

The Happy People

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- [0:00] Let's turn back to Psalm 84. Those of you who were able to be here in the morning will know that we were looking at Psalm 84, the opening verses.
- And we may just read this evening to verse 4. Where she may lay her yin, even your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They will still be praising you.
- I want us to think this evening for a wee while on verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 84.
- And to simply think about the happy people. The happy people. Most of you will know that the word behind the word blessed is a word that can be translated simply happy or happinesses.
- But blessed is perhaps giving a little bit more of a sense of distinguishing it from just general happiness.
- [1:42] But essentially the word has to do with a lightness of spirit based on something that is worthwhile.
- The blessedness, the happiness. And he says here in the psalm, he says, Happy are those who dwell in your house.
- They will still be praising you. So I want us to think then for a wee while about the happy people. And in a sense, you see, that's almost a topical thing.
- Happiness. People want to be happy. And sometimes you hear the question asked. Sometimes it's an interview on the television. And they'll say, what would you like most? What would you like to be most? What would make you happy? And they'll say, I would be happy if I was rich. Or something like that. Very often people are asked a question that probes a little deeper.
- [2:46] And they'll give all sorts of answers about what would really make them happy. But usually their answers have very little to do with real happiness.
- At least in terms of how the Bible defines what is true happiness. What makes people really happy. The Bible tells us, happy are the people, for example, whose God is the Lord.
- Happy are the people whose God is the Lord. That's one way the Bible looks at real happiness. The Bible has actually a variety of ways of thinking about what makes people really and truly happy.
- We read in Psalm 32, happy are those, blessed are those, same word, happy are those who have their sins forgiven.
- Happy are those to whom God does not charge their guilt, but who gives to them deliverance, who frees them from it, who pardons them freely in the Messiah, in Jesus.
- [3:58] And David himself, King David, discovered that although he was as guilty as he deserved to be cast away from God forever, he was allowed of God to see that he was truly happy because the Lord had dealt with his sin and his deserving of being condemned.

So the Bible has many ways of looking at what makes, what builds up a picture of true happiness.

Jesus, for example, in the Beatitudes, the Blessednesses, the Happinesses, Matthew chapter 5, the opening verses there, He looks at the qualities, the characteristics of those in whom God's Spirit is at work, and he gives a list of how it is they are happy.

What brings all these descriptions of the truly happy person together is God himself. God, in what he is and what he does, underlies their true happiness.

He is at the heart of their happiness. And you see, in this psalm here, in the verse we are looking at tonight, thinking about the happy people, this is part one really, happy are those who dwell in your house, who know that they belong to God's family through faith in the promised Messiah in Jesus.

[5 : 41] And from the standpoint of the psalm writer, which was way before Jesus came, nevertheless, the promises were made, and the believers held on to these promises that God would bring the Messiah in.

He would bring the suffering servant, the Saviour, in his own time. So they were happy to belong to the household of God, to dwell in his house, as we thought this morning.

That sense of belonging together as the worshipping, serving people of God. Happy in what he has done for us.

Happy are those who dwell in your house. And we want to think about that a little, on what brings us into the happy state of belonging to his family.

And what the psalm writer does here is he turns, as it were, he turns our thoughts to these truths.

[6 : 51] He says at the beginning there, Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young. Then he says, Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

And then he goes on, Blessed are those who dwell in your house. He fixes our minds on how we can know that we are truly happy people.

Not thinking there is happiness in the here and now things, chasing the wind as it were. But being happy in God, in what God accomplishes for us.

Now, don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying that people cannot be happy without the Lord. People can be happy.

There are many people who are happy in what they achieve. There are people who are happy with their wealth and so on. But we're talking here about true happiness. Happiness as God sees it.

[7 : 58] Happiness that we need to know we have in him. And as we've been looking at already, happy in belonging to his family.

And there's three things I want us to look at. First of all, from verse 3. And they're really taken in terms of the learning process. First of all, we are to learn from the temple birds about the happy people.

We're to learn from the temple birds. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.

Even your altars, O Lord of hosts. Now, you would never think you could learn really very much from little birds flying around.

In those days, the temple courts. But God tells us that it's possible for us to learn. The psalmist speaking to us by the Spirit of God turns our attention to these little birds.

[9 : 07] I have to say that the sparrow and the swallow are really little birds that we know about. It's an English translation of the Hebrew.

They're just the little twittering birds that are found all around, or were found then all around the city of Jerusalem. And the psalm writer tells us that these little birds nested within the temple courts.

Some interpreters think that he's talking about when the temple was in ruins, and they nested in these great boulders between the cracks in them.

But I think it's safe to say, and others take this view too, that the temple was operating when the writer spoke. And he's saying to us that these little birds, here called the sparrow and the swallow, found for themselves a nest near your altars, right at the heart of the house of God, which was the place appointed for the people of God to come and to worship.

Now, we've been trying to say earlier on today, we've got to look at the images, the pictures that are in these psalms, because the picture tells us something that is a spiritual truth.

[10:39] If all we think about is simply these little birds finding a nest in the stonework, we've missed the point.

Because that's not the point. What he's doing is he's drawing attention to the little birds, and he's taking us through pictures to something deeper, and to do with people.

And what he's saying, first of all, is that these little birds were as close as that to the very altar of God. They were as close as the altar.

And the psalm writer is not, as it were, saying he envied them. Rather, he is delighted that even these little birds were there.

They were allowed to be there. And what he's doing is he's taking that imagery, and he's saying, the people of God, the believing people of God, have this closeness to God.

[11:44] They have such security as those little birds of the air in the days when the psalm writer wrote. They were as close as that to the altar of God.

And some interpreters take up the thought that these birds, in their closeness to the altar, picture for us the life of freedom and joy found in those who live close to God.

And I like that way of putting it. The little birds being so close to the altar, give us a picture of what it is to live the life of freedom and joy as those who live close to God himself.

That's what belonging to him is all about. That's what it is designed to be. Those of us who are from the free church background tradition will know that very often we are faulty in that we tend to brood too much on what we're not and what we should be and could be.

We look at our defects and our failings and we get bogged down and we get down in here. Instead of looking at what we have in the Lord, instead of seeing that we have freedom in Christ, we have joy in the Lord.

[13:27] Joy that he has given us. And these little birds that are pictured for us in the psalm, right in there at the heart of Israel's religion as it then was, the bird is around the altar, free and disturbed.

And it's saying to us that that's the way we should be as we contemplate what we have in the Lord. And if we for a moment just look at the vivid imagery that's here and learn from these temple birds, then we learn something of how we should be through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

One writer, a modern writer called Krauss, he says, the holy place is the representation of the undisturbed and fulfilled life.

And these little birds around the altar speak to us in this way about the way we should be. About the way we are allowed to be in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our lives should be undisturbed. We shouldn't allow the negatives, what we are not and could be and should be, to dominate, to predominate in our lives.

[15:10] But we should feel at peace, at rest in the Lord in a life fulfilled because it's lived to Him. That's an interesting line that this interpreter brings before us.

Now you may be saying to yourself, well, I don't know. Maybe you're pushing it a wee bit here. These little birds around the altar finding a place to nest and disturbed.

Did not our Savior, did not our Savior, Jesus, in His earthly ministry use the very subject, Consider the birds of thee.

Yes, they toil not. Neither do they spin. you're worrying about this, you're worrying about that, you're worrying, worrying, worrying. Why worry?

When the Lord is on your side, consider the birds of the air. They don't gather into barns and storehouses, yet God feeds them.

[16:27] And the God who feeds the ravens will feed his children too. So we can learn. We're on safe ground.

Not only did the psalmist tell us this all those centuries ago, but Jesus himself used the birds as a way of teaching us not to worry, not to be disturbed and agitated.

Learn from the birds of the air. Our heavenly Father feeds them and he will feed us.

He'll provide for us in other words. And actually Jesus was saying in teaching his disciples, O ye of little faith, why are you fretting and worrying?

Learn from the birds of the air. And I'm sure that it follows both from our Savior's teaching and from the psalm writer long ago that we can learn from these little birds.

[17:37] Our true happiness is in relying upon him and not in fretting that we'll not have the security and stability that we need in this uncertain world.

The swallow has found a home the sparrow rather has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young even your altars O Lord of hosts.

That's the first thing we can learn from the birds of the air. the temple birds. The second thing is to look at the greatest privileges and still dwelling a little here on these little birds.

They dwelt literally they dwelt in God's house and the imagery brings before us their security there.

and of course as we've been saying it's a picture it's an image of what it means to dwell in God's house. But he goes on you see in verse four and he says blessed are those who dwell in your house they will still be praising you.

[19:05] Now he takes us to people and the obvious people he's thinking about here are the priests and the Levites and the singers who were employed in the temple in those days in Jerusalem.

Hundreds and hundreds of them working their shifts to ensure that the worship of God went on. The preparing of the sacrifices the offering of the sacrifices morning and evening and special occasions the whole system went on and on and on endlessly and the priests and the Levites and the singers too were there.

They were in a privileged position. They were allowed of God to daily conduct the worship and service of God.

And we remind ourselves that central to that temple worship was the altar, the place of sacrifice. That's why it's highlighted in the previous verse, in verse 3, that the little birds were close to it.

Central to the worship of God was God's way of receiving his people through the sacrifice, the blood shedding, the death of the substitute of this lamb or that lamb or this bull or that bull.

- [20 : 48] Not that there was forgiveness through these things, they again were pictures of the coming Jesus. But all that system went on and on with the pledge of acceptance, with the pledge of forgiveness, and they were able to draw near on that basis, trusting the promises of God.

And what that tells you and me is that we cannot separate belonging to the household of God, belonging to his family, from acceptance his way.

How is it that we are accepted? We receive God's provision in his sin, pictured as it was in the days of the psalm writer, through the sacrifices offered, fulfilled in Jesus.

It is on the basis of the death of Jesus, we have covering for our sins, we have a standing with God, that we can say, I am accepted in the court of heaven.

A moment or two ago, we read in that psalm, Psalm 32, Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

- [22 : 15] Happy is the man to whom the Lord does not impute his iniquity, does not put them to his account, and charge him with them. God's provision of forgiveness and acceptance, and as we have said before, the temple system held in its bosom, as it were, the picture of Jesus, the great high priest, and the one and only and unrepeatable and acceptable sacrifice.

Behold the Lamb of God, who alone bears away the sin of a world of sinners, who will receive him.

Happy then indeed is the person who can say, my sin is covered, my transgression removed. We are looking at the greatest privileges, the way whereby we do dwell in God's house and know we are in that house.

Now, you will not find anything different in the New Testament. The New Testament writers had no difficulty in referring to belonging to the house of God, the household of faith.

They were connected, not only they were connected because there were Israelites, there were Jewish, who had come to believe in Jesus, but they were connected with all those pictures in the temple worship, all the endless round of things.

- [24 : 07] They saw as part of what God had given, provided his people, so that they could belong by faith to him.

That's why I say again, the apostles had no problem with talking about the house of God and belonging to it, the household of faith and belonging to it, the family of God and belonging, the children of God and belonging all through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

belonging to the house not made with hands, a spiritual house, blessed, truly happy, wonderfully privileged, are those who dwell in your house.

We thought earlier on today about us being as living spiritual stones built up, a spiritual temple for God to indwell through his spirit.

And we are to see that, you see, as a wonderful privilege. There's nothing like it in all the worlds belonging and dwelling in God's spiritual house by faith in Christ.

- [25 : 37] to be members of his family and to know it. Happy are those who dwell in your house.

And we're to see that as a wonderful and a great privilege. But notice he takes us a wee bit further and he says this, they will still be praising you.

They'll be ever praising. The Lord's people are not only saved to serve him, they're saved to praise him. Praising him is important to us.

And you see in the passage here, some interpreters see this as a reference to the festal gatherings when the Israelites went up the three feasts of the year to praise God.

But I think that's rather narrow an understanding. Rather what is being seen here is the gathering of the people of God at all times when they went up to the worship of God.

[26 : 56] Someone has said what is here before us is the zest and the vision of this poetic picture of enthusiasm.

It's a refreshing picture. Listen to it. Blessed, happy are those who dwell in your house. They will still be praising you. I wouldn't want you to get the wrong impression about my interest in football.

But I must say there are times when I listen to crowds supporting their team. Oh, what enthusiasm they have.

I can't help but think we lack sympathy. What enthusiasm. They put their whole being into it. And that's a bit of a rebuke to us.

Who like we, said the hymn writer, who like we, his praise should sing. Praise him, praise him. Praise the everlasting king. It is a good thing to give praise to the Lord.

[28 : 11] I will bless him, said the psalmist, at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make our boast in the Lord.

Each day I rise, Psalm 145, each day I rise, I will be blessed, and praise thy name, time without end. My dear friends, these are not mere words.

They're words that should be in our hearts, so that we praise them from our hearts. Seeing the wonderful privilege we have of belonging by faith in Christ to the household of God.

Blessed, happy, truly happy, are those who dwell in your house. And you see, I think we actually let the world around us have the advantage over us.

We look at them and they're going along in their ignorance of true happiness, and we almost are tempted to think they're better off than we are.

[29 : 24] They haven't the problems we have. What we are to do is to think biblically, to think about what we have, the privileges we have, and then pity those who haven't got them, want them to have them.

You remember, I'm sure I preached on the text of Moses' words to his father-in-law, Hobab, come with us, for we will do you good, for God has spoken good concerning Israel.

He wanted Hobab to come along. Don't go back to your own land, come with us. And you see, the more we dwell on the privileges, the more we are excited in our soul by the privileges, the more we'll want to tell others to come along with us.

Because we'll be dwelling on what's right. We'll not let the negatives and the gloomy things over influence us.

We'll be full of praise of adoration for the Lord. They are happy indeed who dwell in his house. Happy, I wonder if you think about it when we're singing, singing the songs of the Psalter in the Spirit is a spiritual offering.

[30 : 56] It's offering through the Lord Jesus Christ a spiritual offering, Hebrews 13, 15, which is acceptable to God in him. The privilege of belonging, the privilege of praising him.

And we are to think about these things in such a way, to look at the greatest privileges that we have in belonging to the house of God and the praise that is to be ours from the heart.

One last thing then. Listen to the psalmist's affirmation. He affirms, he affirms in these words.

You'd almost stop and not think about the words that we're going to finish with. Let me go back to verse 3. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even your altars, O Lord of hosts.

But look at what we've missed out. My King and my God. He affirms that God is his King.

[32 : 25] He affirms God is his God. And we may benefit from listening to these points as we finish. My King You can go back and study the Old Testament history, and one of the greatest blots on Israel's history is that they wanted a King like the nations.

You remember what angered old Samuel? Is that they were shifting their allegiance from God as their King? And they wanted a mere mortal to be their King.

They wanted a King like the nations. We want a King like the nations. We want to be like the nations. And Samuel was angry with them, the old prophet, because he knew that God would give them a King and they would pay the price for getting a King like the nations.

And they did. Saul, the son of Kish, was no godly man. And it cost them a great deal and they had many a tragedy through him because they craved a King other than God.

They shifted their loyalty from the Lord. They no longer wanted him as their King. And therefore, what the psalm writer says here in affirming God as his King, my King, is not a superficial thing.

[34 : 10] This is profound, this is deep, this is important. You see, just because people's views of monarchy have changed nowadays, even in our own land, the view of the Queen is not what it was.

Some of you remember a bit further back than me, but even I can remember back in the 50s when the Queen was a young Queen and just beginning.

It's not like that anymore. People don't look up to her the way they did. I'm talking generally here. And some would exchange her, scrap the monarchy and get a president.

Some want a celebrity, some want a superstar. What a lot of nonsense, but you see, they want a figurehead that's suitable. There's no sense of loyalty.

And my dear friends, I go back again and remind you that that was the tragedy in Israel. They didn't want God to be their king. It was the tragedy of the Jewish people in the day of Jesus.

[35 : 19] We will not have this man to rule over us. We have no king but Caesar. Away with John 19, 15.

And in the Acts of the Apostles, again, they resented the view that the apostles were proclaiming not only a savior, but a savior who was the king.

And you and me, therefore, have to take this to heart. We are to say by faith that Jesus is my king. In fact, the apostles were accused of treason because they followed a king that was not Caesar, but was Jesus.

It's important, therefore, that we affirm in our hearts that we are not afraid publicly to say, I serve the king of kings.

His name is Jesus, my king. Let's humbly submit ourselves, mind, heart, and will to Jesus, and in our hearts crown him as our king.

[36 : 40] But the last thing that is here before us is my God, my king, and my God.

That's important, too, as we leave it. The psalm writer identifies himself, you see, with God. He calls him the Lord of hosts, but he says, my God.

I was interested in a debate, between Richard Dawkins and a Christian professor in the same university as Dawkins, and he was a professor of mathematics and of the philosophy of science.

And the debate, if anybody wants a DVD, I'll let you have a look at it, but the debate was most interesting. And when this Christian man, his name escapes me just now, but when he was debating with Dawkins, he said, you know, that he's the aggressive atheist scientist.

And when he was debating with him, he said, when Dawkins referred to your God, that professor was very careful to define God, to define him as the God of the Bible.

[38 : 06] He said, the name in English they used to use was Jehovah, but modern Hebrew scholarship calls him Yahweh. That takes us back to the God of the Bible, to the God of Israel, to the God who appeared to Abraham, and so on.

God needs to be defined in the way that he wants to be defined, defined according to the Bible. and I was most interested that man for all his outstanding ability as a professor in those ways I mentioned.

He was totally committed to the Lord as his God, my God. And that's the way we need to be. Committed to him in this way, not only saying my King, but my God.

Defining him the way he defines himself, using the names he has given us. Actually, we could get into a big subject there, like for example, whether you should refer to Masala and things like that, but that's for another day.

But we're to use the words that the Bible uses to describe him, and yet to remind ourselves that when we say my God, we are affirming that he is our very own God.

[39 : 34] He has made us his people by faith. And he is such a God who is our strength, to use Moses' words, our song and our salvation.

He is my father's God, said the psalmist, and I will exalt him. And what we say here applies most perfectly to Jesus, my King and my God.

Do you remember what Doubting Thomas said when he saw the nail prints in hands and feet and the spear mark below the Saviour's heart?

Do you remember what he said? my King, my Lord, and my God. He doubted no more.

And this is what we are to affirm. We're to look at what the psalmist says, to learn even from the little birds.

[40 : 47] And we're to be ready to take lessons from the little birds. We're to look at the great privileges of belonging to the Lord's house, serving him in it, and praising him.

Each day we rise. And as we said there finally, we ought to listen to the psalmist's affirmation, my King, and my God.

And to say in the quietness of our own hearts about Jesus, my King, and my God. And then when we meet people, we will be all the more ready and emboldened to say, think about him in this way, as King, and as God.

Amen.