

Psalm 84

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[0 : 00] Well now let's turn to the book of Psalms and Psalm 84. Psalm 84 and we may just read the opening verses.

Those of us who are local, so to speak, would be looking at this in the past couple of weeks. Psalm 84 on page 526.

How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her name.

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.

[1 : 04] Blessed is the man whose strength is in you. Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Beka, they make it a spring.

The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in sight.

Our text this evening comes from Psalm 84, verses 6 and 7. And I want us to think about this as it's given to us here in the world.

In terms of God's people grow spiritually through afflictions. God's people grow spiritually through afflictions.

Now, we've earlier noticed, and I think perhaps for the sake of our visitors, we should just take a moment to remind you where we've come from.

[2 : 08] And what we've been doing here is we've been reminding ourselves that although the psalm was written by a son of Korah, someone who functioned as someone who was there frequently, we reminded ourselves that although the content of the psalm here is clothed in the language of the Old Testament, it's pictorial, it represents something far deeper and more relevant to the people of God.

And we saw that belonging to the tabernacle or the dwelling place of God, belonging in the house of God, it's not about the breaks and mortar thing.

It's about being living stones in the spiritual temple that God is building through his spirit, so that we become a dwelling place for God by his spirit.

This is, if you like, the Old Testament way of putting what Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, at the end of Ephesians 2. And he talks about the delightful way that even the little birds find a home in the temple of God.

But more particularly for him, he's there, and he's glad he's there, and he's glad that God is his king. We thought over two studies on those who are truly happy people.

[4 : 01] And we saw that true happiness consists in being part of the family of God by faith. Blessed are those, happy are those, verse 4, who dwell in your house.

They will still be pleasing you. Verse 5, happy is the man whose strength is in you. We thought about that today. And whose heart is set on pilgrimage.

Not just trotting away at Jerusalem for the peace, but whose heart is set on the heavenly way. And who has a concern for the rule book of the king himself, that we're travelling the road according to his word.

So this evening we want to look at how it is that God's people grow spiritually then through their afflictions. Perhaps I should say, at least they ought to grow through their afflictions.

Because the truth is sometimes we don't. Sometimes we become resentful about the way God deals with us. That things are too hard for us.

[5 : 13] And we maybe go off track because we feel that he's been too hard for us. But in the normal course of Christian life, God uses afflictions to teach his people patience and perseverance. Often in the Old Testament this comes out when we were singing in the Psalms about it. But in the New Testament the word *cupomone* translated sometimes endurance or perseverance or patience or steadfastness.

It is a very full and rich word. And it's all over the place in the letters in the epistles. Because it's so necessary.

And God improves upon us in the spiritual life through afflictions in order to teach his patience and perseverance.

And also of course that we may rely upon him more for our help. And so here the psalm writer depicts the believer passing through as if were a dry harsh land, a weary wilderness, to the seat of worship in Jerusalem.

[6 : 39] And of course, as we were saying before, this is symbolical. It has to do with the Lord's people passing through this weary wilderness of life towards the heavenly homeland, towards the heavenly Zion.

And so it's good for us to consider then the nature of the life of faith that we are called into by the Lord. It's not the bed of roses.

It's not the believe on Jesus and everything will be fine. All your problems will be solved. You'll never have a day sickness in your life. Ravish. It's not about that at all.

That's false. It's not about the prosperity teaching that is so common that God will multiply your finances because you believe in Jesus.

These things are not biblical. If the Lord does that, it pleases him simply to do it to this one and that one. It's not a rule. No.

[7 : 47] The way of life in Christ Jesus is a way of hardship, of tribulation, of sorrow. It is through mass tribulation, he said, that we enter the kingdom of heaven.

It is the way of sorrow and sin. Now it's not about long paces then and gloom and doom. It's about the reality of sorrow and sin on the one hand and yet rejoicing in the Lord on the other.

We were singing Psalm 34 for that reason. You've got the contrast. You've got a blessing in the Lord at all times. And in the same Psalm he says, the trials of afflicted us in number may be.

That's the reality. And so what we're to do here then is to ponder how God operates in enabling us to grow spiritually through afflictions.

And the first thing I want us to look at here is sorrows turned into blessings. Sorrows turned into blessings.

[9 : 05] Verse 6. As they pass through the valley of Beka, they make it a spring. Those who are passing through the veil of tears, they in passing through it make it a place of blessing.

Now, there are variants in the translation. Here I know. For example, in some translations, the valley of Beka is translated, the valley of mulberry trees.

But it is certain that the vast majority of the significant versions, the translations of Scripture, faileth the view, the veil of tears or the valley of tears.

They take Beka or Beka as the veil of weeping. And most interestingly of all, the Sertuigan version, that is the Greek Old Testament, that was compiled by Jewish scholars because the Jews had long since forgotten the Hebrew.

And apart from the scholars, the people used the *Nengua Franta* there, the common language, which was Greek. And so they put together what we call the Sertuigan.

[10 : 39] And in the Sertuigan, this is the translation, the valley of tears. The same word in the plural form is used in Judges 2, verses 1 and 20.

And there are other references too, but that was suffice. And one of the great Christian Hebraists, who is a Baptist from the United States, one of these hugely competent linguists, and an excellent Hebraist, as I say, and he describes this as a beautiful poetical description of the present life, as one of suffering in the veil of tears.

And I find that the most succinct way and agreeable way of putting the valley of Beka. But you see there, in the veil of tears, where there's sorrow and sign, the Lord's people make it aware.

Derek Kipner, in his little IVP, commonly says there, this is a classic statement of the faith, which dares to take blessings out of hardship.

I like that. It's a classic statement, he says, of the faith, which dares to take blessings out of hardship. Yes, there's sorrow and sign.

[12:19] Yes, there's tears. That faith, days, blessing. And my image in the man's eye is digging for a well of water, where we'll be refreshed.

And so the sound makers ran, which is, he reminds us that the Lord's people, I'm going back now to the literal, of the Lord's people going out to the prescribed festivals to Jerusalem.

And as they went down, that wasn't an easy thing to do. They were going, many of them walked for miles and miles and miles to get there.

They didn't hop on a bus or take a plane or a train. They shanked his pony. They walked in. And don't forget, Jerusalem is 3,000 feet above sea level.

Don't forget that. That's only 1,000 feet less than Benes. They walked in the heat to get there.

[13:27] They walked at personal cost to themselves, both in time and energy and means. And I think we can remind ourselves legitimately that here in the Veil of Tears, in our experience of hardship in the faith, there is, there is cost.

It's costly to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It should cost us time and energy and means. Following him involves personal sacrifice.

I remember, as clear as can be, sitting in a meeting in Dorland Free Church, it was a Christian Witness to Israel meeting.

It's a long time ago now, I can tell you, decades ago. And Ernest Lloyd, that great veteran of Jewish vision, was speaking. And I remember him saying that serving the Lord demands sacrifice.

And it came home to me very powerfully. And I mention that simply, because that's the reality.

Jesus said himself, if anyone will be my disciple, he must take up his cross daily and follow.

[14:50] And he told the disciples in another place, it's cost me to follow. Using the language with the rabbinical twist, except you hate father, mother, sister, brother, husband or wife, you cannot be my disciple.

It's as dark as that. And that can make it very hard. It can make us weep a ton.

But, we are to take blessings out of hardship. We're to make the veil of tears a well-spring.

As they pass through the body of the calf, they make it a spring. And with this in mind, then, we can see our trials and sufferings as part of the all things that work together for good to those who love God.

There's a really class statement on all things work together for good to those who love God. There's a class statement in Jonathan Edwards, the New England Puritan, and he says, when it is said all things work together for good, he doesn't say all things are good.

[16:21] There are many things that are calamitous and evil and hard to believe, but ultimately they work together for good to those who love God.

and we need to have that perspective on life. That's the way we grow through sufferings. We look for a spiritual advantage over the most difficult providences and that takes some doing.

I mean, we need wisdom from God to do it. I can't say I've been following the word cat with much time wasted on it, but I've been watching the old bit here and there.

And you know, there's always lessons you learn. You can watch how people take advantage of this situation or that. My defense, that's the way we're to be in the spiritual life.

We're to look for an advantage for our growth in the life of faith. Out of situations because there's nothing out with the purpose and the providence of God.

[17:41] When Jesus talked about the hay falling from our head, which we don't like because there's another one gone and there's less, Jesus used that, yes, he used that for a purpose.

He used it to make us realize nothing, not even a hair falling from our head, is out with his purpose. He wants us to see just what a God he is and how ordered his purpose is.

That not even the little things happen without him involved. And Jesus said, even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

These things matter. So you see, it's with that in mind, we are to look for an advantage from our sufferings and our afflictions.

God has brought them in our way. we are not called upon to whine and pine under pressure, we are called to shine.

[18:54] In the valley of tears, we are to so look for advantage that we will shine for him. The psalmist says, we've been being endured for a night, but joy counts in the morning.

And that's important to us. I pause there because I was actually thinking about Annie Margaret who's gone, and I always think about her as somebody who seemed to shine.

Even when she was suffering, she seemed to shine, and kept shining. Sorry for the pause, but that's what I was thinking. And that's where we're to be, taking advantage, even of the veil of tears, the place of suffering and affliction.

And you see, for the believer, there's the temptation to go the other way. And that's why we have to focus on the positive.

It's so easy, and books have been written in recent times, it's so easy to take the wrong view of what God's doing.

[20 : 13] I'm trying to think whose book is entitled God, That's Not Faith. I have feeling he was a preacher, he's in America now, and he was in Scotland at one time, in a party even, but his name escapes me, Alastair somebody.

Anyway, God, That's Not Faith. People write books now about this, searching, because they feel that their trials are too much, and they're saying, I'm not going to change, you take the heat off, you make it easier for me.

But that's not the way. That's a hazardous approach. Listen to the spirit in the word, who, passing through the valley of tears, make it a well spring.

they make the very best use of the difficulties. They turn them into an opportunity for Christ to shine through them.

In the terms of the New Testament, you'll go, you'll try hard to find a better example than Paul himself. Sitting there as he was in a prison, writing to the Philippians, and he's telling them, he's telling them, I know that this will turn out for the furtherance of the gospel.

[21 : 48] You see that? The valley of tears becomes a place of blessing, a spring, and actually many people will come more converted through the apostle in his time in prison.

he knew, why did he know? Because he had a heavenly perspective. He knew that God was working, that even in the bad situation, God would make a blessing of it for him.

Now, I can't remember who said it, but someone said, no misery can be so great, no estate so barren, that a godly heart can make it a well, because the source of spiritual help is theirs in the Lord.

I like that. I think that's the way we're to think. no misery can be so great, no estate so barren, but the godly heart can make it a well, because their source of spiritual help is in the Lord.

And we need to go no further than to think about Jesus instead. A man, says the prophet Isaiah, looking through the prophetic vision in Isaiah 32, a man shall be like a stream of water in the desert.

[23 : 26] That's what Jesus is to us. And that's the way we're to look in the times of affliction and trial and difficult, the hard times. Jesus is come to me and drink.

And we go to him weary sometimes, unborn, and sometimes sad, but go to him and miss. Because when we do, he refreshes us in the midst of the valley of tears.

Now you may not be in it just now in such a way as I'm describing, but my dear friend, lock on, hold on to this, hold it in your memory, because it will come in useful in due course.

Jesus will be to us if we will have him, as the early and the latter reads. he is our great, not only our great teacher, he is our great supply of spiritual blessing.

I don't suppose you thought about it, but when we were reading there in Isaiah 12, the prophet says, therefore with joy you shall draw water out of the wells, wells, the well springs, of salvation.

[24 : 48] And the word for salvation there, if you don't know it, is really the Savior. And the best way to translate it is you shall draw water from the wells of the Savior.

Yeshua is the original. and that, I think John Calvin takes that view of things, that's exactly what it is. You see, in the midst of this dry and weary wilderness, full of trials, we find in Jesus, one who supplies the spiritual refreshment we need, so that we can go on.

I'm trying to remember the words, I came to Jesus and I drank, of that life-giving stream. My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.

They turn the veil of tears into a place of blessing. The last thing, strength may be received for progress.

They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God inside. Now, those of us who were looking at this earlier on, will have noticed that in verse 5, it was all about blessed is the man, or happy is the man, whose strength is in you, that is in the Lord of hosts, their King and their God.

[26 : 40] Verse 3. But you see, the sun right here comes back to that. He takes us back to the need we have of divine strengthening for the journey heavenward.

And know his progress more the law of the life of the Christian than that we need strength for the journey.

We need that spiritual refreshment from death. That's how it is we're able to go from strength to strength. Listen to it, from strength to strength.

Does that not remind you of Paul talking about faith, from faith to faith? Does it not remind you of John in the prologue of the gospel, out of this fullness we have all received grace upon grace?

That's what it is. What we need in the veil of tears here, he will supply. They go from strength to strength in him and against each one appears before God inside.

[27 : 53] And so it is necessary to realise that and to hold on to that. This is a daily exercise for us. We need to be strengthened here in this weary wilderness by him.

Someone said, I have a feeling, I just can't remember who, but somebody said, it's not only necessary to begin well, it's necessary to go on well, but it is most necessary to finish well.

God help us to think like that. To begin well, to go on well, and to finish well.

And for all stages of the journey, in all the trials, we need the strength he supplies. I was telling the folks in the morning that I study well these athletes who have such a tremendous capacity not only for doing their particular discipline, but for focus.

things. And that's Armstrong was getting a mention, not because I'm commenting on his moral attitude, but because of the lessons we learned from that kind of ability to focus, to lock on, to really narrow down.

[29 : 29] And that's the way these folk are able, in their own sense of course, to begin well, to go on well, to finish well, in the race that they're engaged in.

Or it may be a mountaineer who has done very well, and he's getting quite near the top, but he begins to weaken. And he's got to focus, he's got to really bring his energies in on that last part of the climb.

Difficult though it is, weak though he may feel, he's got to go for it. He's got to summon his resources and get on with it, so that in renewing his focus, he's able to finish well, he gets to the top. Friends, we're not left like that. We're not left to do it in our own sense. So what's the problem? Why is it that we achieve so little?

Why is it that we wallow in self-pity so often? It's because we're not getting to grips with what the Lord means when he says to us, I will strengthen you, I will repress you, I will invigorate you, so that you go from strength to strength.

[30 : 57] We need to find more of the reality of this in our experience, of the Lord strengthening us with strength inwardly.

We're far too inclined to aim low instead of aiming high. we're to aim high. We serve the great God of heaven.

We serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are not to let the hindrances get us bogged in. We're not to let the afflictions make us stop in the way.

Of course, there are many hindrances. I know that very well. And sometimes it's just the sheer weight of responsibility can make us feel weary, indeed exhausted.

And we've got to look out for that. Because such experience will make us feel like giving up and turning back. I never thought it was going to be this difficult.

[32 : 08] Well, we're in the company of a man who spoke by the Spirit of God. My flesh and heart, they failed and failed. Ah, but he says, God did fail me never.

For all of my heart, God is the strength. And fortune failure. And we're to lay hold of this and say, Lord, this is what you tell me.

Well, here I am. I'm struggling. I'm not making much of the day of the years. I'm not managing to dig very deep for the well of springs.

Lord Jesus, I'm not managing to drink of the life giving stream. Come to me, help me. We're to fill our minds with arguments like that, so that he will come and help us.

Years ago, I had a great spiritual companion, apart from the obvious, outside the family.

[33 : 17] And he died at the age of 44, and he was a great Christian, he was an elder in the Roskeen congregation. And I sat with him frequently as he was dying, praying that the Lord would spare him and that he would recover.

wasn't to be. And as he was dying, he kept a positive note, conscious that this was all about the will of God, all about God at work, at work his way.

God said, and I remember that when he was coming to the end of his days, and his focus became much more on heaven, his words were more than once, from the magical sound, from this sound, strength, and weary growth, still forward and restring, until in siren they appeared, before the Lord had left.

And he wasn't talking about physical strength, he had been a strong man, he was a farmer, he was, some folk would say he was a workaholic, but his physical strength was disappearing fast, but his spiritual strength was growing mightier all the time.

Who passing through the valley of tears, they make it a well, and they make it a well when they draw on the strength that's supplied at that well, so that they go from strength to strength, the outward man may be perishing, but the inward man is being renewed.

[35 : 17] And you see, we've got to get a grip of these things and live on them and live in them. The believer's inner strength is to come to the Lord, that can what may, we live unto him, and we may die unto him as well.

And we're not to let the burden of afflictions press us down. Let us lay aside, said the writer of the Hebrews, every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, nothing entangles us more than feeling we can't go on.

Let us lay it all aside and let us run the race with patience, looking into Jesus, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith.

And you know what? To use a children's turn of faith, you know what? We'll grow. We'll grow through afflictions because we'll be doing the will of God, we'll be doing it his way.

as they pass through the valley of Beka, the vale of tears, they make it a well spring. The rain also carries it with pools, so they go from strength to strength.

[36 : 58] Every one of them appears before God inside. And what was true on the horizontal and going up to the temple in Jerusalem, is far more gloriously and everlastingly when they see him face to face.

Amen.