

The True Believer and Spiritual Worship

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: 27 June 2010

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0:00] Psalm 84 I want us to think about the true believer and spiritual worship as found in this particular section of Psalm 84.

Now, what we need to do here by way of introduction is to notice that in the days of the tabernacle in Israel when they had that great tent and you had all the different sections in it.

And you had the priestly ministry and the slaughter of sacrifices and so on. And then later on in temple times you had that same process going on although they had built a great structure, Solomon's temple.

We have to remember that that whole way of doing things was in God's purpose a teaching means.

Yes, worship went on. Yes, true believers were among the Israelites. But the whole thing of it was geared to teach people about the key points that God would have his people understand and would later fulfill in the coming of the Lord Jesus.

[2:01] And that's why all these things were designed for a time and they were designed to pass away. And if you have any doubt about that, you'll find that the letter to the Hebrews deals with all the questions you might have about, should we be thinking about rebuilding the temple?

Should we be needing these things again? As indeed the Orthodox Jews think. So what we're saying to begin with here is we're looking at a situation in which the tabernacle, the dwelling place was functioning where God had said it would be.

And all that was involved in the priestly ministry, the sacrifices and the holy place where the high priest went into, that was all functioning. But it was functioning for a time and it was functioning in the immaturity of the people of God and their worship was limited in that sense by all these outward things.

Now it's true of course that we function, we all function in terms of our senses. If someone hasn't got their hearing or hasn't got their sight or a sense of smell, that's a big disadvantage to them.

But in the general run of things, we like to see things and hear things and smell things. We react by our senses. And that is a problem for us when it comes to the worship of God.

[3:52] Because God is spirit, he is infinite spirit, personal, tri-personal, but he is to be worshipped in spirit and truth.

But man or people, I mean, crave to see things going on. They like the trappings.

That's why many people are attracted to certain expressions of Christianity where they've got their robes and censers with the smoke in them and all they carry on.

Because people see and smell and hear what they like. It's easy. It doesn't make it right. And it certainly doesn't make it spiritual.

The World Cup's on just now, as you know. And four years ago, when the last World Cup was on, they've done things down a bit.

- [4 : 58] That's why I'm referring to four years ago. But four years ago, if you recall, when the programme started on the television, you had a picture of a wonderful stadium.
- And then all of a sudden, in a digital way, the great heroes came on with almost like in the clouds. They were like the gods of the Greek mythology.
- I better not start mentioning names. But there they came on the screen. And if you recall, the hymn tune that we associate with the Lord Jesus.
- Yours be the glory, risen and conquering Son. Endless is the victory you through death have won. That was actually the tune that was used.
- In other words, there was creating something to see and hear that was almost bordering on the pseudo, on the false spiritual.
- [5 : 59] It was like worship. People crave to have that sense by what they see and the trappings of what appears to give them an idea of what it is to worship.
- But God was bringing his people deliberately away from these things to the purer and more spiritual. And he had determined that in due course, the temple itself and all the priestly ministry would be gone.
- And it's an interesting thing, though a neglected thing, that when Jesus rose again on the third day from the sepulchre, the tomb, many priests became obedient to the faith.
- And they became obedient, not least because of the impact of what went on. Remember that when Jesus died, the veil of the temple, that thick, palm-thick curtain, was torn from the top to the bottom on the way into the most holy place, where only the high priest could go once a year.
- That curtain was torn from the top to the bottom. And God used that happening to awaken these priests to something mega, that the old was now passing away, and the new had come.
- [7 : 38] The temporary, although it was for long centuries, was now to be phased out. And so when we look at that, when we look at what we've just said by way of introduction, and we look at the passage we're going to look at in a moment, we bear in mind that it's not the outward things that mattered even back then when this psalm was written.
- What we are thinking about, or what we are to think about, is the heart of the matter, that the worship of God is a matter of the heart.
- It's not concerned with dazzling, splendid things, with colourful things, things that we like to hear and see and smell and so on.
- The worship of God is in spirit and in truth. So I want us then to begin by looking at the psalm writer's view of the worship of God.
- And he says, How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! So what he does first is he directs us to the place of worship.
- [8 : 57] The place, in the first instance, the place was appointed by God. It wasn't just about the Israelites saying, Well this is what we want to do, we'll centralise the worship.
- It wasn't about that. It was about what God appointed, what the living and true God had appointed for his people. And so for their time in history, they did what God told them, they went to the appointed place.
- And this man who employed himself in the service of God, in the worship service of God, a son of Korah, thought about that place of worship as absolutely beautiful.
- How lovely, how pleasant, how beautiful is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! And that reference to dwelling place is important, because the tabernacle is really the dwelling place where God had graciously stooped down to meet his people in.

And that's what made it beloved by them. That's why they loved to go there. Now as we've been saying, in the days of the tabernacle and later the temple, the Lord chose to meet his people there.

[10:25] It's God saying, This is how we do it. This is where we'll meet. And this is where I'll meet with you. And I hope when you read your Old Testament, and for example in the book of Exodus, when they had the tabernacle made of these curtains and so on, you'll recognize that when God's cloud appeared, the people worshipped.

They were all involved in it. It mattered to them. But you see, it's not that the temple itself, in terms of the stones, was inherently holy.

It's not that there was something magical about it. It was holy because God came there to meet with his people. There was no guarantee of the building being a holy place.

It may have been built for a holy purpose, but that didn't make it holy. What made it holy was God met with his people. He presents himself among them. He came down, as it were, to meet with them.

He made his presence apparent. And one of the big mistakes, even in the Christian church, has been to major on these great buildings of worship, and all the things that clutter the worship, and miss the point, the vital point of God being there.

[12:05] You see it. For example, in the times of the apostles, long after the temple of Solomon was built, and destroyed, and rebuilt by Zerubbabel.

You see, they were turfed out of the synagogues, and they had to worship in homes, to begin with, until things moved on. But God met with them.

Because meeting with God, for worship, was what they desired. How did they decide it? Because he said, this is the way we do it. God meeting with his people.

And in the Old Testament, there are a number of words, that have this idea, of God dwelling, in the midst. To dwell, the place of God's choosing.

Where God met, with his people. Indeed, although we are not getting into this, you could go back, even before the tabernacle, to the places where the, the patriarchs, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, where they built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord.

[13:16] Because the Lord said, this is where you'll do it. This is where I'll meet with you. So it's all about God, determining what we'll do, and how we do it.

But the important thing for us, at this point, is, is how we react, to coming together, to worship him.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. It's lovely to us, because it holds this promise to us, that he will meet with us in it.

The focus then, for us, is not on the building itself, but that God has promised, to meet with us, when we, desire to meet with him, according to his word.

And, and this congregation, should know very well, that, when you were forced out of the building, in, in, 2000, you met in a scout hall.

[14:19] A scout hall, that you've heard me say, I used to, I didn't enjoy coming to, enjoyed meeting all you folks, but not the hall itself. For me, it wasn't conducive, to worship.

But that wasn't the point. You never saw anything, negative about it, because the Lord, met with you there. And that's, this is the point. You long to meet with him, to be together, and you may do, with what, he gave you at the time.

But to return, to the Old Testament, setting, in the psalm. How lovely, is your dwelling place, your tabernacle, O Lord, of hosts.

We focus on this, important fact, that God, the great, living, and true God, sought the good, of his people, and came, as it were, to them, and received, their worship, as they worshipped, together.

and he did this, not only, for his own praise, but for their benefit. And the same is true, to this very day.

[15:30] It's not about, man meeting, with God, to do him service, but God, meeting, meeting, with man, to bless him.

Our worship service, is according, to his appointment, and he delights in it, and will bless it.

And that makes it important, then, for us, to understand this, where we are, together. You see, although the psalm writer, is writing here, and he's talking about, his own experience, it's experience, as belonging, to those, who gather together, for that worship.

Yes, there's, there's a, me, part to it, but there is a, we, part to it, as well. It's not just, simply, I myself.

It's about, us together. And you remember, that, when, Jesus, spoke to the woman, at the well, at Jacob's well, near, the little village, of Sychar, he said, woman, the hour is coming, and now has come, when the true worshippers, of God, will worship him, in spirit, and in truth, because the father, is seeking such, to worship, it's about, his initiative, it's about him, saying, this is, how to do it, and this is, where I will bless you.

[17:11] Not, of man's initiative, not, an occasional thing, not, an accidental thing, but, it fits in, with what God, wants.

That's how, we're to look at it, and we were saying, in prayer there, it's no longer, on the Jewish Sabbath, on the seventh day, but it is, on the first day, of the new week, that was the apostolic, way of doing it, and that's the way, we do it, and we do it, because it is the, it is the Lord's day, he is, he is, exalted, and he rules over all, and we worship him, on this, the first day, of the new week.

That's why, the men of old, the theologians, called it, the Christian Sabbath. Yes, it carries in it, the benefits, of the day of rest, but it's the day of worship, he's specially appointed, for us.

And it's, God's provision, for us. And you see, that's why, it should matter, to us, to be together, on this day. I'm saying that to you, because, you like I know, very well, that the worship of God, in particular, in our own land, an interest in it, a desire for it, is simply, has simply, almost, it's almost, at rock bottom, it's not quite there yet.

People are not interested, people have no, sense of, of need of it, but, you see, they're not thinking, what would God have me do? Has God any say in this?

[18:55] And the answer is, God has, has the full say in this. If we choose to ignore it, that's a problem for us. But it's important for us, who are here today, and those that are connected with us, that we refocus, that it is about God's business, that it is the worship of God, it is meeting with him, not only to praise him, but to learn from him, in his appointed way.

And we ought to think about it, as something, precious to us, because he, wants it that way, and he has appointed the means, for blessing us.

Now of course, if we are genuinely, unwell, and weary, by some infirmity, then, it follows that we can't do it. That's not an issue, that shouldn't be an issue, that's simple, and clear to understand.

But it is, what we're trying to put across here is, a right attitude, to the worship of God, and being together, in that worship, is what, the psalm writer, is pressing upon us, by the Holy Spirit.

How do I think about, meeting with God, God in his, in his appointed, way, and time. How lovely, is your dwelling place, where you have promised, to be Lord.

[20:25] Where the twos, and threes, and fours, and more, are meeting together, in your name. And it's good for us then, to ask, what do I think about, the worship of God?

Is it something I rate? How, get me here, what I'm saying. We need to know, how we rate it. That's an N word, I know, it's a jargon word, but, I was looking for a, a set of, mud flaps for, for David's car, because, without them, the car is a bit of a mess.

So, I went to Holford's, and I said to the guy, do you have, such and such, for this car? Oh yes, I have them, he said. I said, how do you rate them? Ah, ah, he said, I'm afraid, not well at all.

A simple thing like that. We supply them, but how do you rate them? Not well at all. They're not all that great, he had to say. Why am I using that?

To make a point to you, how do you rate, the worship of God? Can you take it or leave it? I actually left the mud flaps.

[21:39] I didn't think they were of much value, when he said, they're not very high on the scale. You can get a lot better. How do you rate, the worship of God? Does it matter to you?

Can you take it or leave it? Can you, can you, can you simply say, well, not today, not tonight, not whatever. Do I love it?

Does it matter to me? Is the meeting together important? Because God has promised to be there. It's important to think these things through and to learn from those who spoke in days long ago by the Spirit and who still speak to us in the living word.

let us think about God himself, about what it is to meet together with him, not in family devotions, but together as representing a congregation of his people in the place where we meet together.

Let us learn from the psalmist to think about how we rate the worship of God. And the last thing is the psalmist's view of fellowship with God.

[23:01] Now, there's a wee bit of an overlap here, I know, but we want to focus on this in verse 2. My soul longs, he says, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. We might say if we're thinking, wow, what an attitude of mind, what a heart switched on to God.

my soul longs, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Now, there needs to be a personal expression of how we view fellowship with God in the worship. It's about fellowship, it's about meeting with him.

I'll not ask for a show of hands, but I wonder if you could put up your hand, you don't have to, but if you could put up your hand, if you would ask to, did I come here today to meet with the Lord?

[24:29] You see? it's good to be here, it's good to meet with one another, it's good to sing the songs of the Psalter together, it's good to read the word, but did I come here to meet with the Lord?

You might even say, it's good to listen to the preacher or minister, but did you come to meet the Lord? That's the question, if not, why not?

think about it in a different way, the psalmist says here, it's about fellowship with God, my soul longs, yea, even faints for the courts of the Lord, my flesh, my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Now you see, you remember I said, I was explaining something in a psalm earlier on, that you can get the wrong impression from the reference to the outward thing, look at this, my soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

Now you could take that simply and you would be wrong, you could take that simply, he was longing to be at the tabernacle, to do his job, he served at the tabernacle, at the temple, but if that's all you think about this, you're wrong.

[26:01] His soul is not longing simply for the courts of the Lord, and that that is clear, is clear in the next bit, look at it, my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

See the point? That's why I said, did you come here today to meet with the Lord? We have to think about how the psalm writer, speaking by the Holy Spirit, brings us into the heart of the matter.

Yes, to come together to our appointed place for worship, but to come together longing to meet with the Lord.

Yearning for him, yearning for the courts, is to yearn for where he has promised to meet us. That's the point. He's crying out for the living God.

My heart, he says, and my flesh, my whole being, is crying out for the Lord. I remember years ago, my mother's father, my grandfather, used to quote this psalm to me, and I was always touched by the depth of his emotion when he quoted it to me.

[27:34] It meant nothing to me, I have to say. But I knew it meant such a lot to him. And now I know why it meant such a lot to him, because his heart was in it.

The fellowship of God, the longing for that fellowship, the longing to be with the company of God's people, to meet together for the Lord's worship, but for fellowship, for connecting with the Lord in the worship.

We don't need to see him. We don't need helps like images and other things. we don't need these things.

We don't need a picture of Jesus, because we have no idea what he looked like then and looks like now. We don't need these things. We live by faith, not sight.

That will come. We worship him in the heart and from the heart. My soul longs for more of that.

[28:40] God's love. And you see, the psalm writer is not saying I've never had this experience before. He's not saying that. He's saying I've had this experience before and I'm longing for it again.

I want to know more of it. I want to know its enriching power and enabling power. I want to be in touch with the Lord in that way that he's just filling me with a sense of the wonder of his being and of what it is to live for him.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. And that reminds us that we can have real spiritual contact with him.

He's ordered it that way. He draws near to us. In Psalm 65 we're told that the person is really blessed, is truly happy who is brought near by the Lord to himself.

And this is what the psalm writer is thinking about. It's about being brought near to the Lord to have a spiritual thirst quenched and a spiritual hunger satisfied.

[30:09] to be able to say in a spiritual way, I'm full, the Lord has filled me with the good things of his word.

My flesh and my heart cry out for the living God. And all these things were in their measure through in the days when this man wrote.

But they're all the more gloriously true in our day. Jesus has come. Jesus has fulfilled all that that man was involved in in the temple.

It's all gone and can stay gone. Jesus has come. He has fulfilled it all. Pick up any aspect of what went on in the temple, the priestly ministry, the high priest, the animals for slaughter, the altar, anything you care to mention fulfilled in him.

Indeed as we were saying in prayer he is the very chief cornerstone of a new temple, of the true temple, a spiritual building built with living people, those who come to faith in him, those who know what it is, to long for more of the worship and of the fellowship of God, to worship him in spirit and in truth, as we said a moment ago.

[31 : 50] And you see, we are in what the New Testament rightly calls the age of the spirit, the age of the Holy Spirit's ministry, which is a Christ centered ministry, taking the things of Jesus and making them clearer deeper and deeper to our understanding and warming our hearts to the Lord Jesus so that we know him all the more and enjoy him all the more in our worship and in our fellowship in the worship.

Remember he said to the woman at the well, I referred to this a moment ago, but he actually said to it, we worship whom we know. Salvation is of the Jews.

All that we need to know about the worship of God and fellowship with God we have in the Bible. It's been given to us and it's here to help us to have real living contact in worship and in fellowship.

with the living God. That's why the Bible means so much to us. That's why we spend 35 minutes or so opening up the word so that we're better able to understand the important things in that word.

It's through the word we get understanding and what William Cooper calls soul refreshing views. Jesus in the word.

[33 : 35] And so we're to think about the effect of all this upon us. What is the effect of all this upon our heart?

Well the psalm writer tells us here that his heart and his flesh his whole being cries out for the living God.

Someone has translated it like this in the whole of my being I sing for joy and to the living God.

And our worship ought to be marked by that. It shouldn't be dull and dreary. It should be joyful.

Yes we can sing even the solemn psalms with joy in our hearts. To be in touch with the living God in this way is a thing that should fill us with joy.

[34 : 37] Our praise is important. We should think more about it and what we are about in it. And the psalmist you can't deny it is absolutely full of it.

He's emotional, he's enthusiastic, my soul longs, yes even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

It was the Baptist minister and preacher of a bygone day Charles Haddon Spurgeon who says in his commentary on the Psalms about the psalmist theory said he had a holy love sickness for the Lord and his worship.

I like that. That's a very Spurgeonic way of putting it. He had a holy love sickness for the Lord and his worship. He had these intense longings for a richer experience of the Lord in the worship.

And we need to look at that and think about that. It's something we're to be active in and not simply passive.

[36 : 03] That's why it should matter to us that we are about his worship and about meeting with him. And we need to go back again and again to the great things of the word that are centered in Jesus.

So that we long for him all the more and long to meet him and long that he meets with us to do us good. And if you think about it and if you know anything about what we've been trying to say here you'll know that there are times we lose a sense of that.

We're not as aware of him because either we're drifting a bit in our lives we're less intense in our following of him or we're just weary or something like that.

And it can lead to a cooling off of our interest in the Lord and in his ways and the psalmist is reminding us of how important it is to be bringing ourselves to him in the appointed way and crying out to him like this we sing it in the psalms Lord thee my God I will early seek my soul does thirst for thee how tragic when you see somebody who's addicted to alcohol and as soon as the day breaks they're looking for the next one thirsting my dear friends we should be like that and more for the Lord thirsting for him yearning for him as the deer pants for the water brooks so my soul pants for you oh

God longing to meet with him well maybe that we will have something from the Lord for our soul today from these wonderful words how lovely is your dwelling place oh Lord of hosts my soul longs yes even faints for the courts of the Lord ah yes but that's all about meeting with him together my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God for fellowship with him who lives and who has appointed the means to bless us Amen that and life gave who here is the life the man who

[39:02] He Palm was the■■■ and – him he came with him