

Psalm 84 (2)

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bible with me to Psalm 84, verses 1 and 2, where we read these words.

How lovely is your dwelling place, the Lord of hosts. My soul longs yet space for the courts of the Lord. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the risen God.

Do you like travelling? Do you like going on journeys? I think most of us like travelling. Apart from all the interesting things you might see when you're on a journey, one of the best things about travelling is that it gives you a new appreciation for home.

You can always tell when you've had enough holiday because you're ready to come home. Psalm 84 is a song for Christians on the journey we call life.

We're travellers, we're pilgrims. As the old hymn reminds us, this world, it ain't our home. We're just a passing through. Written, as you can see, by the descendants of Korah, this psalm is filled with the imagery of journey and pilgrimage.

[1 : 19] The writers of this psalm are travellers, but they're desperate for home, the dwelling place of God in Jerusalem. Whatever God is, that's home for them.

They're on a journey and they envy even the small birds which have made their home in the sanctuary of God. They've been pilgrims long enough now and they just want to settle down somewhere close to where God is.

And so these sons of Korah, these Levitical singers, write this psalm to set down before us their innermost emotions and their desires. Two weeks ago we learned about their perspective on God from these verses.

That he is the Lord of hosts, the commander of heaven's armies. That he is the Lord who's passionately committed to them in love. That he's the living God who hears them, sees them and responds to them.

And we saw how we can use their perspective to help us through all the troubles we face on this journey we call life. Well, this week I want to return to these verses to learn more about the pilgrim's prayer.

[2 : 33] The way we relate to the God in whose presence we long to dwell. So tonight we want to focus our attention on two things. First of all, the pilgrim's prayer is holistic, where we'll learn that our prayers aren't to be mere words from our mouths, but the expression of everything we are.

And secondly, the pilgrim's prayer is honed, where we'll learn that our spiritual desires aren't focused on a building, but on a person.

Jesus Christ, the New Testament dwelling place of God. So first of all then, the pilgrim's prayer is holistic, holistic.

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.

As I said last time, when we considered the three names for God in these verses, Lord of hosts, Lord, living God.

[3 : 45] But now I want to turn from God, if that's possible at all, and look into our own hearts to examine how deep our desire for him is and for his dwelling place. And we immediately learn that this pilgrim's prayer provides an example of how our desires for God are to be holistic.

It's to involve everything about us, not just our minds, not just our voices, but our emotions, every faculty of who we are as Christians.

Our desire for God begins in the mind. We saw last, two weeks ago, the sons of Korah use their minds to gain this perspective on God being almighty, all loving, all present.

It's vital that our minds are involved when we pray, that we both sing with joy and pray with understanding. I remember a conversation I had with a charismatic colleague of mine when I used

to work for a living before I became a minister.

He was commending to me the practice of praying in tongues. And he told me that praying in tongues was so effective because it bypassed the obstacle of his mind. It was as if the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to God on his behalf.

[5 : 04] Well, clearly, in view of everything the Bible teaches about the primacy of our minds in our relationship with God, my charismatic colleague was mistaken. Now, sometimes because our minds are fuddled with confusion, doubt, mental illness or challenges, it can be difficult to pray with understanding, and that's fine.

But as far as it depends upon us, our relationship with God must be centered on the mind. Likewise, our desire for God is expressed in the will, our actions.

Remember, this psalm is being written by pilgrims who, by virtue of their traveling to Jerusalem, are expressing the desires of their hearts in action.

Later on, we read of them passing through a desert, the valley of Beka. It takes willpower to keep on going when you're challenged by the burning heat and the drought conditions of a desert.

So our desire for God involves the mind and the will. But in these verses, Psalm 84, 1 and 2, the predominant theme is the heart, centered of our emotions and affections.

[6 : 20] The writer begins, How lovely is your dwelling place? In the superscription to Psalm 45, again written by the sons of Korah, the exact word lovely is used, but this time translated as a love song.

Tell me about your heart, and I'll tell you a story of love. A story of the things that you dearly love. For the psalmist, faith isn't a matter merely of intellectual cognition.

It is emotional. It's effective. His relationship with God isn't governed by law as much as by love. Not by duty as much as by delight.

He reveals the extent of his desire. He says, My soul longs. Yes, faiths. The word translated longs is also used in Genesis 31, 30 to describe the intensity of homesickness.

If you've ever been homesick, you'll know exactly how all-absorbing that emotion is. As a 16-year-old boy in an English public school, I was most desperately homesick.

[7 : 37] And it consumed me. And the psalmist is saying, I'm homesick for God. I'm so emotionally invested in desiring God that I'm beginning to run out of emotional strength.

I'm fainting. I don't think I can make it to the finish line. It's like my legs have gone all jelly. Then the psalmist says, my heart and my flesh, my body, they cry out for joy.

Heart and flesh, the totality of a person. Modern medicine is now beginning to understand the inextricable connection between our emotional mood and our physical health.

To use their language, we are psychosomatic beings. Heart and flesh, holistic, integrated. I don't know when in the Reformed Church we began to lose our vision for the holistic nature of our relationship to God.

You read the early Scottish fathers like Samuel Rutherford and James Durham and their writings drip with heartfelt affection and love for Christ. Every faculty, every faculty, mind, mind, heart, will, mind, mind, body, heart, will, is caught up with the glory of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 03] But now, the ideal architecture of a Reformed church is very similar to a lecture theatre. Well, a lecture at the front, chairs laid out in rows, and anything remotely concerned with aesthetics.

Avoid it. Our churches are plain and undecadated. What's the problem with that lecture theatre layout? It caters only to the mind and not to the whole person and their psychosomatic essence.

It turns us into creatures entirely made up of brain. We don't need that anymore. Let me suggest that's why tertiary educated Christians find exclusive word centres ministries so attractive, because really, there's not an awful lot of difference between a lecture theatre and a church.

There's no notable architecture or decoration. Just a preacher, now in distinguishable appearance from a university lecture theatre, university lecturer, giving out a lecture in a carefully conditioned lecture theatre.

Modern preachers are expressly told to avoid being emotional, for after all, emotion distracts from the mind, shall they say. There's nothing to see.

[10 : 28] There's nothing for the body to react to, the eyes to wonder at. There's nothing to touch. Sure, that relationship with God, and especially in prayer, is very far from being mind to mind.

I don't know about you, but the closest presence of God, the most intense times of prayer I've ever experienced, have been what I've been so overwhelmed by, emotion.

I can't really get my mind to work properly. It's been more heart to heart, not just mind to mind. We're problems, we're homesick, we're longing for God. Our prayers are the whole person relating to God. Not just the mind, although primarily the mind. But everything about us as well. Tell me, are you afraid of this at all? Of being who you really are, toward God? Of telling him everything about yourself? Of being genuine? We must take the chains of being a creature, almost entirely made up of brain, and be real human beings in prayer.

[11 : 45] So the podium's prayer is, first of all, holistic. Then secondly, it is honed. It is honed. There's one final issue I want to deal with in this verse.

In many ways, the most important issue of them all. The psalmist is focused on the dwelling place of God, the courts of the Lord. But why is that?

Well, he loves the construction of the temple. Every stone of the judicial of the temple is dear to the sons of Korah, as we'll sing in our last psalm. But let's face it, it's just a building.

It's just bricks and mortar and fabric in a fancy arrangement. We love the building, yes, to the sons of Korah, but only because of whose building it is, and who lives it.

Their passion, you see, is for God, for the Lord of hosts, the Lord, the living God. Their hearts are tenderly moved toward the God of Israel.

[12 : 46] And yet there must surely be even more going on here, but as much as I love ornate buildings, I wouldn't attempt a dangerous pilgrimage across a hazardous desert to visit even the finest monastery.

Surely a Christian's spiritual experience does not consist in bricks and mortar, however well designed, however well decorated that building might be.

And you know, that got me thinking, because I genuinely reckon that we all too often sing this psalm unthinkingly. As Christians, we don't believe that this is a temple.

We don't believe in temples where God lives. The dwelling place of God is not a building. Surely we've understood that much. We used to say, remember, Glasgow City is not a building.

We come to. When we sing, how lovely is your dwelling place, we all too often think of God's dwelling place as a church, a building, but it's not. Church is just a building.

[13 : 53] It doesn't have to be. It shouldn't be a boring building, just a lecture theatre. It should be aesthetically pleasing, but for as well decorated and as well functional as it may be, God does not live in a building.

It's not the dwelling place of God. The Greek translation of Psalm 84 verse 1 uses a word for dwelling place, which is also used in John chapter 1 and verse 14 to describe the real and ultimate true dwelling place of God.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have beheld his glory, glorious of the only Son from the Father, for the grace and truth.

Let me cut to the chase. The dwelling place of God toward which our prayers are honed and our spiritual attention is focused is the word made flesh, the Son incarnate, the God we see in the face of Jesus Christ.

The dwelling of God we long for, it's not a place, it's a person. The psalmist's ultimate passion wasn't for the dwelling place of God, but for the God who dwelt there.

[15 : 19] Progressive revelation affords us a sharper focus. Our passion as Christians isn't for ornate buildings, but for a sacred person, the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself on the cross to redeem us for himself.

It is knowing Christ we long for through these verses and for which our heart and flesh cry out. It's Jesus Christ the early Scottish fathers longed for.

It's he for whose sake we're willing to cross deserts and endure the burning heat or whatever life throws at us.

In Philippians 3.8, as we read these words together, Apostle Paul sums up how we feel. I count everything a loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

And this brings us back full circle to the beginning of what I ask you when you like going to journeys. For the Christian, this pilgrimage we call life different for us all.

[16 : 31] That's one destination in view. It is the face-to-face experience of the presence of Jesus Christ. Is there any danger to which you're unwilling to be exposed as long as your pilgrimage in life ends with him?

It is all worth it. Even the Goliaths, we may fight. It's all worth it.
Because sooner than any of us realize, the years of our pilgrimage will be over. We'll be at home in
the dwelling place of God. And Jesus will be there right with you.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.