

Rev Murdo Campbell: Psalm 84

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] If you could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if you could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read and that we were singing, Psalm 84, Psalm 84 and we'll just want to look at the whole Psalm but we'll just take as our text the words of verse one. Psalm 84 verse one, how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. Out of our 150 Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs which we have gifted to us in the book of Psalms, it's inevitable that there are some that we would describe as our favourite Psalm and not that we would consider them to be more important or more inspired than any other Psalm or any other part of scripture but there are particular Psalms which stand out for us because as individuals who go through different experiences in life and encounter different providences throughout our life, there are certain Psalms which we would consider as particularly precious to us either because it's encouraged us at a difficult time or it spoke to us powerfully or it was used by the Lord to shape our life in a particular way and you know the Psalms they are precious to us and we ought to see them as precious because they speak to the soul. Is that not how John Calvin famously described the book of Psalms? He called it the anatomy of all parts of the soul because the Psalms they have this unique ability to address every area and every circumstance and every feeling and every emotion that we go through in our lives and this is what makes the Psalms so wonderful that they're able to speak to our soul in a way in which no one else can or nothing else can and you know

Psalm 84 also has that ability because it's not only a favourite with many of the Lord's people but it's a Psalm that reminds us about the wonder and glory of who God is and it was Spurgeon who said in his treasury of David he said about Psalm 84 he said this sacred ode is one of the choices of the collection it has a mild radiance about it entitling it to be called the pearl of Psalms, the pearl of Psalms and then Spurgeon he went on to say in his commentary that if the 23rd Psalm is the most popular and the 103rd Psalm is the most joyful and the 119th Psalm the most deeply experiential the 51st Psalm the most plaintive he says that then this Psalm is one of the most sweet Psalms of peace and you know I think Spurgeon he captures the feeling of many of the Lord's people when he calls Psalm 84 the pearl of Psalms because it really is a pearl and it's a

Psalm which describes the longing and the delight which the Lord's people have in their heart when they consider the house of God and with a Psalm such as this one we cannot help but view it in this you could say this twofold light because it speaks about the now the here and now and the not yet what is to come in the future because you could say that for the for the child of God there are two dwelling places which we refer to as lovely dwelling places there is the dwelling place of the Lord's house here which we're in tonight in this life where we gather in God's presence to worship him and to learn more about him and but there is also that place in the not yet the place of many mansions which we long for and which we are journeying towards because it's there that will worship the Lord forevermore and continue to learn about him throughout the endless ages of eternity and so for the Christian there are two dwelling places two lovely dwelling places and that's the way we ought to view this Psalm that it speaks about the lovely dwelling place of God's house in the now and the not yet the now and the not yet and by considering what this psalmist is saying I'd like us to see that the psalmist he divides it this psalm into into three different sections using this little word called Sella a word that causes us to pause and to consider what's been said and so he gives to us three sections and he tells us first of all that the Lord's house is the blessed place the blessed place then he points out to us that those who travel to the Lord's house they are the blessed pilgrims they are the blessed pilgrims and then the Salmist he concludes in the last section of this psalm and he says that that everyone who trusts in the Lord is someone who has a blessed prayer. So there is the blessed place, the blessed pilgrims, and the blessed prayer. T The blessed place, the blessed pilgrims and the blessed prayer. So we look firstly at the blessed place. Look at verse 1.

He says, 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 altar, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God, blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise, Sela. And in these words the psalmist he expresses to us this his longing and his earnest desire to be in the house of the Lord with the Lord's people and to be worshiping the Lord, because he says those who dwell in the house of the Lord are blessed. We are blessed, we are a privileged people, we are a people who have come here tonight in order to receive the blessing of the Lord. And you know that's what the psalmist was longing for, he longed to be in the place of blessing because that's where his King was to be found. And in these opening verses the psalmist he refers to the Lord using all these different titles. You see them as you go through it, he says he calls him the

[7 : 11] Lord of hosts and the Lord, the living God, the Lord of hosts, my King and my God. And what the psalmist is saying is that the longing of his soul is to be in the presence of his King, because that's where the blessing is. And is that not why we have come here this evening? Is that not why you have come here this evening my friend? Is that not the longing of your soul to be in the place of blessing and in the presence of your King? Is that not why you have come? Is that not why we are here? And you know this word bless, it's a beautiful word and it's significant because it's a royal term and it literally means to kneel. And the word bless it, it gives to us this image of a King standing up from his throne and those who are in the King's presence, they are kneeling to receive something from the gracious hand of the King. What they are receiving from the

King is something that they don't deserve and yet the King is graciously and freely giving to them what they don't deserve. He's blessing them because blessing only comes from the gracious and merciful hand of the King. And the psalmist knows that the place of blessing is only to be found in the presence of the King and that's why his longing is to be there, his desire is to be in the Lord's house. And that's what he emphasizes and re-emphasizes all the way through this Psalm because he gives all these descriptions not only of the Lord but also of the Lord's dwelling place, dwelling place that he's longing to go to because as he says in verse one he calls it the lovely, the lovely dwelling place of God. He calls it later on the courts of the Lord, the house of God, your house, your courts and the house of my God. And the psalmist is clear, he wants to be in the presence of the Lord praising him and thanking him and experiencing his blessing. That's his longing, that's his longing in life. And he says, as he says in verse two, my soul longs. Yes, it even faints for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh, they are crying out for the living God. And the psalmist he gives this in verse two, this threefold description of his entire being that is longing for God. He says, my soul, my heart and my flesh, it's crying out for the living God. My soul, my heart, my flesh. And he's saying to us, there's not one part of me that doesn't want to be in the King's house and in the place of blessing. My entire being longs to be in your dwelling place. My friend, is that you? Is that me? Is that our, is that our desire as we come to another communion season? Is our desire to be in the King's house and to sit at the King's table? Is our desire to be in fellowship with the Lord and fellowship with the Lord's people? Do we have the same longing that the psalmist had to experience the blessing of God over this weekend? Have we come here this evening, not out of habit or duty or that just because we're a member but because our soul and our heart and our flesh longs to be in the presence of the living God? But you know the psalmist, he doesn't end there. He doesn't end there because his deep desire to be in the place of blessing was such that he even envies the sparrows and the swallows. He envies the sparrows and the swallows because he says even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young at your altar, oh Lord of hosts, my King and my God. You know the psalmist he considers two of the most insignificant birds and he has envy towards them because they have found shelter in the Lord's house and they have found it to be a place of blessing.

And with this imagery of the sparrow and the swallow, the psalmist is describing how he feels. We don't like to speak about our feelings too often but the psalmist reveals to us how he felt and by envying this sparrow the psalmist was showing us that he felt weak, ah and frail because the sparrow it's a bird in ancient times that was considered to be almost worthless. It's said that young boys in Jerusalem would often try and catch sparrows and sell just two of them for only a penny and yet the psalmist says the sparrow has found a home near God's altar implying that he feels that he is worth less than even a sparrow because he hasn't yet come home to the palace of the king. He hasn't reached there yet and you know that's how we often feel. We can often feel so unworthy and think that we are so insignificant to God and comparison to other people and we naturally make a comparison with other people even though we know we shouldn't. But you know my friend don't you just love what Jesus says about us in Matthew chapter 10. He says are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin and not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will and he says therefore do not fear you are of more value than many sparrows.

You are of more value than many sparrows. My Christian friend you are not worthless. You are not unworthy to come to the king's house or unworthy to sit at the king's table and you're certainly not insignificant to the king. No no you are precious to him and most valuable. You are his prized possession redeemed by his precious blood. You are a prized possession. You are not worthless. You are more than worthy. But then there's also this description of the swallow and if the swallow if the sparrow was an illustration of the Sammists worthlessness then the swallow is an illustration of the Sammists restlessness. Because if you're a keen bird watcher which I'm not you know that the swallow is a very restless bird. It's always flying from point to point all day long. It never rests. It's always it's a restless bird. But when it comes to the time for us a swallow to mate and raise its young the swallow settles down in a resting place by building a nest in preparation for laying her young. Just what the Sammists is saying here. And interestingly swallows make their nest in open-fronted buildings. High buildings such as barns or stables or in this case the temple. And once the nest is built the swallows they settle down and they rest peacefully in their home which they have made. And the Sammists he's thinking about the swallow and he says that and he feels that the swallow is even more blessed than him because the swallow has made her nest near the altar of the Lord. And yet he is still restless. He's still longing. He's still yearning to be in the Lord's house.

He's still longing to get there. And you know we should be like the sparrow on the swallow. Because like the worthless sparrow we should only find our worth in Jesus Christ. Not in people or things or feelings or opinions or relationships or finance or intelligence. No no no we should find our worth in Jesus Christ alone. And the love he has demonstrated towards us. And like this swallow we should be restless until we are resting in Jesus. We should be restless until we're resting in Jesus. Resting in his royalty, resting in his redemption, resting in his own righteousness, resting in his own resurrection, resting in his restoration. We should be restless until we are resting completely upon Jesus

[16 : 44] Christ and Jesus Christ alone. And you know that's why the invitation that Jesus gave out is to come. Come unto me he said. All you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. My friend we should be restless until we're completely resting in Jesus. And our longing, our longing should be to be here in the Lord's house with the Lord's people to receive the Lord's blessing. Because this place it's a lovely dwelling place and we should see ourselves as privileged to be here. Because I'm sure there are many people connected to this congregation tonight who are housebound and they would love to be here. They would love to be here because this is the blessed place. The blessed place and we have the promise blessed are those who dwell in your house ever singing your praise. So we've considered the blessed place but secondly we see the blessed pilgrims. The blessed pilgrims. If you look at verse 5 he says blessed are those whose strength is in you and whose heart of the highways of highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baker 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.

Geveer, O God of Jacob. Selah. And in this section we see that the Psalmist begins by declaring what blessing is. In the previous section he emphasized that the place to which he longed to go was the place of blessing. But that was the Lord's house. But now he says that the pilgrims are blessed because they desire to get to the Lord's house. Which means that he not only longed to be in the blessed place but he also knew that he was a blessed pilgrim because he had the privilege of going to the Lord's house. He was a blessed pilgrim going to the blessed place. He was a blessed man. And that's what he says. Blessed is the man. Blessed is the man. And the word which the Psalmist uses to describe himself is the word Adam. It's the word Adam. And it's of course it's significant because the Psalmist is highlighting that the gracious and merciful blessing of the

King which is being bestowed, it's being bestowed upon Adam and all his descendants. The Psalmist is speaking about the fallen race of mankind which sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first transgression. And he's saying Adam has been blessed. Mankind has been blessed. Sinners are being blessed. Those in Adam have received from the King what they didn't deserve. They have been blessed because the King has conferred upon them what they couldn't earn or manufacture for themselves. They have received the riches of his grace from the hand of the King. And my friend that's the difference between someone who is still in Adam and someone who is now in Christ. We are blessed. We are blessed.

We have received from the King every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. And you know these words, those words of Paul, every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, those words they always remind me of one of the students who was studying with me in the free church college. And maybe I've said this somewhere before but when Thomas and I when we were in college there were many students with us but one in particular was a man called Craig. And Craig well he's now ministering in the United States. He's a minister there and he's now married. But every morning when we would arrive at college I would say to Craig, as you do most people, you'd say how are you today?

But Craig's response would, it would always be the same. Craig would never say I'm fine or I'm not bad or I'm just plodding on. Craig would always say murder my brother, I'm blessed. I'm blessed. And every time Craig said those words in one way he always rebuked me because he attributed everything he had to the Lord. But in another way he always reminded me of what we have in Jesus Christ. Craig had a very difficult upbringing and yet from a young age he knew that he was a miserable sinner and that Christ was an all sufficient Savior. And for that very reason when you would ask Craig how he is he would always say I'm blessed. I'm blessed. And you know when someone asks us how we are that's how we should always respond. We should respond and say like Craig I'm blessed. I'm blessed because my friend we are blessed. We are blessed pilgrims who've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. We are blessed pilgrims and because we are blessed the psalmist reminds us that our strength is in the Lord and our heart is set upon the highway to Zion. But you know the psalmist he very quickly highlights to us the reality of this highway towards Zion. Because he says that getting to Zion it's not an easy journey. It's a long journey and it's a journey which is not for the faint hearted because you have to be committed. You have to keep persevering. You have to keep pressing on despite the opposition of the world, the flesh and the devil. You can't turn back. It's a long journey. It's a hard journey but you need to keep pressing on towards Zion he says. But the fact that we are blessed and have our hearts set upon the highway to Zion and the strength of the Lord to help us along the way, the fact that we have all these things my friend as I'm sure you're well aware that that doesn't make us immune to the pains and sorrows of the journey. The strength of the Lord doesn't leave us continually on the mountain top and excuses from going through the dark valleys. Now what the psalmist reminds us is that the strength of the Lord is for the valley. The strength of the Lord is to keep us going in the valley. The strength of the Lord is to prevent us from turning back from the valley. My friend the strength of the Lord is to help us pass through the valley. And what a valley it is because he says as they go in verse 6 as they go through the valley of

[24 : 16] Bacchus they make it a place of springs the early rain also covers it with pools. The psalmist affirms to us that every blessed pilgrim which is traveling on the highway towards Zion must pass through the valley of Bacchus. We must all navigate our way through the valley of Bacchus in order to reach Zion.

And in Israel the valley of Bacchus it was a very treacherous valley to pass through because it posed many dangers to the traveling pilgrim. And one particular feature of the valley of Bacchus was your exposure to the heat of the sun. The valley of Bacchus was a dry valley. It was you could say a dry parched land in which the bearing sun above the pilgrims had parched the ground beneath the pilgrims at the time of year when they would all be traveling towards the Lord's house for the festivals in Jerusalem. But there was no way around the valley of Bacchus. Every pilgrim had to pass through this valley in order to get to Zion.

You had to pass through Bacchus veil in order to reach the King's Palace. And with all the pain and the hardship and the difficulties, the dangers and the sufferings which this valley posed for all the blessed pilgrims as they journeyed towards their destination. That was the reason they named it the valley of Bacchus. Because the name means the valley of weeping. The valley of weeping. And the image which the psalmist is creating for us is that it was through a veil of tear that the traveling pilgrims which reach the King's Palace.

And how through that is my pilgrim friend. That in order to stand on Mount Zion we must first of all pass through Bacchus veil. In order to enter the gates of the King's Palace every pilgrim must pass through the darkness of the valley of weeping. And I know that for some of you in here this journey really has been for you. A valley of weeping. Because under the heat of illness or through the pain of sorrow and loss you're left saying my tears have unto me been made both in the night and day. And maybe sometimes in your weeping and your mourning which endured for the night you longed for the joy to come with the morning light but it never came. The tears of this valley were there night and day. Because this valley which you had to pass through it's a hard valley. It's a dark valley. And of course Bacchus veil was a valley that you didn't want to pass through. And what was in this valley was something that you never maybe expected to encounter.

Maybe it was a valley which you didn't see coming and yet this valley of tears is a valley which you know in your heart and your soul and your flesh. You know that this valley will bring you to stand upon Mount Zion. Because the promise is that by passing through Bacchus veil we will reach the King's palace. By passing through Bacchus veil we will reach the King's palace. And you know I can't help but think that that's the imagery we're given in the book of Revelation. You'll remember when the Apostle John he was given that glorious vision of the throne room of heaven. The throne room of God and of the Lamb. And gathered there he says was this multitude that no man could number. And they were all clothed in white robes as he saw them. And they had been gathered from north, south, east and west. They'd been gathered from every nation, tribe and people and and language. But I love that occasion in Revelation 7 when we're told that one of the 24 elders who were sitting around the throne asked John a question about this multitude who is that was gathering in heaven. And he said who are these who are clothed in white robes and where have they come from? And John said to him

[29 : 04] Sar you know. And then we hear the elder saying to John yes these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have passed through bake as veil and they've washed their robes and they made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

They are the Lord's redeemed and they've been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb that is sitting in the midst of the throne. And the elder says to John that's why they are before the throne of God. And that's why they're serving him day and night in his palace because the Lamb who sits in the midst of the throne will shelter them with his presence. And he says these people this multitude they shall neither hunger no more nor thirst any more the Sun shall not strike them any more nor the scorching heat. The valley can't hinder them any longer because the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd. He will guide them as it says in Psalm 84 to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. My friend this is the wonder of being a blessed pilgrim that by passing through a veil we will enter the king's palace with the tears of our valley still in our eyes. But on entering God will wipe away every tear and every pain and every heartache and every sorrow and he will wipe it all away and he will lead us as the psalmist says into springs of living water. Oh my friend we are we are we are we are blessed pilgrims we are blessed pilgrims and the valley which we must pass through in order to stand on

Mount Zion. That valley is not there to weaken our faith but it's there as he says himself it's there to make us go from strength to strength until we appear in Zion. So they from strength and where it goes still forward on to strength until in Zion they appear before the Lord at length. My friend it's through much tribulation that we shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Much tribulation. But as the psalmist concludes this section he prays to his faithful covenant God and he longs for him to hear his voice because he says in verse 8, Oh Lord God of hosts my prayer here give ear oh God of Jacob Sela. The psalmist desires that the Lord will listen to his prayer for blessing and that brings us to look at the final section of this blessed prayer the blessed prayer in verses 9 to 12. We've seen the blessed place the blessed or we are the blessed pilgrims and lastly and briefly we'll consider this the blessed prayer the blessed prayer look at verse 9 he says behold our shield oh

God look on the face of your anointed for in a day in your 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 son and shield the Lord bestows favor and honor no good thing does he withhold from those who walk up nightly the Lord of hosts oh Lord of hosts blessed is the one who trusts in you. The prayer of blessing which the psalmist concludes with you could say that it's a plea a plea that others would see the blessedness of trusting in the Lord that they would see what we see which is why he says in verse 12 oh Lord of hosts blessed is the one who trusts in you but even though that's how his prayer concludes there is something so beautiful about the way he commences his prayer because he says behold our shield oh God look on the face of your anointed and what we see is that the psalmist describes this figure as our shield and the Lord's anointed and we may well ask well who is our shield and who is the Lord's anointed who is the Lord's

Christ and of course he's speaking about our beloved Jesus Jesus is our shield in whom we find protection and shelter and Jesus is the Lord's Christ he's the Lord's anointed he's the one in whom the Lord has set apart to assume the office of prophet priest and king he's the one who acts on our behalf and he is the redeemer of God's people Jesus is our shield and he is the Lord's anointed and you know it's in this blessed prayer that we realize why the psalmist is longing to be in the king's palace it all comes together and we see why his flesh and his heart and his soul are crying out for the living God it's all because he wants to see Jesus he wants to see Jesus he wants to look on the face of the Lord's anointed he wants to see with his own eyes the source of his blessing he wants to gaze upon the one who has been the fountain of his strength throughout his journey he wants to be with the only one who never left his side and didn't forsake him one moment through that dark valley he wants to behold the one who is the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth he wants his faith to give way to sight and see and know that he has been made like him he wants to stand before the throne of God above and sing with that great multitude in heaven blessing and honor and glory and power be to him who sits upon the throne and to the lamb forever and ever oh my friend the longing that the psalmist had to see Jesus was such that he says that even one just one day in the courts of the

[35 : 57] Lord and in the presence of Jesus it's better than a thousand elsewhere and that he would rather be just the doorkeeper just the doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in tents of sin and that's the psalmist's desire because he knows that blessing comes from nowhere else but from Jesus because in him as we said we are blessed with every spiritual blessing and what the psalmist is emphasizing to us is that the King's Palace it's a place of even more blessing because in the King's Palace he says that as he goes on in verse 11 he says the Lord is a son he is the only source of light because in the King's house there is no night there he is the permanent light and in his pure light we will see everything so much more clearly we will no longer see the Savior through the glass darkly but face to face and more than that we will understand the valley better we will understand bake us veil much better and why it had all that it did for us and we'll see our Savior as our shield we will see him as the lamb who is in the midst of the throne who is sheltering us and protecting us with his presence my friend we are a blessed people we are a blessed people because this King bestows upon us as he says not only his grace but also his glory not only his grace but also his glory he will bless us not because of who we are but solely because of who he is and as I know what we were singing in our opening item of praise oh greatly blessed the people are the joyful sound that know in brightness of thy face oh Lord they ever on shall go my friend this evening we are in a blessed place because we are in the King's house we have come to the King's house seeking blessing and as blessed pilgrims who have strength for the journey and help for the valley we are going on towards an even greater another blessed place in Zion but along this highway to Zion we have read about the promise of the blessed prayer oh Lord of hosts blessed is the one who trusts in you blessed is the one who trusts in you my friend if you're a Christian tonight you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ and so when you leave here tonight when you have fellowship with the Lord's people and someone asks you as they probably will how are you I want you to respond like Craig did to me I'm blessed I'm blessed because we are blessed and we are being reminded here that blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord we are blessed may the Lord bless these thoughts to us

let us pray