

Good Home

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[0 : 00] Bow heads and pray. Our Heavenly Father, we pray now as you speak with us, we know that we are weak and we ask that you would pour out your strength into our hearts, our distracted hearts.

We pray that you would draw from us true affection and desire and longing so that we might be guided and guarded until we join you at your true home.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Please sit down. If you would turn back to Psalm 84, just read for us on page 493, you'll be able to follow along and we might have time for one other cross-reference during the sermon.

And for those of you who are visiting with us, we've been looking at the goodness of God through some of the Psalms. And one of the nicest surprises, certainly for me, has been that the Psalms that talk about the goodness of God all have to do with longing and desire and yearning of our hearts.

And part of that, of course, is because the Psalms are not only God's word to us, they're our words to God as well. But it's wonderful to watch how these Psalms of longing work.

[1 : 31] The way they work is a gift to us. You see, you think about it. They don't list out, here are the things you need to desire, one to ten and then you'll be a good Christian.

They don't berate us or manipulate us into feeling a particular kind of feeling. What they do is they appeal to us.

They entice. They attract and draw us to the goodness of God. If you were here last week at the 11 o'clock service, I don't know whether you smelt it or not, but the welcome lunch started to be cooked.

The food was starting to be prepared downstairs. And the aromas wafted up the stairs here across the stage. I don't know if you could smell it. It was driving me crazy. I was preaching and my mouth was salivating.

And as I was preaching, I thought, this is exactly how these Psalms are working. You know, they make us, they send to us the aroma of the goodness of God and invite us to taste and see how good God really is.

[2 : 35] But I know that when we talk about longings and desires of our hearts, we have very different styles. I look around the church and some of you wear your hearts on your sleeve.

Some of you are more reserved. And there are cultural differences as well. You know, if we did this service today in a church, in a number of churches in England, it would be regarded as very, very lively.

It is true. But if we did it anywhere in Africa, it would be incredibly dull. But it doesn't really matter your background or your style.

True Christian faith has to do with spiritual affections. Many of you will have heard of the name of Jonathan Edwards, who was a preacher and theologian in the mid-1700s in New England.

And he saw a tremendous outpouring of God's Holy Spirit during his ministry. Tens of thousands, literally, if people came to faith in God. And as I drove to church this morning at 9 o'clock, I thought revival had broken out.

[3 : 45] I couldn't get a parking space for blocks and blocks and blocks. And I said, finally, Vancouver has come to its senses. Until Erin told me that all the people coming out of the cars were wearing one coloured T-shirt.

And I thought, that's very odd. And then I realised what was going on. However, back to Edwards. The revival under Edwards and others came with a lot of crazy, wild behaviour.

And Edwards, a very clever man, was opposed to emotionalism and manipulation and excess. And he wrote prolifically of true Christian faith and experience. He wanted to separate what true Christian faith is from just emotionalism or just experience.

He says this, that with our minds we understand, but with our hearts we set our affections on things. It's not quite feelings, it's our affections. So with our hearts, we either like something or don't. We love something or we loathe it. We enjoy it or are grieved by it. And Edwards calls these motions of the heart affections, which I think is very helpful.

[4 : 55] Because you see, you can understand a massive amount about God. You can have great theological knowledge. But unless your heart is inclined to seek God, to pursue God, to delight in God and to love God, your faith cannot be genuine.

And it's very remarkable for us. You know, it's not just those whose hearts are disinclined towards God, oppose God, it can be complacency as well.

Let me read you a quote from one of his little essays about this. This is language, a couple of hundred years old. True religion consists, true Christian faith consists, in great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or fervent exercises of the heart.

The religion which God requires and will accept does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above the state of indifference.

God, in his word, greatly insists upon it that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged.

[6 : 10] If we are not in good earnest, and our wills and inclinations are not strongly exercised, we are nothing. Good stuff. Because the one thing most that God despises most is the lukewarm person.

And I think this is where the Psalms come in and are so helpful. Look at the language of longing in verse 2 in Psalm 84. My soul longs. It goes pale, literally, for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. And look down at verse 10. One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

It's a Psalm, again, full of longing. And the longing in this Psalm is attached to the dwelling place of God, to God's house, God's home, God's eternal dwelling place.

Verse 1, your dwelling place. Verse 2, courts. Verse 3, home. House of God. And the last section, the house of my God. In other words, the Psalm is, it's like a homesick desire of the writer to dwell with God forever, which is the deepest longing of all of our hearts.

[7 : 31] Look at the heading, if you would, and I say this every week. The in capitals at the top of the Psalm is part of the text. To the choir master, according to the gittith. Gittith is an old Hebrew word for gifford.

And... Just call me a prophet. I don't know. Nobody knows what it means.

A Psalm of the sons of Korah. Sons of Korah were part of the tribe of Levi. In the Exodus, they were given the job of looking after pieces of the tabernacle.

And in the temple in Jerusalem, they had a threefold job description. One, they looked after the doors. Security. Which is why doorkeeper is mentioned, I think, later.

Secondly, they washed the pots and pans. And thirdly, they were in charge of all the music.

Orchestra, composition, choirs, instruments, writing, hymns, songs, leading congregational worship.

[8 : 34] Which just means that our minister of music doesn't know how lucky he is. So I want to look at this psalm through three questions.

Where is our true home? Where are we heading? How on earth are we going to get there? And thirdly, what does that mean for us today? What does it mean now? How does it work now?

So firstly then, where is our true home? Where are we heading? And some of these words are so familiar, they've lost a bit of their punch. In verse one, how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

That is not a sentimental statement. This may not have occurred to you, but hosts in the Old Testament, they're not TV presenters.

Hosts is a word for armies. And the armies that are thought of as the hosts are the fiery armies of angels that surround God. It's a terrifying picture, but also because God is there, it is the place of home and belonging.

[9 : 40] I think the idea of the hosts is to burn away any other kind of threat toward us. I love your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

Your place. He keeps talking about place, house, courts, home dwelling. And what he's doing is he is touching on a very deep seam of gold in the scriptures.

You see, God created the garden paradise at the beginning of the Bible before he created man and woman. And he created the garden for Adam and Eve because as human beings we are created for place, for our place.

And we have this inbuilt homing instinct which drives so much of what we do. But the point of the garden wasn't just the luscious fruit and the fresh water.

It was a place where we were to dwell with God in face-to-face fellowship, walking and talking. It's our true home. And I know the idea of our true home is very complicated today.

[10 : 45] I talked to a guy after the nine o'clock service who comes from one part of the world, he's living in another part of the world, and he wants to live in a third part of the world. And I think today home has much less to do with a piece of soil than a piece of our soul.

Do you know, 220 million people today live where they were not born. That's the fifth largest nation on the planet. But this longing for home, which is complicated in us today, is still deeply rooted in who we are, in the essence of who we are as humans.

And it's a deep residual echo of the fact that we were created in the garden paradise in the first place, and that we long. We long for a new thing.

And we just, it doesn't matter what we do, we just can't recreate it. It's not just that we're attracted to the idea of a place where there's no suffering and evil or sin or tears or injustice, a place of harmony and love.

What we long for is to be at home with God. We long to be known and to know. We long to love and to be loved. We long to be in communion with one another and with our God.

[11 : 58] What makes paradise, paradise is not that it's a place of perfection, but it's the dwelling place of God. And you know, of course, the story of humanity is how we chose to live independently of God and marched away from the garden to create our own home.

And we live independently of God now. And the story of the Bible from beginning to end is how God created us and created a place and a dwelling place so that he would dwell with us.

And that when we get to the end of the Bible, the story of the Bible is how he recreates a new dwelling place for us, the garden city, at the cost of his own son.

So when you read the Old Testament, it is not the story of people pursuing God. It's God pursuing us to bring us back into his presence. And I think that explains something of the bitter sweetness of the mood of this psalm.

You know, those first four verses, the psalmist longs for and faints for and gasps for to dwell in the house of God. And it's sweet because he knows the presence of God is where all his needs are met.

[13 : 10] But it's bitter because he cannot dwell there permanently now. Now, that's why he's jealous of the little birds, the swallows and sparrows.

And I can't tell you the pressure I've suffered under this week. My wife is a birder and she wanted me to preach a lot on this verse, but I'm not going to. They just flit in.

They're there with God. They have access to him all the time. You see, to dwell with God, verse 10, is beyond better than we can possibly imagine. You know, take a thousand days of the best days.

What's the best day you've had so far in your life? Bring it to mind. Multiply it by a thousand. Multiply it by a million. It doesn't really matter. It won't come close to time spent with God.

An hour, a day. Or to just see the edge of his glory creeping out from under the doorpost. That's better than the best intimacy this life has to offer.

[14 : 09] So you can hear this bittersweet longing. Look at verse 4. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. Because this is what we were made for.

The experience of God's face and favour. And it only comes to us who dwell in the house. And that is where we're heading. That's the direction. That is the where of this psalm. That sets it up.

Now secondly, how can we possibly get there? And I think the question is an obvious one, but the answer is not obvious.

And I think this is where I lost everyone in the last sermon. So I'm not sure how to keep you with me. The answer comes to us in verses 8 and 9, which baffle the commentators.

You know when you're reading the Bible and you're in a passage and the passage says something that doesn't make any sense? It's usually that's pretty important. It means we need to keep working on it.

[15:10] Most of the commentators I read say something like, oh, this is just a parenthesis or it's an addition from somewhere else, which I think is lazy. This is the first time in the psalm the psalmist asks directly something from God.

Let me read you the verses. Verse 8. O Lord of hosts, hear my prayer. Give ear, O God of Jacob. Sella. Here it is.

Behold our shield, O God. Look on the face of your anointed. That's his one prayer. Look on the face of your anointed. And we know that the anointed, that's the word for Messiah.

That's the Hebrew word. Christ. It's all the same thing because when God chose his kings, he'd have the prophet anoint their heads with oil to show that they belong to him more than they did to Israel.

There's nothing random about this suddenly talking about the anointed one, the Messiah, in this psalm that's speaking about our eternal home because it was King David to whom God made specific promises about the eternal home.

[16:15] In fact, in all the Old Testament, the clearest representation that God will dwell with his people, create a place, an eternal place, are in 2 Samuel 7 where God says to David, I'm going to create you a house, a home.

Your people will live at rest. No more will you struggle with enemies. And it will be eternal. And one of your descendants will sit on the throne and rule forever. He's just, God is affirming, reaffirming his purposes in creation.

It's astonishing to think about this, that in this psalm, the psalmist, as he's meditating on the home of God, the one thing he prays for is that God would look on the face of his anointed king.

So somehow it is through the anointed king that God is going to bring us to this home. It is a prayer that God would look on his face, which we know means that the psalmist wants the father to have face-to-face fellowship with the Messiah so that we would be brought home, his face of favour and blessing and presence to him.

Let me show you what I mean. If you keep your finger in Psalm 84 and turn right in the Bible to John 14. This, very familiar words, this is the night before Jesus is killed.

[17:41] He's told them that he's going to be betrayed by Judas, that Peter will deny him and he's going to die. Chapter 14, page 901. Let not your hearts be troubled, Jesus says.

Believe in God, believe also in me. Here we go. In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

So Jesus speaks about his death and resurrection by saying, heaven is my father's house and that he is going to prepare rooms for us.

And the word room is in a permanent, eternal dwelling place, an abiding place. How will he do that? Verse 3. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself so that where I am, you may be also.

And you know the way to where I'm going. He's just spoken about his death. And Thomas wonderfully says, we haven't got a clue, in verse 5. I love Thomas. In verse 6, Jesus says, I am the way, the truth and the life.

[18:51] No one comes to the Father except through me. Here is God's Messiah. And he is saying that through his death and resurrection, he is going to provide the way and be the way.

He is the door and the way into the eternal house and presence of the Father. I just think this is amazing. It's as though Jesus has been meditating on Psalm 84 here.

This is God answering the prayer of Psalm 84. Did he look on the face of his anointed? Yes, he did. And all the goodness and favour of God are now poured out through the face of Jesus Christ.

So that for those of us who live after Jesus Christ, God sets his anointed one, Jesus Christ, before us as the way in which we see his face. And all the favour and all the blessing and all the goodness of God now come to us through Jesus Christ.

They're all tied to Jesus Christ. What is Jesus by nature becomes ours by grace. So let's go back to the psalm. Okay.

[19:59] So we're heading for the eternal home. How we get there, it's through the work of the Messiah. And thirdly, well, what does that mean now? And verses 5 to 7 in the psalm shift away

from our future home to the pilgrimage, to being sustained.

And the key is that God works through weak, weak people. Verse 5. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Not people who have strength in themselves, but people who have a keen awareness of their own spiritual inadequacy and failure. The blessing of God rests on those who don't think of themselves as winners and strong, but who've learned to draw strength from God.

In other words, they live in dependence on God. They live in close fellowship with him. And there's a terrific realism about it in verse 6. It's not effortless. It's not easy. Verse 6.

In other words, our life and our pilgrimage is through this dry and arid valley, a place you never want to put your roots down or else you'll shrivel up and die.

[21 : 25] But here is the fundamental principle of the life of faith. If we don't understand this weakness and drawing strength from God, we will either pretend in the Christian life and how easy it is to do that, or we will despair in the Christian life.

Weakness is the way. God has planted in our hearts a desire to dwell with him. He has looked on the face of the anointed and as we walk our way toward him, we do so with a growing sense of weakness and a growing sense of his strength.

If you've been a Christian for 10 years or 20 years, you have a growing consciousness of your own weakness and failure. And that is because it's when I am weak, I am strong.

Because God only gives his strength to those who recognize their own spiritual weakness. This is why verse 5 says, those whose strength is in God, those who depend on God for their strength.

And if you are feeling particularly weak and if you're feeling in a circumstance that's particularly beyond you, the encouragement here is to go to him with your weakness and draw your strength directly from him.

[22 : 39] This is so important. See, blessing in the Christian life, it doesn't come from running harder on the treadmill. It doesn't come from going to conferences and finding some new technique or experience.

It comes by the daily leaning on God and depending on him and trusting him, looking to him for light and for strength. And how do we do that?

How do we get our strength from God? How do we draw our strength from him? The answer is in the second half of verse 5 and it has to do with the geography of our hearts.

He blessed are those whose strength is in God in whose heart are the highways to Zion. You see, for everyone who relies on God, there's something in their hearts.

It's a raised road. It's a high road, a highway literally, which is leading us towards God's dwelling place. In fact, if I could put it this way, what raises the path in the hearts of believers is that it's attached to God's dwelling place and God's dwelling place pulls the road so it gets high in our hearts.

[23 : 49] Does anyone understand what I'm talking about? That was a very discouraging silence. Look back at verse 5.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you. How do we find our strength in God? In whose heart are the highways to Zion, the dwelling place of God. If your heart is fixed on that future home, what God does is he creates a highway in your heart, a road that is high in your heart.

Are you with me so far? You start at sea level, you end at sea level, the road's flat. You start where we are now. Your destination is the dwelling place of God.

There's a highway in your heart. And if the roadway, if the path, if the course of your life is attached to the heavenly city, the dwelling place of God, it will raise our hearts.

Let me explain what I mean. It's not that the longing for the city is something separate from and disconnected from the daily circumstances of our lives. They're the two sides of the one coin.

[25 : 08] To fix your heart on heaven, that's what it means to draw strength from God today. That's precisely what it means to depend on him and his promise. If you know your weakness, go to him.

Remember he said, I'm going to come and take you to be with me so that where I am you may be also. So the longing to dwell in God's house is not some occasional, fairy, inspirational thought.

It's food for our hearts daily. And over time it changes the shape of our hearts. It changes the journey of our lives. It changes where we're heading.

It changes the angle of the steps, if you like, of our lives. And this affection doesn't just affect ourselves, it affects those around us. That's the point of verse 6.

See, as they go through the valley of Bacar, the dry and dreadful valley, they make it a place of springs. If you're a believer in whose heart your heart is attached to the heavenly city, it means you will make the valley, the desert, a place of springs for those around about you.

[26 : 25] See, this is the Christian life. The Christian life is we will trudge and trudge our weary way until we finally get rescued for heaven. No, no, no. We do what we can to make Bacar a place of springs for others, precisely because our hearts are set on the house of God.

How do we do this? How do we make the place around us a place of refreshing springs? How do we be a life-giving source to others? It's not by being a busybody or by neurotically wanting to help everyone else.

But it's because you know your weakness and you draw your strength from God. And that strength from God, because it is the strength of God flows to others around about us. You see, verse 6 says, they make it a place of springs because the early rain covers it with pools.

The early rain, that is from God. If you want to be a blessing to people around about you, you look to God and where does the early rain fall first?

It falls on the high road and then it flows to those around about us. That is why God has put you in your present circumstances. Some of you are facing awful things.

[27 : 36] God has not done that just for you and for your sake, but it's for you as you draw strength from God and it shapes your heart. Some of the blessing and the rain of God will flow out to others around about you.

This is the way it works as you draw strength from God. We go from strength to strength. We know we're weak. The Lord strengthens us in a circumstance and then we know we're weak again.

He doesn't fill us up like batteries so we're ready to go. No, no, He only gives us His strength before. He gives us the strength as we're going through it.

And do you know how much strength God gives us? He gives us enough for one day. Just one day. This is the way dependence on God works.

Did God give you enough strength yesterday? Yes, He did. Will He give you enough today? Yes, He will. It means you're blessed, brothers and sisters.

[28 : 37] It means we're doubly blessed. It means we're triply blessed. We have the hope of the true home. We have all the goodness of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And we have the assurance of His refreshing strength along the way. Amen. Amen. Amen.