

The Heart of a Pilgrim

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to be with you. So I've thought about this morning, I've been thinking a lot about longing and how these have been days of longing in many different ways.

My kids are longing for the end of school and for summer vacation and hopefully for a vacation where they actually will get to travel and see their family this summer.

I am longing to see my fiancée again in person. Many of you have other things that you are longing for. As a group, many of us in this church are longing to gather together again in person, safely, and to have the blessing of being together.

And as we've looked over in the last two weeks, we've seen a country longing for justice to roll down and righteousness to reign in our society.

Longing is something that is common to the human heart. But it makes us ask a question, why? Why do we long? Why do we long for things that are not?

[1 : 22] Well, the Bible says, in part, we long because we were made for a kingdom that is not yet here. We are designed to have a life that we only get foretastes of in this life and that we live now in a world that is not yet all that God designed it to be.

The Bible tells us that humanity began in perfect fellowship with God. But in rebellion and independence forsook the goodness of Eden and the presence of God.

And since then, we have lived in a fallen world, broken, tear-stained, and ugly. And yet still, with the rays of creation and the inbreaking of redemption, tantalizing us, reminding us, reminding us of what we were made for and what we long for.

Friends, this is the plight of humanity, that we live in exile from God and from our true home, and that this life is a journey in this world.

We are sojourners in a world that will not last forever, and we are pilgrims longing for a heavenly city that we can, a heavenly city whose glory we can only begin to imagine.

[2 : 49] This is the true source of our longing, and it brings us to our passage today. We are taking a break from the book of James, and we are looking at Psalm 84.

If you want to turn there in your Bibles, Psalm 84 we will read. And as we read this, we come to see that this is a psalm written by a pilgrim.

One on their way. One who similarly lives with longings and desires. And we will see in this passage the heart of a pilgrim.

So let's read Psalm 84 together. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young at your altars.

[4 : 01] O Lord of hosts, my God and my King, blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. And blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in Zion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer. Give ear, O God of Jacob. Behold our shield, O God. Look on the face of your anointed.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold for those who walk uprightly.

[5 : 10] O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this word.

We thank you that you speak to us. That we are not left alone on this journey, but that you have spoken so that we might hear your words and your voice as we travel through this life.

God, I pray that by your spirit this morning, you would help encourage our hearts. Lord, that you would teach us about the life of a pilgrim.

And Lord, that you would turn us again so that we might see what you have made us for. And Lord, give us strength to pursue you in this journey.

Amen. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. The heart of humanity on pilgrimage through life is pictured in this psalm.

[6 : 18] We see a pilgrim who has a heart with two characteristics. He has a thirsty heart. He has a treasuring heart. So let's look at these in order.

First, a thirsty heart. As you look at the beginning of the psalm, you see the pilgrim burst out in song. How lovely is your dwelling place, O God. He expresses this exaltation and joy about the place where he might know God.

And then he says, I long for this. Yes, I even faint to be with God. I cry out. Maybe that's a better translation of the second half of verse two.

My heart and flesh cry out in need and in desperation and in longing. I cry out to the living God. The psalmist envies the birds who are able to go and make their nests in the courts of the temple in Jerusalem.

The sparrows and the swallows who are able to come and go easily to be in that place. And at the end in verse four of this section, he says, blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord.

[7 : 32] Now he's used a number of metaphors here. Your dwelling place, the courts, the place of the altar, and your house. And all of these things describe the temple in Jerusalem.

And to understand why this pilgrim longs to be in the temple of Jerusalem, you have to understand the sweep of the Old Testament story. For when to the estranged world God came and called Abraham.

He said, I will make you a father of many nations, and I will be your God. And he confirmed this with Moses in Sinai, and he said, I will be their God, and they will be my people, and I will dwell among them.

And he instituted this thing called the tabernacle, which was a portable traveling worship center. And in that, God manifested his presence among them.

And then as the people of God moved into the promised land and established themselves as a nation, and as the king sat on the throne, as David and Solomon took up and established this kingdom, then they built a temple, and in that temple, it said the glory of God descended, and in a unique way manifested itself, manifested himself in the world.

[8 : 57] And so for all who lived in Israel, for all who knew God, they would long to go to this temple, this place, not because God was limited to that place, but because God had chosen to make that place the very special place where his glory would be manifested, the place where his people could come and commune with him, make themselves right with him through the acts of worship and atonement, and sing praises to him.

The pilgrim longs to be at the temple because it is a special place where God said, I will be among you. And so he longed for it, and he longed to be there because he longed to be with God, the living God.

So for us today, are we to long to go back to a temple in Jerusalem? No, the Bible continues to unfold God's plan for how he will be their God and how he will make a people for himself and how the Old Testament people of Israel and the nation of Israel was a picture of what he wanted to do more broadly, where he would make a people for himself from every tribe and tongue and nation. And you see the fulfillment of this idea of the temple in three ways in the New Testament. First, you see Jesus coming in those famous words in John 1.

As John writes about the coming of the Son of God to earth to redeem a people for himself, says the Word became flesh and literally tabernacled among us.

[10 : 51] He came to be the tabernacle, the presence of God among his people. And so Jesus is the first and maybe the greatest fulfillment of this where the temple is going.

It prefigures this place where God himself would come and be among his people. But it's more than that. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3.16 talks about the people of God in the New Testament that is the church as the very temple of God.

That is that in his gathering of people from every tribe and nation to be his by faith in Christ, he is building a, not a physical edifice, not a space, but he is building a community in which he dwells by his spirit.

He says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 6.16, the presence of God by his spirit. And so that's the second thing that the temple is prefiguring and pointing to is the people of God now not located in a particular place in Jerusalem, but spread to the ends of the earth, gathering in places throughout the world.

And then as we read the Bible story in the end, the future consummation in Revelation 21.22, when God having defeated all the powers of sin and death, having judged all evil and unrighteousness, having now remade the world so that it is without sin and sorrow and sickness and death, it says, there will be no more temple in that renewed world, for the temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb.

[12:43] And friends, this is what we long for, is it not? For us to be in the presence of God, our Creator and our Redeemer, to be with Him in present, in person, in perfection, where there will be no barrier of our sin and our lack of understanding, but we will fully know Him.

what a great glory that is. And friends, this is what our hearts were made for, to be in the presence of the living God.

I wonder, do you thirst for God the way the psalmist did? I know I don't, always. sometimes my heart doesn't want to long for God.

See, I don't like being disappointed. Sometimes I'd rather kill my longing. If I don't desire anything, then it doesn't hurt so much when it doesn't happen.

I don't like to live in the tension of longing for something that I can't control the outcome of, can't be sure of when it's going to come. sometimes I long for God and then it seems that He's so far away and there are other things closer by, earthly pleasures, control, success, addictions, whatever they are, things that I grab onto and say, well, at least I can get this.

[14:23] Or sometimes I just prefer despair when I can't get what I want when I want it. it's easier sometimes to settle than to thirst.

But friend, the psalmist reminds us that God has made us for Himself. And this life of a pilgrim is to long for Him and for His presence.

And we will live in the tension because the psalmist because the psalmist writes this psalm because He's not there, because He's not in the temple. He's longing to be there but He cannot be there.

And this is true for us as well. Though we have the inbreaking of His kingdom, though we have the gift of His Spirit, we do not have the fullness yet. and so we live with that longing.

And God wants us to continue in this. C.S. Lewis puts it this way, I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country which I shall not find until death.

[15:33] I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside. I must make it the main object of my life to press on to that other country and help others do the same.

Friends, when we think about our longing as a church, this is what we are called to. And I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but this is why we value gathering together as a church.

Because this is the foretaste. This is the place where we get to by gathering together in person encourage one another and strengthen one another and remind one another and long together for the fullness that is to come.

To speak of the hope that we are certain of coming one day but do not have yet and to encourage one another when we are weak, when we are stumbling, and when we want to give up.

This is why the leadership of the church has been so eager to figure out how we could gather again. And for those of you who for good reason may not be able to join us in the coming weeks and months, let this be a place where you will take hold of that longing and feed it.

[17:02] Don't become discouraged and certainly don't compare yourself with others who are, but let your not coming feed that longing to be with God's people.

for those of us who may come and do it, may we give with great joy give thanks for this oasis in the desert after a long shutdown.

for it's been a long shutdown, it's a hard road, has it not been, to be separate. The psalmist knows this in the next part of the psalm in verses 5-9, he displays, he knows that this journey is one that goes through the valley of Baccah and we don't know much about it, but we know clearly that what it's picturing is going through a desert.

And the psalmist knows how hard that can be. But in these verses in 5-9, he says, in this journey we are able to find strength in God.

And as we look to Him and as we look to His help for us, we are able not only to pursue Him in the journey, not give up in our longing, but in fact we are actually made to be, look at verse 6 again, that we will make the desert a place of springs, that in the midst of the pilgrimage of this world, we can be, because of what God has done, places where there will be a foretaste of the fullness of the presence of God.

[18:48] And this is true in our spiritual lives, this is true in our society, this is true in our church, that we can be pools of water, water, and it will come from pilgrims, and it will also come graciously from God Himself.

The rains will come, and we will drink in the midst of the desert, because God knows how hard this road is. So we're called to look for it.

finally, in this longing section, I want you to see that He changes His pronouns here from I, and I long for these things, He changes to plurals.

He says, blessed are those as they go through the valley, they make it a place. we weren't meant to journey alone.

And as Pastor Greg mentioned earlier, one of our great desires as a church leadership is to encourage you. I know for me, in the last three months, my default has been me at home alone.

[19:55] Right? That's what we've been asked to do, and it's been a blessing to our world to not feed a pandemic. But friends, we weren't made for that.

And maybe we need to figure out how to do it over phone or over Zoom, but we need to be intentional about connecting with others. I've been thankful for chances to connect with my small group over Zoom.

I've been thankful for the few times I've gone on socially distanced walks with friends where we've just been able to talk face to face. I encourage you, find places and ways to do this.

as much as you can, and everyone's situation is different. There is no absolute standard to meet here, but recognize that as we long for God, we are meant to do it together, and we need one another to continue on this road.

So the heart of a pilgrim is one who thirsts. The heart of a pilgrim is also one who treasures. And this is what we see in verses 10 through 12. A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

[21:13] I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. The psalmist says, the reason why I long for God is because God is of such great worth that the highest value that I could give to anything in life would be to be in his presence.

It is a treasure. And a doorkeeper in the house is not per se in this psalm a role. It is instead a position.

I'd rather be just on the outskirts of the Lord's house. I'd rather be close. I would treasure that above anything.

A thousand days elsewhere couldn't satisfy but one day being that close.

This is the treasure. And it's easy sometimes for us to treasure other things, isn't it?

[22:22] It's easy for us to treasure maybe things that are easier to control. Things that we can gather and do on our own.

Things that we can escape to that for the moment will help us feel better and resolve the tension of the longing life that we live. Perhaps it's worth reflecting what have I been obsessing about in the last couple of weeks or months?

Maybe it's worth thinking about where have I found anxiety overwhelming me in the last weeks?

What are the things that I find myself talking about more than anything else? What do I find my mind going to over and over again? Friends, for this psalmist it was God himself and being in his presence.

and I wonder if we have become distracted and the psalmist says the thing is that when we look at God when we actually pay attention to him he is glorious beyond belief and he is all that we want

and need.

[23 : 40] He is a treasure. It's not a question of whether he is worth that attention. It is simply a question of whether we recognize it or not. this is what he says in verse 11 for the Lord God is a sun and a shield what more could we want in life than an ever producing ball of fire that gives light and life to all things in our cosmos.

Okay, so that's an exaggeration. In our solar system it gives all in our world at least the sun is the source of all the energy and all the light and God is like that in our world as the creator and sustainer of all things.

God is the one who bestows on us after a long winter how do we long for the sun to come and bring its warmth? How does it lift our hearts? God does this tenfold hundredfold to our souls and to our spirits regardless of the journey that we're on and the trials that we face and he is not only that this life-giving source but he is also our shield he is our head our protector our overseer he is like a king who oversees his kingdom and as a shield protects gathers provides and loves those that he is over and not only that but he bestows favor and honor one commentator said that this might be better understood as we look ahead to what the psalmist is pointing to favor and honor sound like God may give us an extra day off a bonus check in our paycheck a special gift something like that but he said actually this might be better translated that God is giving us his grace and his glory his grace that is his undeserved acceptance of weary pilgrims like us whose faith falters whose hearts are weak he gives us that acceptance and welcome come into my house and be my people be a part of my family I will be your heavenly father this is the grace that he offers us and it is also his glory that he invites us not only into his presence but he invites us into the richness and the beauty of his kingdom and of his goodness and of all of his characters and it's not something that we simply observe but it is something that we participate in it is something that we are able to become a part of he bestows upon us his glory so that together we reflect and resound and magnify his glory and this is why God is a treasure above all and so

Paul in Philippians 3 says I count all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ and being found in him not having a righteousness of my own but a right having one that comes by faith I press on towards these things because of the surpassing treasure of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord now friends it's easy at this point to read this psalm and to hear this message and to think that what I'm saying is alright it's been a hard season buck up long harder treasure better keep going you have to pull up your bootstraps and get on with it and friends there is a sense of exhortation in this sermon for us to set our longings right and for us to set our treasuring right but the good news of the gospel is that there's a better story than us trying harder to do better it is that Christ took his own pilgrimage and came he left heaven to come to earth for us he walked a pilgrim road of hardship and suffering of persecution and death for us and he did it with such righteousness he is the righteous one from whom

[28 : 44] God does not withhold any good thing he has done what we cannot do in walking righteously before God and he came and did this for us so that we might have an acceptance with God and a righteousness with him and a presence and the right to become his people and to walk into his temple and into his presence we have the right to do that not because of anything that we have done not because we succeed in being the best pilgrims today or next week but because in our faltering faith and in our weak hearts and when we lose sight of the treasure Christ has taken a hold of us and when we have been joined to him by faith he says you are now mine and I will take you and the work that he has begun in us he promises he will bring it to completion he has come to do this for us to win himself for a people a people who are called pilgrims who are going home a home that God has achieved for us in Christ a home in eternity that we are certain of going to and a presence of his Holy

Spirit along the way friends this is how the pilgrim walks with a longing heart for the fullness of what Christ has already done for a treasuring of the things that Christ has already done for us when we do this then we can pursue and walk the road with hope and not give up may this be true for us let's pray Lord we thank you for this word Lord we you by your spirit Lord renew our hearts today Lord we pray that you would Lord implant in us and revive in us our longing for you oh Lord may you help us to see how great a treasure we have in you and will you guide us oh

Lord on this pilgrimage may it be your strength that is our strength we pray these things in Jesus name amen say what be what did this act on him and have a honor as hi and have this other same as as I saw them and have as oh to right