

Friday Evening - The Highways to Zion

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[0 : 00] Psalm 84 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

I suppose at a time like this, it is a time of course of reflection. The Bible teaches us that before we come to the sacrament, that we are being called to examine ourselves and to engage ourselves in that spiritual discipline.

To reflect on our own spiritual lives and our own spiritual condition. But we come to a time like this loaded with our own expectations and our own hopes.

That there are things that we are looking forward to. Things like gathering together or having fellowship. Remembering the Lord's death in a public way and declaring our faith in him.

Maybe we have expectations of ourselves and of others. Maybe we have hopes concerning our meeting with God in our worship together.

[1 : 48] And I'm sure you have your own hopes and expectations. But I'm also quite confident in what I would say that I'm sure for all of us, our greatest spiritual aspiration is that on the end day, we will be brought into the Father's house.

That our greatest spiritual longing and desire is to be in a place called heaven. The place described in the Bible as a place for God's people.

Where the Lord tells us that there is much room there. And he has gone to his death in order to prepare a place for his people. It's a place where there is no more suffering.

No more pain. Where there is no more death. Where we will arise if we are to enter in. And we will be like Jesus.

And these things surely are the greatest spiritual hope that we have. And yet also it should be our daily hope and expectation.

[2 : 55] It should be our own sense of longing towards heaven. And engaging in that journey even here and now. And this evening I just want to spend a little bit of time here in Psalm 84.

And I'm sure for many of you the psalm is very, very familiar. It's one of these psalms that many people have learned. It's a psalm that many people enjoy singing.

And can record what the psalm says. And maybe there is even an understanding of what the psalm is teaching. It's a very positive psalm.

Some of the commentators call this a pearl of a psalm. Spurgeon referred to this psalm as the most sweet of the psalms of peace.

And it's a beautiful psalm the way it's framed and its emphasis and how positive it is and how positive its message is. And we learn immediately as we enter into the psalm that the context is worship.

[3 : 58] That it's about the worship of God. And the psalmist himself in his own spiritual desire to be in the place of worship. And his great longing and yearning to experience God.

The psalm here is a psalm that is expressing both love and devotion on the part of the psalmist. In verse 1 he speaks of how lovely is your dwelling place.

It speaks of the place of worship. And yet also it speaks of the one who is to be worshipped. And the psalmist is able to see beyond these physical pictures.

Beyond even the walls. Beyond even what he is engaging here on earth. In order to see the reality. To see with the eyes of faith the things that are unseen. Beyond this world. Beyond this life. As the Lord takes his people from grace to glory.

[5 : 03] And to experience the greater reality of what our worship here. Even at our time here. Is speaking of. In the flavor of its eternal dimension.

And in our own uniting together. With the heavenly chorus. Singing praise to our Lord. And when the psalmist here is writing the psalm. It's a psalm of longing.

In verse 2 my soul longs. He wants to be. In this place. He wants to be amongst God's people. In God's dwelling place. Because he's cut off from it.

He speaks but of memory. And he misses God's people. He misses God's house. And he wants to be.

With God. His soul longs. For the greater reality. For the greater reality. Of the unbroken fellowship. With God.

[6 : 02] Forever. The psalm itself. In its origin. I suppose. It may seem a little complicated for us. To understand where the psalmist comes from.

But many of the older commentators. Refer to the author as David. Some people would. Postulate something else. But really the language of the psalm.

Fits in. With that understanding. And they would say that. This is David fleeing from Jerusalem. As Absalom. His own son. Has taken the throne.

And David is cast out. And fleeing. In the wilderness. And I would really. Agree with what we may think. In terms of the language. And the poetry. It's something we would expect from David.

And also the deep spiritual experience. That we see here. That this is a person. Who has these great spiritual experiences. And we would ascribe this too.

[6 : 59] To David. And these experiences. That he faces. Let's look together then. Briefly. At the psalm. And first of all. I want to. Just to. Begin by saying that.

The heavenly pilgrim. Is a happy. Condition. This is a psalm. About heavenly pilgrimage. And yet he speaks here. In verses 1 and 7.

In terms of the dwelling place. Of God. And Zion. And these of course. Speak to us. Of his great longing. And his desire. And his delight.

When he is there. He loves to be. In the dwelling place of God. In God's tabernacle. He longs to be. In Zion. And yet here he is.

Speaking and writing. From the point. Of isolation. And being cut off. And he yearns. To be. There again. In verse 1. The dwelling places.

[7 : 57] The word tabernacle. It refers to the ark. And. We are to understand. That the ark is. In Zion. In verse 5. And in verse 7. He speaks of Zion. The ark.

Only came. Into Jerusalem. When David was king. And of course. After David. Solomon built. The temple. So it was no longer. The tabernacle.

Or this ark. But the ark is then. In the temple. So we understand. That this is David. And his desire. Is to be in God's house.

In verse 4. He says. Blessed are those who dwell. In your house. He wants to be. In God's house. This is what he longs for.

And here he reflects. On those who are going. Into God's house. They are ever singing. Your praise. These are the people. Who have this great privilege.

[8 : 52] Of being in the house. Of God. And he speaks of a time. Of religious fervor. In Jerusalem. One of the great feasts. Maybe. And he reflects.

And he remembers. What Jerusalem is like. At that time. Of great anticipation. As the people of God. Gather together. In worship. They gather together. Before the Lord.

To sing his praise. And to worship him. And David. Thinks on these things. He remembers. These things. And he desires. That he was there.

In the great excitement. And anticipation. Of the worship. Of God. He wishes. To be there. To experience. Once again. What it is.

To enter in. To God's house. To experience. What it is. Again. To be in the tabernacle. To experience. Once again. What it is. To be with God's people.

[9 : 48] And yet. David. Has gone even further. He longs. For the experience. More than anything. To be with God. And God's presence.

Again. That's what he misses. Jesus. That's what he longs for. Above everything else. Here he is. As a man.

Who's been put out. Of his own city. Cast off. From his own throne. And all he longs for. Is the experience. Of God's presence. Again. In verse 2.

My soul. Longs for you. My flesh. And heart. Are singing. For your joy. Why? Because when you've. Experienced.

God. There is nothing like it. And all of these things. They are only pointing. To the greater reality. And this is what he misses.

[10:43] He misses more than anything. As he reflects. In his own memory. In his own past. And in his own history. And what it was like.

Being there. And the power of God. Being felt. In his own heart. And soul. And he stands. In the wilderness. And he longs.

For it again. And how he misses it. And he wants it again. But can't you see.

That he wants it. More than just. In a temporary way. He wants the greater. Reality. The reality of. The holy hill. The tabernacle. God dwelling. With his people. The Zion. The house. It's God he longs for.

[11:39] And the father's house. He longs to be. In heaven. He speaks here. Very much. In terms of being.

Cut off. Maybe we don't appreciate. Maybe we don't appreciate. Things. Things. Enough. Maybe we don't even. Appreciate each other. As much as we should do.

And it's only when people. And places. Are taken from us. That we truly understand. What they meant. To us. And so.

Here is the hunger. And the longing. Intensified. By his isolation. The desire grows stronger.

And stronger. When he knows. He's not permitted. To go there. When he knows. He's unable. To be there. Maybe we too. Are taking our.

[12:35] Spiritual blessings. For granted. Maybe it is. Only times. When we're cut off. That we truly. Understand. And appreciate. What it means.

To be here. And what it means. To experience. God. And he here. Speaks of it. In verse 4. Blessed are those. Who dwell in your house.

They're ever singing. Your praise. And he's saying. I appreciate. And wonder. At what these people. Have. And he wishes.

To be there. The liberty. Of going in and out. And being in the meeting place. With God. And being able to experience. The worship. With his people.

And being there. And understanding. And anticipating. The greater reality. And he longs for this. In verse 2. My soul.

[13:31] My soul. Faints. For the courts. Of the Lord. He realizes. That this is where joy. Is expressed. My heart. And fresh. Sing for joy.

To the living God. He wants to feel. That joy again. To experience. The power. Of God's presence. To be there.

And he knows. That no matter. Where. His wilderness. Will take him. Nothing else. Can fulfill this. Longing of the heart.

And soul. But the presence. Of God. Wherever else. We go in life. And whatever else. We do. To deal with our pain.

And our difficulties. And the yearning. Of our soul. It cannot. Deal with the issue. Temporally. It dilutes.

[14:26] Our difficulties. And our pain. But it is only. When we come. To find. The fulfillment. Of our joy. In the presence. Of God. That everything.

Becomes clear. And that we can have. Our confidence. In God. You see. The psalmist. Desire this. He is one. Who is humbly.

Seeking. Our home. With God. His desire. Is to be. In this place. To be there. Again. I wonder.

What it was like. For David. Here he is. In. In this wilderness. He is the king. Of Israel. The man. Who has been. Anointed. By the prophet. The man. Who has been. Set apart. By God. And he's been. Cast out. Of Jerusalem. He's been. Cast out. Of his throne.

[15:20] And yet. What he longs for. Is a dwelling place. Of God. Not the comfort. Of his palace courts. But the presence.

Of God. To be there. With God. God. And I think. This is a very important. Spiritual lesson. For us too.

That we need. To realize. That our sense. Of belonging. And identity. Comes only. As we come. To Christ. And to come.

To realize. And experience. The presence. Of God. God. And here. David. Is speaking. Of his desire. To belong.

And to stay there. And never. To be removed. Again. And yet. He sees in this. The picture. Of what is promised. To have the faith.

[16:17] To see beyond. The things that are seen. To see the greater reality. Of what is unseen. And to experience. The pleasure. Of perfect worship.

Isn't that something. That we major on. That our worship. Is imperfect. That we criticize. Ourselves. We criticize. One another.

And yet. Our worship here. Is not perfect. It will not be perfect. Until we enter in. To the glory. Of the Lord. Till we are there.

Forever. With the Lord. And you see. As David. Is going through this journey. He is able. To realize. That his life.

Is a journey. And therefore. He is able. To assert here. That this psalm. Is a pilgrim psalm. In verse five. He says.

[17:16] Blessed are those. Whose strength is in you. In whose heart. Are the highways. To Zion. This psalm. Is for heavenly. Pilgrims. People who are on this journey.

Into the father's house. People who are on their way. Through this wilderness. Of this world. To a greater place. Of the unbroken. Fellowship.

And worship. With God. The NIV. Actually says here. In verse five. Those who are set their heart. On pilgrimage. The Hebrew. Is more in terms of.

Those who have a highway. In their heart. And this is the question. In terms of our own hopes. And aspirations. Do we have a highway.

In our heart. Are we really on. This journey. Are we really heading. Towards this wonderful. Destination. Destination. And here is the king.

[18:13] Of Israel. He's been put out. By his own son. Others who were his friends. Have turned against him. And he is here. In the wilderness. And he doesn't want.

Restoration. It's not his throne. That he longs for. What he longs for. Is to belong again. In God's house. Is to have that sense.

And feeling. That he is in the presence. Of God. And he reflects here. In verse 3. On with envy. On the sparrow. On the swallow. These birds.

Are able to freely. Come in. They're freely. Able to enter in. And find a home. In God's house. And what he longs for. Is what they have. To be close.

To God again. To have that free. And open access. To be experiencing. The presence of God.

[19:08] He tells us. In verse 10. A day in your courts. Is bet. And a thousand elsewhere. He is saying. Being with you. Is incomparable. There is nothing.

Like it. He just wants. To be there. In verse 10. He goes on. To say. I want to be. I would rather. Be a doorkeeper. In the house of my God.

And dwell in tents of sin. In verse. Sorry. In the title. It's a psalm. Of the sons of Korah. Korah. Korah. We're part of the. Levitical tribe.

And part of their church office. Was to keep the door. In God's house. And so here is the king of Israel. And he says.

It's not the throne. I'm longing for. If I would just be at the house. If I would just be at the door. If I could just be there.

[20:07] Close to your presence. Close to you. This is the humble desire. Of the true worshipper. Finding his identity.

And belonging. Just to be there. You remember. On Calvary. There was a cross. On either side of Jesus.

And one of those. On the cross. Turned to Jesus. Said. Remember me. When you enter into your kingdom. And David here.

Is using similar language. Just to be at the door. Just that you would remember me. Just that I would know my acceptance.

And my place with you. That I would belong. There. That this would be my joy. Receiving acceptance.

[21:06] And finding the presence of God. This is a journey through a wilderness. And David is reminding his own soul here.

That there is help. In the wilderness. He is here reminding us. In verse 6 also. That he is going through the valley of Beka. And here he speaks of his exclusion.

Maybe this was the most painful experience. In the life of David. Not only that his friends. That had turned on him. But that his own son.

Thought. That the throne was more important. Than David. Or God. Or God. And doing what is right. Maybe this is the most heartbreaking experience.

In the life of David. Where he is cast out of Jerusalem. Where he is set apart from the earth. And where he is like a fugitive.

[22 : 12] Through the wilderness. And he is treated with disdain. And rejection. He is cast out. He is hunted. He is betrayed.

And it is his own son. That is the origin. Of all of this. And I am sure. And I am sure. That David knew. The way this would end. That this would not end well.

Not end well for Absalom. David knew that he was the Lord's anointed. And that what Absalom had done. Was a sin.

Not just against his father. But against God himself. And here is David. And he understands. That God is more valuable.

Than all the temporary things we have. All the possessions. All the positions. All the ambitions. That what we have with God.

[23 : 09] Is far greater. And David here is in the wilderness. He tells us in verse 6. It is a valley. This is a deep place. A low place.

It is a low place geographically. But it is the lowest place of all. Emotionally and spiritually. For David. Cast off here. And he knows.

That this son. Will have to die. He knows the pain. And the grief. That is about to come. He knows what this experience.

Is going to be. That it is going to be so dark. One preacher recently said. Did David ever get over this heartbreak. Of the death of his own son.

This is what David. Had to face. He says in verse 6. It is the valley of Beka. The word Beka. In the Hebrew means weeping. This is my journey. This is my journey.

[24 : 12] Of tears. And difficulty. This is my pain. And my suffering. And yet he is saying in verse 6.

They go through. They go through the Beka. They go through the wilderness. And the valley. David knows. That it is through great difficulty.

That the people of God. Will enter into the Father's house. In the book of Acts. We are told. That it is the great tribulation. That we enter into the kingdom. We are not free from pain.

And suffering. Here in this life. That doesn't come yet. We are not free from all the difficulties. In the wilderness. And the hardships of this life.

God does not exclude us. From pain. That goes beyond words. Pain like David had.

[25 : 12] But I am telling you today. Don't reject your pain. Don't run away from it. I know you have experienced it.

I know you know what suffering is like. I know you know what a valley of tears is like. What it is like to be in the wilderness.

And to feel away from God. And from God's people. To feel rejected. I know you have your own pain. But don't reject your pain.

Embrace it. It is one of your greatest spiritual teachers. You are going to learn more about yourself. And more about God.

If you will open your heart. And be honest with how you feel. And to come to God. And to know that this is the path.

[26 : 16] That he is leading you on. The path of tribulation. But he tells us too. In verse 6. They make this valley a place of spring.

In verse 7. They go from strength. To strength. And David is saying. Even at the lowest points. There is refreshment to be found.

In your low wilderness experience. There is a blessing from God. Because David is finding out for himself.

That God's blessings are not confined. To God's house. And David is finding out what it means. To learn. To truly follow.

To make God your greatest treasure. And to make heaven. Your greatest expectation. And hope.

[27 : 16] And anticipation. That there is friend. A place where there is no pain. And no suffering. And no death. Where the former things.

Have passed away. And this is where the Lord wants to take us. But we have to realize. That we don't get there. In our own strength. We get there by God's strength. And God's help. We know this. Theologically. In our minds. It is very clear. But yet in our lifestyles. We don't live like this. We feel that we come to a point. In our own lives. Where we come to faith. And God has done this. And then we think. We'll do the rest ourselves. We'll equip ourselves. We'll add to ourselves. We'll build ourselves up. We'll walk in our own strength. And here was David. In the great high point on Israel. On the throne with the crown. And yet he has to learn.

[28 : 15] What it is to be weak. And so do you. And so do I. That we need to humble ourselves. And we need to see that in our weakness. We see God's strength. And God's power. Because your strength cannot take you there.

It's God's strength. That takes you home. It's God's strength. That takes you. To heaven. In verse 6. He tells us. To make this place. A place of springs. And so regardless. Of the pain. And the difficulty. That we're facing. Even there in the wilderness. We have to believe. And we have to engage ourselves. In the spiritual disciplines. And we have to dig.

[29 : 16] And this is hard. Isn't it? Where are the springs going to come from? This is just a dry wilderness. And David and those with him. They're going to dig.

They're going to believe. They're going to trust. That God is going to fill these pools. They're going to believe. That despite everything. That is going on around them. That God is still there. That God is still with them. That God has not left them. He has not forsaken them. They dare to believe. They dare to dig.

Are we daring to dig? Are we daring to believe? Can we see the things that are unseen? That's the real call of faith. That we believe beyond all our temporary circumstances.

And that we see God. And we see the things of eternity. And we live for them. And we prioritize them. And they mean everything to us. Even when we're in the wilderness.

[30 : 17] Even when we're there in the valley of tears. We believe. We dig. And we will see God at work. He will strengthen us for the journey. He will help us.

In this wilderness. And he will reward us. By giving us hope. By fulfilling our hope. And our confidence.

In him. In verse 8. O Lord God of hosts. Hear my prayer. Give ear. In the most difficult of situations. What do we do? Who do we turn to? Where do we go? We seek counsel from this person. And that person. We seek to meet our problems. With our own resources. That we can work. Or buy our way out of problems.

[31 : 16] That we will meet our own situations. But David says. The first port of call. Is God. O Lord.

Hear my prayer. In everything we're facing. In the wilderness. Have we prayed? In all the pain. You're facing in your life. And everything that you're going through. Have we forgotten. The basic lesson. Of the life of faith. That we're to keep on praying.

And to keep on. Believing. Because God will answer. Your prayers. No matter how much. David is going through.

He keeps on praying. He keeps on. Believing. Things are moving from bad. To harsh. True. Yet. David still believes.

[32 : 20] He still prays. Because God has not forsaken him. God is there in your pain. Shaping. Molding you. And equipping you.

For something that is far better. Calling you to see beyond your circumstance. Calling you to believe. That God's grace. That God's grace will help you.

And that God. God's promises to you. Are greater than your present difficulty. That you could stand there. Boldly. And believe.

Though your world is falling apart. And crumbling all around you. That you believe that God is there. God is hearing. God will fill these pools.

That you've dug. And that he will refresh you. And strengthen you. And that he will encourage you. And so here we're called. To keep on believing.

[33 : 19] Maybe this is hard. Because faith can be weak. And it can tremble. And love.

And passion for God. Can feel dull. And maybe we do feel far away. Maybe we do feel far away. From God's people. And God's house. And God's presence. And the essence of faith. Tells you. To keep on going.

To keep on believing. This is a journey. This is part of the journey. And you're to march through. Progressing onwardly. On your pilgrimage. Believing that there is a destination. And a home. That you belong there.

[34 : 20] With the Lord. And that he will meet. Every need. That you have. As he says here. In verse 11.

The Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold. From those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts.

Blessed is the one. Who trusts in you. You remember of course. The words of Paul. To the church in Rome. Where he speaks here. In verse 32.

He who did not spare his own son. But gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him.

Graciously give us. All things.

Paul says. If God is willing to give you his son. Surely he will give you. All things. He will give you. Everything you need. He will meet you on the journey.

[35 : 17] He will provide for you. He withholds. Nothing. From you. But he calls you. To give up on anxiety. To give up on your fears and doubts.

And to keep on going. Keep on this journey. And keep the destination in view. And believe that through this journey. Through all its hardships.

That your heavenly father knows. He knows. Can you believe that? Can you believe.

That your heavenly father knows you. And that he takes care of you. Isn't that what faith is all about?

That we surrender everything to him. Anxiety. Anxiety. Doubt. Worry. Fear. Trust. Strength.

[36 : 20] That he will fill the pools. That we've dug. That he will take us. Home. And that we will be with him. Forever.

This is the journey of faith. It has the destination. But as a journey. It has to be lived. And walked.

And you have to take this journey. You remember of course. The children of Israel. As they stood in the Red Sea. And they put their feet in that water.

And they crossed the sea. As it were dry ground. Can you believe. Can you see the things unseen. Do you know and trust.

That God is your father. And he cares for you. And he meets your need. Let's pray together. Our heavenly father.

[37 : 28] We come to you. In confession. Lord of our doubts. And how often Lord. You address them. With your favor. And your love. And you dispel.

Every obstacle. That we place. In our own journey. We thank you Lord. That even when we feel cut off. You are still there. That you love us.

You care for us. And you are committed to us. We thank you Lord. Because we are so undeserving. Help us to respond.

In a faith that is humble. But that is believing. And trusting. And living. For another world. Forgive us our sins.

We pray. In Christ's name. Amen. Let's sing then.

[38 : 27] From Psalm 84. As we have it on page. 330. these