

Good Home

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name, amen. Please you can be seated. Good evening, everyone. My name is Aaron Roberts. I'm the minister for this service. If you're new, I'd love to meet you. Just let you know if you want to find out about what's happening around here. We have a Facebook group. That's probably a really good way to get to know what's going on around here. Okay. Psalm 84. I've really loved the series and the Psalms. One of the big things that's come through, I think, in these last few weeks has been the idea of experiencing God, of enjoying God. From 34, that line, taste and see, the Lord is good.

And from 63, in the shadow of your wings, I will sing for joy, my soul clings to you. I mean, it's beautiful stuff. And as I've been going through these passages, I've been sort of thinking about my own Christian journey and how God brought me to faith. And as I think, as I look back, I'm really grateful for my Christian days, my early Christian days in the charismatic church, which is where I came to faith. But in that kind of environment, if there was a fault there, I think it was that I was at times overly concerned with experiencing God. There was, I became this sort of like, my faith was only legitimate if I had this kind of like thing going when I thought about God, right? A lot of heart stuff. It became primarily important to me. So I've been thinking about that and then thinking about where I am today and as being very grateful for a theological education. And as I've sort of considered that, as I've read these Psalms, I've started to think about, you know, if there was a weak point in that, if there was a, if there was a weak point in that, it's that at times when

I was in the academy, it was like, it makes it sound fancy, when I was at school, I was, at times I became solely focused on knowing the right things about God, like getting all my ducks in a row. Now, of course, both these things are really important. It is really important to think rightly about God. And having a heart whose affections are directed towards God is obviously really vital as well. It's like having an awesome collection of cookbooks and knowing the science of cooking, right? But you also want to eat the food you see in those pictures. That's why we need both of those things. And of course, the knowledge of God God is a passion for God. A heart whose affections are directed towards God. I mean, these things, these things go together. They should go hand in hand because experiencing God, praising God from a full heart is the natural consummation of understanding God. As Packer says, theology should lead to doxology. And I hope you've been getting that idea just in these last few weeks.

Now, our psalm today, Psalm 84, is theologically rich and it's filled with praise. And it talks a lot about this, or it gets this idea across of a soul joy, a soul joy that comes from knowing God's presence. And so it's filled with joy and it's filled with longing and it's filled with yearning. The yearning of a pilgrim. So the person who wrote this wanted to be where God was. And in the Old Testament, that was the temple. And of course, God is omnipresent, but in the Old Testament, the place that God chose to manifest his presence in a special way was the temple, before the tabernacle. So we see the writer really wants to be there.

He wants to be at this place. He wants to be in the courts, verse 1, in the dwelling place, verse 2. His whole body, if you look at the words there, his whole body is aligned in that direction. It talks about his soul, his heart, his flesh. Every part of him desires God's presence. Every part of him is homesick for this physical place where he's experienced God. Now, the closest I've come to this kind of homesickness outside of my religious sort of experience is, so when I was really little, in New Zealand, we had a show, I don't know when it was on in America or whether it was on in America, it was called The Wonderful World of Disney. And was that a TV show? Yeah, so it was on Sunday nights in New Zealand at six o'clock. And I'd watch that every Sunday night.

[4 : 46] And at the start of the show, it was always just, you know, like a Disney movie or cartoon or something. But at the start of every show, they have the Disney opening, and they have the castle lit up at night with the fireworks going off and, you know, Tinkerbell flying around. And all through my childhood, I watched that and I thought, oh, that just is the most amazing place in the world.

It must be the most amazing place in the world. And I longed to be there. Never thought I'd ever get to go to Disneyland. When I was, when I finished university, some friends of mine did a season, we did a season snowboarding in Lake Tahoe. And on the way, we went to Disneyland. We stopped at Disneyland in California. And I remember going through the gates. Pay your money. And you kind of walk like this. It was a very vivid memory for me. Walk along, and then you turn, and this is Main Street. So I turned into Main Street, and there was the castle at the end of Main Street, and I started crying. I literally started, I was 26 years old, and I started crying. Because I'd realized, it's true I realized this dream. I'd realized the dream. I'd longed for this place so long. That's the closest I've come to outside of a sort of a religious experience. All right. So, so this, this, this guy here is just yearning to be where God has chosen to sort of reveal himself in a special way.

Verse 3, it's a lovely line. Even a sparrow finds a home in your altars. He's, he's envious of the sparrows, the most insignificant of creatures, right, in the Bible. These little birds. He's envious of these little birds, because they, they get to live by the altar. They can get a, like, raise their kids, and there's little nests there, and, and, uh, which is remarkable, because I don't, I don't know why sparrows would want to be near a place that small birds are regularly sacrificed. But anyway, he's jealous of these little creatures. They get to be there. They get to be there.

That's kind of the first section of the psalm. It's in, it's in three sections, four sections, kind of. And this first little section, this kind of yearning section, ends with a beatitude. A beatitude is a blessed statement, okay? Verse 4, blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. Presumably he's talking about the priests who get, who get to live there year-round. So this first section, it's very wistful. I really want to be where God is.

Now after 70 AD, 70 AD after Christ, right, the temple was destroyed, as you know. And so the literal temple was no more, but it was superseded by something far superior. It was superseded by, um, the people of God. You know, the Christian congregation, this is, this is the temple now.

[7 : 43] In biblical language, in biblical truth, this, this is the temple, not this, this. You guys are the temple. Just a couple of, a couple of passages here from the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 3, do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. But God's temple is holy and you are that temple. And 1 Peter 2, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Folks, like the psalmist, we, we should yearn to be in God's presence, which means we should yearn to be with God's people. We can't live in church. But we should see this, this time together as better than, you know, a thousand elsewhere. The reason for that is because God's big plan, is to gather a people for himself. That's his, that's his thing. Gathering a people for himself.

This is what this is. This is not like, you know, God's big plan is something else and he's kind of like, he does this cool thing where he gets some people together once a week and we have a good time and here's some cool stuff. No, this, this is God's big plan, that he has a people for himself.

This is the beginning of God remaking the world. That's why this is so important and why we should yearn for it. Back to our psalm. So this guy's yearning to be in the temple. But does this mean when he's not there it's just awful?

Like he's outside of God's protection? They're just miserable for him? Well no, it's not. And that's what the next section is about. Verses 5 to 7. Blessed are those whose strength is in you and whose heart are the highways to Zion.

[9 : 42] As they go through the valley of Becah, they make it a place of springs. That early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God and Zion.

So the first section is yearning. The next section is journeying. So it begins with a beatitude. Blessed. Blessed it is to be on the road to the temple. To be pushing through even when that pilgrimage is tough.

The valley of Becah. Becah are these trees that grow only in really arid places. And it's also the word for weeping. So on the way to God's presence the pilgrimage is tough.

There are valleys to go through. But it says this can be a place of springs. And you can actually hope that the rain will come and break up the ground and bring life.

The Christian life can be despairing. It can be very, very tough. And of course we want to get through that stuff as quickly as possible. But we have this idea here in the psalm this amazing idea that even terrible times can be transformed.

[11 : 05] The word pools in this passage. This is it says that pools will start to form. This is the Hebrew word that also means blessing. That blessings will come. So on your pilgrimage.

It's a pilgrimage we're on. Let's not just pray you know God make it stop. God make it go away. Let it be quick.

Pray that God would turn the lifeless places in your life into places of blessing. That would transform those times.

Ask God to transform those times in your life. That's the prayer you want to be praying. I used the example of my daughter a few weeks ago and I'm just indulging me again. I want to use it again.

Slightly different example though. When our daughter B was when we found out at 20 weeks that there was a problem that the doctor called us on a Saturday night and said says Aaron there's a there's a problem with the brain.

[12 : 09] This is I don't know what this means but this is this is serious. It was a very dark time for us. And of course we're like God just sort it out.

Would you just sort it out? I don't want to think about this. I don't want to deal with this. But God in his great mercy and great grace brought rains pools to break up the dry ground.

And one of the ways he did that one of the blessings that has really come out of this whole experience for us is this is it's like God shined this laser beam into this very this terrible part in my heart and it was a terrible part is that I wanted this perfect family because my family was a bit dysfunctional.

I wanted the perfect family. I wanted little you know beautiful blonde kids that would be amazing sports people and would do well at school and would you know have fantastic careers and go to the best schools and take care of me and and we're just kind all the time and what a goodness what an expectation to put on your children right I wanted perfect you know we had these perfect Christmas cards when it was me Amy and Sadie we had these beautiful Christmas photos and and God God showed the vanity in my heart when we knew that our child wouldn't be a typical child and the vanity was well it was very very dark and God shined this laser beam on that and said brother you need to wait and call me brother he said

Aaron you need to sort that out and he brought life he brought life it's an awful thing that existed in my heart and an awful thing that kind of could have ruined my children with the amount of the expectations it would have placed on them a friend of mine after we sort of got the news as a child in a similar situation and she emailed me and said your child will hilariously fail to meet all the milestones welcome to the wonderful world of uncompetitive parenting it's been true it's true it's a wonderful wonderful blessing that God has brought he has taken this dry ground this dark place in our life and turned it into a wonderful place of blessing and I'm a better parent for it a better person for it I think so if you're in that valley remember you are a pilgrim you will pass through it but don't just sort of think make it stop

[15 : 00] God don't just think well I'll just grip my teeth and kind of bear it pray for God's mercy in your life and pray that God will turn that around into a blessing that he will bring some kind of life to an impossible situation and I'm asking you to be hopeful in dark times even in the worst situations I'm asking you to be hopeful and in the darkest of times this hope is it's hope in its purest form I think so our psalm continues verses 8 and 9 this is an interesting little point in the psalm it seems there's a break in the flow of the text and in verse 8 the psalmist asked God to listen to his prayers and he says look on your anointed now you know the anointed word that's the Hebrew word

Messiah it's the Greek word Christ so the Messiah the Christ the anointed one this was God's chosen king and so when God chose somebody he would anoint them and it was it was God's way of saying that this person now belongs to me more than they belong to you right and so that looking idea look on your anointed the look is pay attention to so it's praying it's praying for God's anointed one right but why why why sort of break the sort of the flow of the text here to pray for the king well this is because the king was central to the life of Israel right he was the great hope of the people so when the king was good and did his job everything was good and when he was dodgy it affected everything now we remember David from last week's psalm we remember his his his troubles his sin that the profound effect that had on on other people it's a major theme of the bible right like our welfare is the old testament anyways is inexplicably linked to the goodness of the king and these old testament kings never lived up to the expectations now as christians we see that god has answered this prayer in a way that no one could have imagined and the good king finally turned up in jesus securing for us our eternal hope the last section verses 10 to 12 for a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere i would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of god than dwell in the tents of wickedness for the lord god is a sun and a shield and the lord bestows favour and honour no good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly a lord of hosts blessed is one who trusts in you you know it begins with one of the most famous lines right in the whole psalter one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere i try to imagine my best thousand days ever and try to imagine that like what would be your best thousand days i sort of thought something probably europe for a thousand days that would be awesome staying in luxury hotels travelling by train train is such a romantic way to travel it's a wonderful way to travel that's of no interest to you but that's what i came up with the best days i can imagine the soldier here says are still not as valuable to you as one day in god's presence then he goes on to say you know it's like in fact i'd just rather be a doorkeeper i'd rather be have the lowest job in god's place than the best place than the best job in the best place in the world what a wonderful attitude to have and it's one that doesn't come naturally to us it's one that comes when god has changed your heart and in this last section there are these statements of faith and gratitude that i think the pilgrim traveller must have to stay on the journey and here they are as we sort of draw near to a close here the first one is we must believe that our greatest need is not wealth or power or sex the big three people hold up right our greatest need is to be in god's presence secondly we must believe that god is our son sun sun in verse 11 our source of life and our shield our protector otherwise we'll get tempted to think that our source of life is our own ability to get on with it to make something of ourselves and our shield is our educational looks or charm or job or whatever it is but that's going to

be the thing that holds off all the bad things in our life goodness such small things aren't they when i list them off wealth and power sex and looks and charm and job and education such small fragile things that can be so easily taken from us so small compared to a strong trust in god which is what this calls us to so summing up here we have this wonderfully wistful psalm a pilgrim psalm this guy is just desiring more than anything else to be in god's presence in the temple he knows he's not there he's on the journey and yet he still believes he's under god's protection and god still has influence over him i mean this is us isn't it as christians we are pilgrims we know something of god's presence and his power but we long to see him face to face and we want the difficulties of life to go away but we hope that god will bring life and transformative power into our darkest places and in our darkest moments so folks desire the presence of god as it's found in your time with god in the gathering of god's people and family devotions or bible studies just protect those times desire them yearn for them and pray that when you aren't there that you'll know god's strength to walk with integrity and trust amen