

# Our Journey to Zion

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn again to the psalm that we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 84, just for a very short time. I want us to consider verse 7, Psalm 84, verse 7.

I'm conscious that we've looked at two or three different verses in this psalm and looked at the teaching of the psalm as a whole. I want us to look at this particular verse today.

They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God and Zion. Now as we know, this is a beautiful psalm.

And it's a psalm that expresses the real desire and longing in a person's heart to be in God's house. And a person's desire and longing to be in God's house is because they want to meet with the Lord. If you're here today, that's what you're wanting above all, is to meet with the Lord. It's not simply coming out of a sense of duty, although there is an element of duty attached to it.

[ 1 : 10 ] It's your primary desire is that you might meet with the Lord, that the Lord will actually speak to you. And he speaks to us through his word.

We want to know, and I believe that you've been here today, that that's right at the very heart of your whole desire for worship. Now, this, of course, was a pilgrim psalm.

It was a psalm that was, it's one of the psalms that was composed with regard to the feasts where the Jews made their way up to Jerusalem for the feasts. And the Lord had set these feasts out for the people for a particular reason.

And there were different aspects to it. There was, for instance, it was one of the ways of keeping the religious through, religious worship of God, keeping it alive. It was also set up to promote social and spiritual fellowship amongst God's people.

And it was also set out to test people's obedience and loyalty to the Lord. Because for some people, the distance they had to travel was great.

[ 2 : 21 ] Some people, for those who lived in Jerusalem, it was fine. But there were people who had to travel a long, long distance. They had to travel the distance of the whole land, really, to get there. So in that journey, as they would make their way, there was a lot of interaction, a lot of social interaction.

And that was part of the whole purpose of the feast. God hasn't made us to live in isolation. God has made us for fellowship, for togetherness, for oneness, for the enjoyment of one another's company.

And there must always be this sense of the social and where the gospel has flourished at its best. There is always a social, a natural spilling over, as it were, there's a social impact always with the gospel.

If the gospel isn't flourishing, if God's power is not experienced, that is where people are much more likely to be in isolation and to be in the individual.

And I'm sure the older people here will remember times of spiritual refreshing. And any time that there is a time of spiritual refreshing, you will find people coming together.

[ 3 : 35 ] There's a spontaneous desire to be together of interaction and fellowship. And that's what God wants. And that was part of what the feasts produced, was this interaction one with another.

And so they're all caught up in it. There is the worship, the desire to know the Lord, the desire for that fellowship and interaction one with another. But also testing the loyalty and the obedience of the people.

Because it would be very easy to say, oh man, it's too long a journey. I'm going to give it a miss this year. And you know, in a sense, what we do as we come, even today and on the Lord's Day, as we come to God's house, these very things are still here.

One is we are keeping alive the true worship of God. There is a social aspect to it, an interaction one with another. And there's also an element of testing the loyalty and obedience. Because it's very easy to say, I'll give it a miss. And so we find that these things are, as it were, set out before us. Now, I want us to look at this particular verse today in relation to our journey, and it's very simple, our journey on towards Zion.

[ 4 : 50 ] And whenever you go on a journey, there is always a starting point. You always begin. If you're going on holiday, you begin from home. And I suppose you're going across the world, you still, there is still a starting point.

If you're running a race, there's a starting point. If you're going anywhere, there is always a starting point. And the starting point, of course, for this particular journey is the moment that we're born again.

The moment that we come to embrace Jesus. The moment we begin to follow him. And I would ask this morning, as we begin another year, Are you on this journey?

Are you following the Lord Jesus Christ? Because if not, then you're alone in a very empty and very dangerous world.

You see, it's quite a strange thing in many ways. Because as we journey through life, you can have maybe here.

[ 5 : 57 ] Now, I don't know. There are people, and I believe that our congregation have many people, Who have never come to the Lord's table.

Have never professed publicly that the Lord Jesus Christ is there. And yet are following the Lord. Because there is an evident desire within their heart that is clear.

And people, it's very, you know, it's difficult. For a Christian to hide the fact that they are a Christian. And often you will see a growing evidence and a growing desire.

And it's becoming evident. The person themselves maybe aren't aware that others are seeing it. But the others are seeing it. But let me say today, if you're not following the Lord Jesus Christ, Then I would urge you that you would make 2010 the year that you begin to follow Jesus.

In fact, that you would make it the first of January, the day that you would begin to follow Jesus. Because you see, you can have people who work together and live together and share together and enjoy life together.

[ 7 : 08 ] And yet the sad thing is that they're going in different directions. Although in so many of the areas and aspects of life, everything is similar. They laugh together.

They play together. They work together. They do things together. They holiday together. They live together. They share in every way. And yet, at a deeper sense, they're going in different directions as things stand.

Because if a person is not rooted in Christ, bound to Christ, then they're not on this particular journey. The destination is different.

And that's why it's so important that we get in with Jesus. Because the moment that we are with Christ, then we begin to follow him.

And I would say to anybody, if there's anybody in here today without Jesus, Just as Moses said to Hobob in the wilderness, I said, come thou with us. You come with us and we will do you good.

[ 8 : 10 ] And that's what we'd say today to anybody who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ. And we'd also say that those who have begun this journey, There's nobody on that journey that will say, you know, I wish I had never begun this journey.

There's nobody who's really following the Lord will ever say, I wish I had never begun it. Now that doesn't mean that there won't be times when you struggle. There won't be times when you have all kinds of doubts.

There won't be times but that there will be difficulties and hardships. And there will be times that you will look across and look over at people who have apparently no interest in the Lord, have appeared to have no desire at all to follow him.

And their lives are going so well. And they appear to be so prosperous. And they appear to be free from every trouble and difficulty. And you look at your own life and you say to yourself, This doesn't balance up.

You won't be the first person who thought like that or experienced that. You go to the Psalms, for instance, Psalm 73. It's a very clear example of a man there, the psalmist, Asaph. He had a real problem, real issues.

[ 9 : 32 ] And he reached the point where he actually envied the wicked. Because things were so difficult for him. And things were going so well for them. But you see, we mustn't judge a situation halfway through.

It's very easy when we're going through a difficult time and see people having it, or we think having it easy. But the bottom line is this. I don't believe there are any of the Lord's people anywhere who are really following, even if they're following afar off like Peter did at one time, who will say, I wish I had never begun to follow the Lord.

That doesn't mean but that there are sometimes people who might begin to follow for a wee while, and they will then walk away. And if they do so, then that means that they have never really been rooted to Christ.

But those who are rooted to Christ, they will follow, even if at times it's like Peter following afar off. Now, while all Christians and believers are traveling in the same direction, they're not always traveling in the way that they're experiencing the same thing at the same time.

Everybody in here today isn't at the same point in the journey. For some people, you might be going through very dark experiences. Other people might just now in your Christian life, you'll be saying, you know, this is a really good time.

[ 11 : 00 ] I am really enjoying my Christian life. And that's a wonderful thing. Because in a sense, we ought to be enjoying your Christian life.

Everybody ought to be enjoying your Christian life. But what we're saying is that there are times that we struggle. Sometimes, just as God's people were taken in the Old Testament through the wilderness, we find ourselves going through wilderness experiences where things are dry and dusty.

And that's how we find it's a difficult time when we find God's Word like that. We read it and we get nothing from it. We come to church and we don't get much from it. We go in and out and we're not really changed.

We're not challenged. We're not affected. And if you're like that today, and you're a believer, it should trouble you. And I believe it does trouble you.

But sometimes we go through these times, through these experiences. But, do you know, the wonderful thing is that even when we do go through these dry experiences, the Lord doesn't leave us there.

[ 12 : 09 ] Because even in the dryness, He turns things around. And that's what we find. Even though, verse 6, as we go through the valley of Beka, they make it a place of springs.

The early rain also covers it with pools. Just as the Lord made water appear in the wilderness in the most unlikely places, whether it was coming out, splitting the stone to cause water to flow, God is able to bring and turn bitter and sore experiences so that there is actual refreshing for God's people. And again, just as the experiences are different, so our way of walking might be different. You know in the natural world, people all walk differently.

You probably don't know how you walk, but we know how other people walk. Some people walk really quickly, and some people walk very energetically. When you see them walk, the arms are going, and their whole body is going.

Some people seem to glide across the ground. Other people shuffle. Some people limp. Some people walk really slowly.

[ 13 : 25 ] Other people are nearly running as they walk. All different types of ways of walking. And when that's true naturally, it's also true spiritually.

God's people are walking today in all different ways. Some people have a spring in their step. Spiritually vibrant, full of joy. It's a great time for them.

Other people are walking really slowly. They're struggling. Some are limping. And the person who is limping is struggling even more than the person who is walking slowly.

Some are shuffling. And you sometimes wonder, are they actually moving at all? But they are. And you see, this is the way it is.

But the great thing is, they go from strength to strength. Each one. They're all actually, whether you think it or not, whether other people think it or not, they are all, you are all going on.

[ 14 : 36 ] That is what the Lord is doing with you and with me. Moving us on. Bit by bit by bit. We're all going in the same direction, even if we're not all going at the same pace.

And you know, that's one of the beautiful things about the Christian life, is that we are not like a sect where everybody looks the same, everybody does the same.

There is, in the Christian life, a wonderful individuality that is expressed. And today that is expressed in the way that there's people walking at different paces.

Just as Jesus, remember in the parable of the sower, there are people who are going to bear fruit at different levels. Sometimes we expect everybody to be bearing fruit a hundredfold.

And if they're not bearing a hundredfold, we're saying, well, what kind of Christian is that? The Lord doesn't say that every believer will bear fruit a hundredfold. Some will bear fruit a hundredfold.

[ 15 : 44 ] Some will bear fruit sixtyfold. Some will bear fruit thirtyfold. And we've got to recognize that. The thirtyfold fruit-bearing Christians aren't going to be at the forefront.

They're not going to be marching with a swing. They're more likely to be shuffling and moving slowly. So we've got to understand that.

But what is important, yes, we would wish that everybody was a hundredfold. We would want that everybody was bearing glorious fruit to the Lord.

What is important is that we are moving forward. That's what's important. If we're in Jesus Christ, let us make sure, A, that we're united to Christ, and B, we're moving forward.

And if we are united to Christ, the Lord will see to it that we will be moving forward. However, I think it's also important to notice here that if we are moving forward and if we are going, even if we're going at different paces, it is important that we are there one for another.

[ 17 : 01 ] I think mentioned before, while looking at this psalm as a whole, that there's various translations given to this from strength to strength.

This is the one which is looked as probably the most emphatic translation. But one translation is given going from company to company.

And again, what a wonderful example that is of the Christian life. Because you look back over your Christian life, and that's exactly what has happened in your experience. You have moved often from company to company.

You've been with one group, and sometimes that group moves on. Some go here and some go there. And as time goes on, you find yourself with others. There's still some maybe from the first and so on.

And this is part of what enhances life. It is part of what enriches our Christian experience. Meeting with different people, learning from different people, developing as we go on.

[ 18 : 04 ] But they're going forward from strength to strength. And what is important, if we are going from strength to strength, one of the essential things we ought to be doing is helping one another.

If you saw a group of people, supposing we were to view in upon a group of people who are making their way to a particular destination, and they're all of one family.

And as you look down at them, you saw them pushing and jostling and punching each other and tripping each other up. And yet they're all of one family and going in the one direction.

You'd say to yourself, what on earth is going on? And you know, sometimes, that's how the Christian church is moving.

And I am sure that sometimes as people look in on the Christian church, they're saying, what on earth are they doing? Because the Christian church, as they move on, God wants us, we were talking about this, the whole area of Christian unity on Wednesday night, the importance, the high view that God places upon unity, the grievous sin of disunity, of breaking up communion and fellowship amongst believers.

[ 19 : 26 ] It's one of the most serious sins that can be found in the Bible and far too often the Christian church treats it lightly. It is in God's estimation one of the most awful things that the cry, remember, is maintain the unity.

God created it. And it's a fearful sin to break it up. And so the Christian church, as they move forward, have to be moving, moving together up, encouraging one another.

If one slips, not sort of saying, oh, that is not awful, I knew that was going to happen to him, and just walk away. If you have family, you go and you try and pick the person up, dust them down, help them, on the way.

And if the church is moving forward as it should be, going from strength to strength, we're looking out for one another and caring for one another. This is the way that the Lord would have us go.

And so, that's the journey, going from strength to strength. You may be saying to yourself today, well, maybe it says going from strength to strength, but that's not the way I feel.

[ 20 : 46 ] because today you might feel as a Christian very weak. But you know this, that as you go from strength to strength at one level, you are going from your own strength into his strength.

Because it is in his strength that you discover the greatest ability to walk this way. in fact, as you go on, you discover that your own strength is not sufficient to make your way to Zion.

And I think we've all discovered that, for instance, say, in the realm of temptation, if you try and face temptation, we've said this before, but if you try and deal with temptation on your own, you're guaranteed to fail.

A hundred times out of a hundred, you can make all the resolutions and all the determination. Satan is far more powerful than you or I.

And that is why we need God's help. God has provided an armory for us. And we have to depend upon him. Jesus said to his disciples, without me, he said, you can do nothing.

[ 22 : 03 ] With me, all things are possible. See how wide that gap is? And if we are struggling, as so often we are, is it not possible that it is because we're trying to go on our own?

Samson was an awesome man of strength. Killed a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass. A human juggernaut. There's nobody who in their right mind would have taken Samson on in his power.

Was it a natural power? No. Because there came a day when the Lord left him alone. The Lord didn't leave Samson forever.

But he left him to become just like any ordinary man. What happened when the Philistines came? They caught him no problem, put out his eyes. He was just like any other man.

His strength, his great strength, was a God-given strength. And Samson learned painfully that the battle ultimately was not in his own strength.

[ 23 : 15 ] My friends, we need to learn that same lesson as well. So you see, it's with the Lord promises a grace, a grace that is sufficient for us. Now as we go on our journey, there are always certain things.

Supposing you're going off on holiday and you're going somewhere, supposing you're going somewhere you've never been before. One of the things that you will do is you will get, I know there's got sat-nav and all that sort of stuff nowadays, but before that you always had your maps. You were relying upon your maps and you were relying upon your signposts as you went down the road. Checking that you're still going in the right direction. And you know, we still do that spiritually. Because every so often we stop and say, I hope I'm going in the right way. Christians do that. And there's kind of like a renewal, a reassessment, just checking out where we are and then off we go again, persuaded that we are going in the right way.

Again, when we go on a long journey, supposing you were going to drive, supposing you decided and you say to yourself, well I'm going to go down to say Southampton or something, I'm going to drive all the way down.

[ 24 : 28 ] One of the things obviously you'd have to do is you'd be looking out for service stations along the way because you need to refuel. Can't go all the way. You need refueling. And so it is as we journey on, the Lord has provided for us signposts and maps.

Here it is in the Word. He will direct us on the way to that, to our goal. And He provides the service stations again in the Word. That's what we're doing.

That's what we've come together for this morning in order that we may feed upon and refuel because we need that for the journey. Because a long journey is exhausting and we're on a long journey.

It's a long journey. We go on and on and on. But the great and the wonderful thing is despite all the enemies and all the battles and all that we have to confront, yet each one, we're told, appears before God in Zion.

Each one. Every individual. Each one will be there. The one who limped. The one who was plagued with doubts all his or her life.

[ 25 : 47 ] the one that many people wrote off. The one who struggled day by day. The one who fell so badly.

But they'll all be there. All the Lord's people will be there. Not one of them will be missing. Each one appears before God in Zion. That's going to be the ultimate homecoming.

You know, that's one of the great things about this time of year. It's very much a family time. Very much a time where people come together. A lot of family reunions. And that's, I suppose, one of the things that, while on the one hand makes this time of the year wonderful, can also make this time of the year very painful.

When loved ones are missing. Where there's the empty place and there's always that pain within the heart. But you know, the wonderful thing is that there will come finally this reunion.

A heavenly reunion. Where there will be no separation. Where everybody will be together, brought in one by one. Every one will appear.

[ 26 : 54 ] Every single one, there won't be one missing. The Lord has reserved a place in heaven for you as people. That place is reserved. Your name's in the Lamb's Book of Life, just like at a wedding.

You're looking around, you're looking at the tables, and you say, oh, there's my place. Your name's on it. And that's how it will be. Your place is reserved in heaven for you.

What a wonderful, wonderful prospect. And that's what makes this life in many ways so wonderful. As we said the other day, having the Lord as our Lord, he is our help and our hope.

And that verse sticks in my mind. Because what a way to go into the future, having the Lord as your help. As we're considering Psalm 139 last night at the meeting, you think about who that Lord is.

The God who searches us. Remember, we're talking about that, the thorough investigation. Probes down, knows absolutely everything about you.

[ 28 : 07 ] And that word, know, regards your future. Who has searched me and knows everything, not only about my present and my past, but also my future.

To have that God, it doesn't matter where you go in the universe, he's there. To have this God as your help and your hope.

What a future. Well, as we begin another year, I hope that we're all journeying on the way to Zion. If, in your own heart, you're saying to yourself, I'm afraid I'm not, what I would say is this, you're in the best place in the world right now.

You are in the place where the Lord, the Lord is. And I would ask you, grab this opportunity, here and now, and say to the Lord, here I am at the beginning of another year.

It's high time I got this sorted. It's high time that I gave my life to you in order that I would follow you.

[ 29 : 21 ] And once you begin following the Lord, once you accept him as your Lord by faith, then you will begin to go from strength to strength until one day you will appear in Zion.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the great encouragement that the Word gives, that the Word holds out before us, where we have this persuasion and assurance that we are one day to be with the Lord.

We could never make this up ourselves. We could never know what the future held unless it was set out for us, and here we have it. And so we pray to bless us and enrich our journey through this life.

Enrich it with all the many blessings and favors and good things from thine hand, because, Lord, we know thou art a great and a bountiful giver. Bless again our homes, our families, and all whom we love.

We commit them all to thy care and keeping. Do as good, we pray, and forgive us our sin. For Jesus' sake, we ask it. Amen. We're going to conclude singing from the 23rd Psalm in Sing Psalms.

[ 30 : 44 ] And after we sing, and after the benediction, if you would allow me the opportunity to go to the door, to the front door, and I would like to shake hands with you as you make your way out.

Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, and again that is found on page 28. The Lord is my shepherd, no one shall I know.

He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow. My wandering steps he brings back to his way.

In straight paths of righteousness, making me stay, and this he has done his great name to display. Down to the last verse, so surely your covenant mercy and grace will follow me closely in all of my ways.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my days. Psalm 23, the whole psalm, the Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know. Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know.

[ 31 : 59 ] He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters grow.

My wandering steps he brings me to his way. In straight paths of righteousness making me stay,  
and this he has done this great name to display.  
though I walk in death's valley where darkness is fear, because you are with me, no evil I fear, your  
wrong and your suffering become heart and cheer.  
fear. In the sight of my enemies that table you spread, the oil of rejoicing you pour on my head, my  
power overflowed frozen and graciously fed.  
Oh, surely your covenant mercy and grace will follow me closely in all of my ways.  
[ 33 : 56 ] I will dwell in the hearts of the Lord on my days. May the grace, mercy, and peace of God  
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more.  
Amen.