

Psalm 84 (5)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 November 2022

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Please turn with me to Psalm 84 and to the words we find in verse 5.

Psalm 84 and verse 5. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. We may be young, we may be old, but one thing is common to every one of us.

We all want to feel settled. Even if we're the kind of people who like change and adventure, we still want to feel at rest and settled in our hearts.

No one likes a restless heart. An unsettled attitude, a disturbed mindset. We all want to be at peace. Our media is filled with stories of people who, in the eyes of the world, might have everything you could ever wish, but don't have settled hearts.

[1 : 10] There are high-profile actors who, in public, portray confidence, but in private are nervous wrecks. There are wealthy businessmen who can buy things we can only dream of, but are themselves desperately lonely.

There are powerful politicians who can control nations, but cannot control themselves. Young or old, rich or poor, famous or common, powerful or weak, we all want a settled heart.

Something money can't buy. Something money can't buy and fame can't earn. But there's only one place, ultimately, that we'll ever find peace. The gospel of Jesus Christ.

Only at the cross, where God and man are reconciled to the blood of God's only Son, can we truly find a settled heart.

In Psalm 84, verse 5, we meet another Old Testament beatitude, the mark of the flourishing Christian. Blessed is the person whose strength is in you, in whose heart is a highway to Zion.

[2 : 18] Now, this is actually a very difficult verse to translate. And for reasons which we don't have time to go into, I prefer the way in which the Christian Standard Bible translates it.

Blessed are the people whose strength is in you. That doesn't change. But the second phrase changes. Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. Here then is a heart at peace. A heart set on pilgrimage. In our prayer meetings, we've been working our way through Psalm 84 in the context of prayer.

Gospel peace is reinforced through our relationship to God in prayer. And so the pursuit of the settled heart is all about pilgrimage and prayer.

It's all about a journey in prayer. Let me suggest that we can understand this verse in two stages.

First, the paradox of a settled heart. And secondly, the path to a settled heart.

[3 : 26] First of all then, the paradox of a settled heart. The paradox of a settled heart. The heart which is settled is a heart that's moving.

The heart at rest is a heart in motion. The heart at peace is a heart at work. The second part of our verse says, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

They are never more settled than when they're engaged in pilgrimage. Than when on the highways to Zion, their hearts are headed. They're never more at rest than when they're moving toward.

According to the National Trust, a pilgrimage is, and I quote, a devotional practice consisting of a prolonged journey, often undertaken on foot or on horseback, toward a specific destination of significance.

In our country, people go on pilgrimages to Iona, the site of St. Columba's Monastery, or they go on pilgrimages to Lindisfarne, St. Aidan's Settlement, or even to Canterbury, the head of the English church.

[4 : 47] It's a journey toward. And the psalmist is telling us that the settled heart, the mind at peace, is a heart which is set on a journey. Now, at the very least, this tells us that the settled heart hasn't

found a home here.

As the old spiritual hymn tells us, this world, it ain't our home. We're just a passing through.

Supposing we've got the best of what this world has to offer us, in terms of its health, in terms of its wealth, we're still not ultimately at rest.

Did I say it? One of the problems we face as Christians, especially in the prosperous West, is that we're so much at home here, so much at home here in this world, that we stop journeying toward that greater destination.

The church's greatest statement on this mindset of pilgrimage is contained in John Bunyan's famous fantasy, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

This book, written by Bunyan while he was in prison, features the adventure of a Christian called Pilgrim, as he travels toward the celestial or the heavenly city.

[6 : 04] As Christians, we're pilgrims, and therefore we're never more at peace than when we're moving toward. We're never more settled than when we're in pilgrimage.

The immediate pilgrimage that the psalmist had in mind when he wrote these words, of course, concerns the journey that Jewish travellers would take at least once a year to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the religious festivals.

They travelled from their home villages, the Longmiles, to Jerusalem, and there they went to the temple to offer sacrifices and to sing praises to God. And so in the psalmist's immediate mind, it was a physical pilgrimage.

The faithful Old Testament believer engaging in a prolonged journey to a specific destination, the temple in Jerusalem. But ultimately, it was not a physical journey he had in mind.

It was a spiritual journey. Because it was not Jerusalem, which was his ultimate destination, but the God whose presence dwelt in the temple, which was his ultimate destination.

[7 : 14] It was not the architecture of the temple that was so precious to him, as much as it was the God who inhabited the temple and all its precincts. And so his pilgrimage was ultimately spiritual.

He wanted to be near the God whose glory and whose love had filled his heart. He wanted to see for himself the sacrifices which made atonement for his sin and declared him right with God.

And he wanted to hear and join in with the praises of God's people as together they proclaimed the worthiness, the glory and the love of the God of Israel.

And so this pilgrimage pilgrimage is the progressive movement of his heart toward God. This is prayer.

Pilgrims walk to their destination. Christians pray their way into a deeper closeness and intimacy with God. They grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and as they engage in what the English puritan John Owen called communion with God and his three persons.

[8 : 29] As a Christian who, as we look back, sees the cross behind us and as we look forward, sees heaven before us, we want to get closer to the Father who loves us, to the Son who died for us, to the Holy Spirit who fills us.

And here's the paradox. The settled heart, therefore, is always unsettled. It always wants more of God.

It never has enough of God. God's our greatest satisfaction, but our deepest dissatisfaction in that we want more of him.

And then when we've got more of God, we want even more of him. As long as we live on this earth, we'll be pilgrims. We're journeying to our destination. Not so much the heaven in which God dwells, but the God who dwells in heaven himself.

He is our greatest desire. To know him better. To live in his love. To rest in his grace. This is the paradox of the settled heart.

[9 : 36] The Christian in prayer. The second thing we want to look at this evening is the path to a settled heart.

The path to a settled heart. Because this all sounds so straightforward, does it not? The advantage of pressing after a closer relationship with Jesus Christ seems so clear to us all.

And yet for all that, it so often seems to us an elusive dream. So many things get in the way. Not the least of which is our sinful desire after all this world's trinkets.

I don't even have to look outside my own heart to see evidence of how complicated and how hard it is to wholeheartedly pursue a closer relationship with Christ.

Moral and spiritual sin continues to blind us and harden us until the very day we die. Last summer we were sowing grass in the man's garden.

[10 : 41] But very soon after we sowed it, pigeons would descend from the sky and eat up the very grassy we were sowing. My youngest son Jonathan came up with the idea of tying together some shiny CDs and hanging them on a stick in the garden.

The idea was that as the sun reflected from these shiny CDs, it would scare away the pigeons. And to some extent it worked and the man's garden is now beautifully green.

Those glittering CDs, they repelled the pigeons. The problem for us is that the glitter of this world's pleasures don't repel our sinful hearts, but attracts them, rather like iron filings are attracted to a magnet.

Add to this the troubles and challenges we face in this life, whatever they may be. They're rather like Joseph's multicolored coat, except they're not colored at all. They're just a multitude of different shades of darkness.

Our bodies sometimes ache. Our minds ache even more. We readily identify with Charlotte Elliot, who wrote the hymn, Just As I Am, when in the second verse she says, Just as I am, though tossed about, with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without.

[12 : 08] And then standing in the background is Satan himself, who hates us, who hates Christ, who'll do anything to stop us in our pilgrimage, to stall us if he can, to turn us around.

It's his greatest victory. In his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the psalmist faced many kinds of trouble in his way. Bandits, seething heat, wild animals, his own personal weakness.

If we are to pursue closeness with God, we're going to need more strength than we currently have. Strength to overcome, strength to persevere, strength to keep pressing on.

We're so very weak, we all know that. Where shall we find that strength to keep going in this pilgrimage after the grace of Christ? It's the first part of this verse that gives us the answer to that question.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in you. The grace, the God after whom we seek, is the God who gives us the strength to keep seeking and to find.

[13 : 30] By his Holy Spirit, who's at work within us, he gives us persevering strength. He shines his love brighter than any glittering CD in my garden.

He'll give us power to overcome all those troubles and challenges we might face in this life. He'll brighten our darkness. He'll lighten our despair. He'll vanquish Satan's grip over us.

There's nothing our God won't give us as we single-mindedly and wholeheartedly pursue him and keep our pilgrimage healthy. How then shall he give all these things to us?

It shall be as we pray. We falsely think that when we pray, we're doing all the work. But in reality, as we pray, God is pouring the blessings of his gracious power and his persevering strength into our weak hearts.

how blessed is the Christian who finds his or her strength in God. He's a living testimony to the truth of what the Apostle Paul discovered, that when I'm weak, then I'm strong because Christ's grace is sufficient for him.

[14 : 50] A Christian who bears witness to the truth of what Isaiah said, Even youth shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up on wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. And remember what Jesus said in John 15, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I and him, he it is that bears much fruit. This is the path to a settled, peaceful heart.

When we are powered by a strength outside ourselves, the infinite strength of Almighty God, who through his Son, by his Spirit, opens the treasures of his grace and pours down blessings unnumbered upon us in a mighty fountain of mercy, even as we pray.

whoever we are, nesters or adventure seekers, we all want a settled heart.

[16 : 02] And here then in this verse, Psalm 84, verse 5, we find such a heart. It's a heart which is set on pilgrimage, on the relentless pursuit of a closer relationship with Christ, whatever that may cost us.

It's a heart which finds its strength in the Christ it pursues so keenly. And as I close, I therefore want to challenge all of us, myself especially, to be satisfied with nothing less than the wholehearted

pursuit of Christ.

Not to settle for a lukewarm version of Christianity which leaves us cold and empty, but in prayer to pursue our highest joy in him. This is true blessedness in the Christian life when in the words of the Apostle Paul, I want to know Christ.

Amen. and to be divided by God among who do