of singing and the excitement and the bustle people all eager to go up to Jerusalem to the temple to meet with God he says they go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion so there's something special about this for those of you who have good strong loving relationships with family that's living far away isn't it wonderful to be reunited with them on special occasions perhaps even at

Christmas time well we imagine that this procession on the roads is something like that times 10,000 people all over coming together streaming into the main roads and all for one purpose to go up to Jerusalem and worship God did they sing along the road well it doesn't say for sure but most likely they did and probably this was one of the songs that they used and as they get closer and closer to the place where they can finally be in the presence of God again in his temple they go from strength to strength suddenly the weariness and the heaviness of life that was there before all this lifts away or melts away there's new vigor in the bones there's a new spring in the step there's a lightness there's a joy in the heart and it just keeps building and increasing until each one appears in those temple courts before God in Zion so it's not an easy journey at the start and it even brings you down into the valley from there it requires even more to climb up to the mountain

Mount Zion but the closer we get to God the stronger we feel the stronger we are verses 8 and 9 are a prayer to God in the midst of this he asked the Lord to listen and then he prays and asks God to bless the anointed one that would be the God's chosen king of Israel whoever it was in the days that this was sung and then the song continues with a sort of reveling in the moment a deep enjoyment of being here at the temple in the presence of God in verse 10 he says better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere I'd rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked for the Lord God is a sun and shield the Lord bestows favor and honor no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless what do you think do you think that the guy who wrote this song really met with God when he went up to the temple or was he disappointed far from disappointment he says

I would rather be here in your temple courts for one day than be anywhere else for a thousand that's how precious that's how wonderful it was for him to be in God's presence to know that nearness to God and he pulls in metaphor to describe what God is like to him here in this place God is to me here and now like the sun like the sun is to a man living in the darkness this should really speak to our hearts at this time of year we're about four days away from the shortest day of the year and I don't know about you but I already find myself just yearning for that sun to come up in the mornings look it's eight o'clock already where is it what a difference it makes when all of a sudden it rises and the whole world is lit up by it and we feel the warmth

[17 : 33] God makes a similar level of difference to us when we see him in his glory when we draw near him when we feel the warmth of his presence in this cold dark world he's like a sun to us he's also like a shield to his people says the psalmist do you need a shield right now with some of the things that you're going through in your life and there's more he says the Lord bestows favor and honor he gives he shows his kindness he lifts us up and blesses us even though we don't deserve it no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless so for those who on the on the whole are seeking by faith to live the way that God has asked to honor him to live rightly before him he withholds nothing good he's absolutely willing he's absolutely eager to give all good things to those who walk by faith rightly before him the song closes with this

Lord almighty blessed is the one who trusts in you this song is really amazing it touches us it speaks to us it calls to us it applies to us in so many different ways I was confounded this week just trying to bring them all together first and foremost this psalm asks us this very personal question do you long to be with God do you desire his presence and more do you long to be with him like this with a passion is there a deep yearning in your soul for him this is what God asks of us here do you long to be with

God does your heart cry out for him around this time of year as we reflect on the birth of Christ I couldn't help but think of the words of Isaiah he said God is a son God is a son and a shield what did Isaiah say he said the people walking in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned for to us a child is born to us a son is given long after this God was planning something special he was planning to shine into our world like never before just like the son does through his own son to be born as we've been learning with the kids the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world

John 1 9 Jesus is the ultimate expression of this truth that God is a son to his people and there's more what is this psalm all about it's about people longing for God's presence it's about a deep yearning of the soul to be near God to be with God God and as we reflect on this truth some of the words of Matthew come to mind Matthew chapter 1 when the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream he says Joseph son of David do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us God with us could it be that God would do a new thing instead of us making that journey to the place where he is he now comes to us the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us we have seen his glory the glory of the one and only son from the father full of grace truth but what about the temple what about the pilgrimage three times a year to be in the presence of God hear the words of

[23 : 28] Jesus himself to the Samaritan woman at the well she said to Jesus I can see that you are a prophet our ancestors worship our ancestors worshiped on this mountain but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem woman Jesus replied believe me a time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem you Samaritans worship what you do not know we worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the father in the spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshipers the father seeks God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in the spirit and in truth could it be that

God would do a new thing instead of us going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where God made his presence felt by his spirit he now sends his spirit to live in us both Jew and Gentile wherever we are enabling us to worship him truly wherever we live wherever we are the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost after Jesus had ascended to heaven said this to the crowds repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call the gift of the

Holy Spirit God in us with us is for you and for all who are far off this is the wondrous gift of God he has sent his son down into our world to be with us and then through Jesus his son he later sent his spirit to live right here inside of us no more do we have to pack our bags and make our provisions ready and go on a pilgrimage to the one place on earth where God dwelt if we believe in Christ God comes to live right here within us by his Holy Spirit wherever we are what did Jesus say after he gave the great commission to his disciples he said surely I am with you always to the very end of the age so this is good news this is something that we can celebrate at

Christmas God is with us the one born in Bethlehem lives in us and we in him and yet amazingly there is still something so true about these words in Psalm 84 yes God is with us yes he lives in us but there's still the longing for a fuller enjoyment of his presence there's still a deep yearning for the end when Jesus returns for the consummation of all things when we will be in the courts of the new Jerusalem when we shall see face to face our king our savior Jesus we will be with him our God and he will be with us his people forever more

John Bunyan had it right in pilgrim's progress we are all pilgrims on a pilgrimage a happy and blessed pilgrimage we are marching to Zion beautiful beautiful Zion and even though right now some of us may be passing through the valley of Baca we journey together we climb upward and onward God helps us by his provision and we go from strength to strength till each of us shall someday appear before God in his holy city for us today this psalm isn't a longing to go back in time and be in the temple courts in Jerusalem for us today because of Christ our Emmanuel our Savior our King this psalm is about our longing for the courts of that heavenly city the new

[28 : 49] Jerusalem the city where there is no night and where God is the sun and the shield of his people forever better is one day in that place than a thousand anywhere else do you long to be with God like that to dwell in his house in his city forever with him I encourage you strengthen your heart in him today set your heart on pilgrimage Jesus the truly blameless one has opened the way for us so that no good thing will be withheld from us and that for all eternity so let your heart cry out this morning to the living

God long for him desire him let's pray father in heaven we thank you that you did a new thing in sending your son Jesus and we thank you that the end of this story you have made known to us and we thank you that someday we shall all be with you in the most intimate way possible face to face we long for that Lord I pray that you would strengthen those of us who are weary that you would give us that help that provision we need Lord you know the struggles that we're facing now different ones of us in different areas of our lives meet us there we pray and carry us on we ask this in Jesus name

Amen