

Psalm 84 (1)

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[0 : 00] Perhaps for a short while this evening, you can turn with me to Psalm 84 and verse 1. Psalm 84, verse 1.

To the choir master, according to the Gittith, a psalm of the sons of Korah, how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

My soul longs, yes, faints by the courts of the Lord. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. There are many ways to describe a Christian.

She's a disciple. He's a follower of Christ. But one of the oldest descriptions of a Christian is that of a pilgrim. The title pilgrim wasn't created by John Bunyan in Pilgrim's Progress.

It belongs to the Bible. We read in Genesis 47, verse 9, that Jacob said to Pharaoh, the years of my pilgrimage are 130.

[1 : 07] And then Hebrews 11, 13, summing up the faith of the patriarchs, it's written they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Now, perhaps pilgrims and pilgrimage aren't familiar descriptions to us, unless you're familiar with the faith mission, but ones which perhaps we need to revive if we want a more complete description of who we are as Christians, especially in our relationship to God.

Psalm 84 is the song of the pilgrim. We love to sing this song, but there's so much more we can learn from it if we pray this song.

And over the next few weeks, therefore, I want us to learn some of these pilgrim lessons. From verses 1 and 2, I want us to learn three lessons about a pilgrim at prayer, our first three lessons. The pilgrim's prayer is historic, it is holistic, and it is honed. I hope we'll see over the next few weeks that Psalm 84 isn't about buildings and temples, as much as it's about our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 25] I want to deal with the first of these points this evening, and then in two weeks' time, the next two. So, tonight, the pilgrim's prayer is historic.

It's historic. 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.

These are some of the most tender words in the Psalms. They're so human. They're so heartfelt. The psalmist is giving us access into his innermost desires.

And we have in these verses three names for God. The Lord of hosts, the Lord, and the living God. Each of them is rich in its own unique way, but all of them bear reference to one particular episode in the history of Israel.

Let me suggest that these three descriptions of God are, first of all, biblical, then familiar, and then practical.

[3 : 41] They are, first of all, biblical. Biblical. biblical. In 1 Samuel 17, we met the shepherd boy, David, who'd go on to become Israel's greatest ever king.

At that time, Israel was being challenged by the Philistines, and Israel's armies were terrified of the Philistine giant, Goliath. Goliath represented the enemy of the people of God.

And when David visited the front line of Israel's army, he saw frightened soldiers shaking in their sandals. But he knows that though Goliath may be big and strong, he's but a speck of dust in comparison to the God of Israel.

And so, after getting permission to fight with Goliath, David challenges him with these words. You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whose name you have defied.

The Lord of hosts is the commander of heaven's armies, before whom even the strongest of men are blades of grass.

[5 : 04] The name Lord, halfway through verse 2 there, or Yahweh, is that which God revealed himself to be, is who he revealed himself to be to Moses.

The Lord is the God of covenant promise. He's our father. He loves us. When we read this name of God, we're to think of George Matheson's famous hymn, O Love That Will Not Let Me Go.

This is who our father is, the love who will not let me go. King David, facing the giant Goliath, knew God not as distant, but as the Lord who loved him, the father on his side.

The living God is another title God used, David used rather, in connection with Goliath. When presenting his plan to confront Goliath, David said to Saul, your servant has struck down both lions and bears and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.

The gods the nations worship are not real gods. They're wood, they're stone, but our God is real and living. He hears the prayers of his people, he sees the situations his people find themselves in, he speaks to his people, he's responsive.

[6 : 36] Now, I'm making this point about the names of God, the biblical source for the names of God, simply for this reason, we do not have to be slaves to one form of address to God.

The Bible contains many hundreds of ways we can address him. Here in Psalm 84 verse 1 and 2 we have but three, but there are hundreds of others from which we can choose, each of which emphasise a slightly different aspect of God's character and find their context in a particular story or stories in the biblical record.

Each of which again describe in real time and space how God demonstrated his loving, powerful and responsive character to us.

Let me set you a challenge. In your Bible readings, how many names of God can you find? Can you use to address God?

Remember two things. You're a pilgrim. Your journey consists in experiencing more of God. God's God's God's favourite name isn't Lord of hosts or living God but Father.

[7 : 59] Don't forget gospel focus. So, it's biblical. Secondly, it's familiar, something familiar about these verses.

There's something about these three names of God topics when I was studying this text. It struck me as being very familiar. Then it hit me. Out of the 150 Psalms, 12 were written by the so-called sons of Korah.

According to 2 Chronicles 6, 31 and 32, 1 Chronicles 6, right? 31 and 32, the sons or more literally the descendants of Korah were appointed by King David to engage in song, in the ministry of song and music.

They were Levites with this particular calling. They were to engage in the worship of God's name in his tabernacle. They were choir masters, singers, musicians, songwriters, appointed by King David to fill the tabernacle with the sound of praises.

The descendants of Korah continued serving in this capacity under David's son Solomon and then right on down until the exile in Babylon.

[9 : 17] And these descendants of Korah wrote at least 12 of these psalms. As you read through the psalms they wrote, you learn just how fond they were of these three particular titles for God, the Lord of hosts, the Lord, and the living God.

For example, Psalm 42, verse 2, written by the sons of Korah, we read, my soul thirsts for God, the living God. Again, Psalm 85, verse 1, written by the sons of Korah, we read, Lord, you were favourable to your land.

Then in Psalm 46, 7, we'll sing this in a few minutes, once again written by the sons of Korah, we read, the Lord of hosts is with us. These three names of God are familiar to us because first and foremost they were familiar to the sons of Korah.

What I'm saying here seems opposite to what I said a moment ago about varying our addresses to God in prayer, but there may be certain ways we address God with which we are more familiar than others, and that's fine.

It may be our distinctive personality, which is drawn to one title of God as opposed to another. It may be the circumstance we find ourselves in. It may be because of someone we look up to in the faith, perhaps someone we unconsciously imitate in prayer, prays using this title of God.

[10 : 52] A foreign minister of mine used to pray with the words, Almighty God, our loving Heavenly Father. One of our elders always begins his prayer with the words, our Father, who is in

heaven.

Jesus' favourite way of addressing God was Father, maybe even Abba. But if your earthly father was abusive toward you, perhaps addressing him as Abba isn't so comfortable for you.

For me, in recent times, Father has become very precious as a means of address to God. But for you it might be something different according to your personality, to your circumstances, to your background, and that's fine.

Be familiar, be comfortable with the title of God you use in prayer, but remember, God is bigger and God is wider than you can imagine. In a pilgrim, you're not at home here.

you need to feel at home in God, in the gospel of his grace, and the resurrection of Christ. So let me set you another challenge.

[12 : 06] What is that title of God with which you are most familiar and most comfortable? Next time you use it in prayer, think of what you're saying.

And if you can, with all reverence, relax into it and value it even more than at present you may do. So, in terms of, whether it being historic, it is biblical, it's also familiar, but third, it's practical, practical.

You might be thinking to yourself, well, all this is very interesting, isn't it? But of what practical use is any of this to me? I agree because every theological truth must be a practical use or it simply isn't true.

Let me suggest that this truth about God's historical names is exceedingly practical, in at least two ways, both of which deal with the same issue, but from different directions.

[13 : 14] things. The first practical use is to start in prayer with your problems and take them to scripture. Start in prayer with your problems and take them to scripture.

Just like the shepherd boy David had his own giant to face, so we all have our own giants.

Loneliness, ill health, addiction, life circumstances, depression, anxiety, sinfulness.

Each of us have things which are problematic to us and bring us pain. And our problems, they may not seem big to someone else, but they're very big to us. Well, the shepherd boy David was faced by this giant Goliath, breathing murderous threats, standing right in front of him.

David had a big problem. Think of how much it helped him to think of God as the commander of Israel's arms, before whom Goliath is a blade of grass.

Think of how much it helped David to think of God as the love who will not let him go, whose passion committed to him in covenant love.

[14 : 32] Think of how much it helped him to think of God as the living God who heard his prayers for help, saw the problem he faced and responded in power and how by comparison Goliath's words were lost in fresh air.

Take your problems to scripture and you'll find just like David did, comfort, strength and courage. Confront your problems in prayer with these biblical names of God and see how much that helps you.

Pray for your father to drive him into your heart so that no matter how big of the life you're facing on this journey of ours we all call life, he'll seem rather small in comparison to the God who loves you.

If the first practical use is to start with your problems and take them to scripture, the second is to start with scripture and take them to your problems.

Start with scripture and take them to your problems. I'd like to think as Christians we read our Bibles pretty often. Some of us use Bible reading notes like our daily bread or Charles Spurgeon's morning and evening.

[15 : 49] Others have reading plans we use to read the Bible in a year or three years whatever. Whatever your reading plan is, make sure you ask yourself of any passage, is there a name for God here or an attribute of God here I can use when I'm going through a difficult time in my life.

Perhaps keep a notepad handy or just write it in your Bible. Write down that name of God, that attribute, the passage of scripture in which you found it. And then when trouble comes your way, when you're faced with Goliaths like loneliness or unemployment, confusion, fear, doubt, you can go back to these names of God from scripture and take your problems to them.

don't be reactive as much as you're proactive. Be ready for those tough times by arming yourself with the titles of God and what they mean.

You'll be amazed at how precious that notebook, containing all the names of God you've learned, will become to you. I hope these applications are practical enough.

Start with your problems and take them to the Bible or start with the Bible and take your problems to it. The thing is, as pilgrims, we can only carry the most important things with us.

[17 : 11] We don't have the energy or the capacity to carry everything. Make sure you carry at least this, a working knowledge of who God is, or rather who God reveals himself to be, through his names, titles, and attributes.

Lo, use them in prayer. Remember, he is ultimately your father in Christ. Remember also, the ultimate pilgrim, Jesus Christ, who for our sakes, journeyed from his home in heaven to the hell of the cross and died for us in heaven.