

Strength For The Journey

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to the chapter we had in Psalm 84. So last week we looked at the first three, four verses.

This week we look roughly at verses five down to verse eight. Again, thankfully for a change we have the separation given to us by the salas, which we've heard a thousand times.

As far as we know the salas were there, but when the psalm was sung in the temple, wherever it was sung, it was a chance for something else to happen. We think, we guess, it was a chance for a pause.

The salas appear at the end of statements. So they would sing and then stop a pause, a menacing again. So we're beginning tonight at verse five.

Like last week, just take these things as a study for us together. Take these things and go home yourselves and look again at these verses and study them in your own time also and see what God is saying to us through His Word.

[1 : 06] Like so last week we started off in verses one down to three. We saw that this is a journeying psalm, a psalm of someone who is journeying towards the temple, journeying back to the temple.

As we said, for whatever reason he is away from the temple, but he's thinking of it, he's coming back home slowly and he's thinking about it. What I forgot to say last week was, or I didn't emphasise perhaps last week as much, is that this psalm was used then after that for those who were journeying to the temple.

So it's a goal for a fact from, it's also from history, from the side of the Bible, from secular sources, that the Jews use Psalm 84 as one of the psalms they would sing together as they travelled from around the country and countries to worship at the temple for the various feasts, in particular the three main feasts of the year.

They would walk together, journey together and sing along with other psalms, Psalm 84 together. So it is really a journeying psalm, it's one that's done and been used by the people of God for centuries as they walk together to worship God together.

Like we said, this psalm applies for us today. This psalm, we know what it tells us about our own larger walk with God as we carry on this journey of our life, just as the people of God in this time were going to the place they could worship God and be close to Him.

[2 : 33] We understand also they knew fan well, they were singing a psalm that was talking about their lives, that they were walking through their lives, getting closer and closer to their final place, a place they could worship God as we'll see later on actually this evening and just taking the verses as they come, nothing too fancy for us this evening.

So beginning with verse 5, we see this idea that who are the blessed ones, and the blessed ones are those who have God, who are travelling towards the house of God.

Last week we saw the ones who are blessed in verse 4, are those who live in the house of God. When verse 5 we see also the ones who are blessed are those whose strength and whose trust relies and stayed on God. Those who rely on God for the strength they need for the journey they are on.

These people as we said were singing this psalm when they were doing a physical journey to worship God. So both for our spiritual journey but also for a physical journey they needed help.

They were walking miles and miles and miles in some cases to go and worship God in the temple, in Zion, in Jerusalem.

[3 : 57] And the ones who are blessed, not only those who are already in God's house in verse 4 but also in verse 5, those who are getting there, those of us who are still making our way to that eternal resting place, those of us in verse 5, it takes in everyone here this evening. We are all still journeying away, we are all still making our way slowly to the place we can worship God forever.

In verse 5 we see we have blessing. And where is that blessing coming from? Why do we have blessing? We have blessing when we trust in God. Blessed are those, not those whose strength is in their own efforts, it's not blessed are those who are journeying through all their own hard work, blessed are those whose strength is in you.

As we journey through this life we understand, everyone here knows fine well we are going to face and we do face with so much opposition, so much pain, so much misery, so much sadness. We find ourselves, and again this goes without saying, but we must say it, everyone here this evening in some way, either now or in the past or in the coming future, we all have gone through or going through, we'll go through a situation where we are just strengthless, where we are powerless, where there's nothing we can do to help ourselves, nothing we can do to do anything for ourselves.

Perhaps it's health, spiritual health, physical health, mental health, you know face and perhaps a facing or will face situations where we have no strength, where we by ourselves are stumbling along our road hopeless and helpless and aimless.

What's the answer? The answer is in verse 5, but blessed are those whose strength is in you. If we trust that God is who he says he is, if we said already in the first verse that God is the God of the hosts of the armies of heaven, that he is a God who is sovereign and all powerful and reigning over all, the God who as we said last week in verse 3, who cares for the sparrow, who cares for the swallow, who cares for the useless creature, the uncared for creature, then it's same God who we trust in verse 5, but if his strength is in us, if we are journeying in his strength, then we will progress through. Again, we know fine, it's not just something we say and understand, we know ourselves a hard life can be.

[6 : 35] Verse 5 isn't saying that life is an easy life for Krishna, we know that's not true, but what it is saying is if we trust in God, then we can know he is working in us and through us.

Strength in any other source but God will lead into a journey that is so beyond our ability. There are times if we are honest with ourselves, we will be all journeying without God's strength as far as we are concerned.

We try and do our own things, as Christians we try and do it the way we think is best. We do our own things, think our own thoughts and just do and carry on pressing on as if God isn't there.

And I'm sure as we all know when we do that we find ourselves faltering and failing quickly. As long as we trust and put our hand in the hand of God as per Krishna said, and as come to us, and trust that he is our leading father, then we go forward in his strength.

Verse 5 describes the people again, so the people who this verse calls blest, are those who trust in God and in whose heart are the highways to Zion. What a phrase.

[7 : 51] It's a really hard phrase in Hebrew, came up one day in class and we were stumped beyond belief. I'm still stumped looking at it. It's a really hard phrase when it stands. A wonderful phrase, in reality it says what it says and that's it. Every translation will translate it vaguely, but the same way.

The image being here is that the Christian, that the believer, those who follow God, that our hearts are always pointing us towards home. But if our hearts are the highways to Zion, these people were going towards Zion, going to worship God.

They were facing that direction as it were in their hearts at all times. And if our hearts at all times are reflecting that, then we're blessed.

But if, as it were, printed onto our hearts is the map that points us to heaven in the end, then that's where ultimate blessing lies.

I saw a great illustration, hand-drawing. It's a map of the pilgrim's progress, the journey pilgrim took. It's a beautiful map. It was four foot by whatever it was. Massive hand-drawing, wonderfully beautiful.

[9 : 08] And that's the same image here, that on our hearts is this map. If we love God, if he is our God, if we trust in him, then he places onto our hearts this desire to follow his ways.

In whose heart are the highways to Zion, we may find ourselves sometimes walking in the verges and walking perhaps in the wrong direction, but eventually we all know God will take us back to the right way.

If we trust in him, if we love him, if he is our God, then his way is on our hearts. Despite how unthrough it sometimes feels in our lives.

Sometimes we feel as if we have no idea the way we should be going. No idea of our journeying direction in his life. As Sam tells us, if we trust that God in our salvation, in his conversion, if in that promise to the New Testament church, that promise that God would write his law on the heart of his people.

If we trust that to be true, and it is true, each of us here this evening, no matter how lost we may feel, but imprinted as it were on our hearts, quite literally in our places, the idea is being etched into our hearts.

[10 : 28] The law of God is etched into the heart of man in that promise. Just here, this map, this idea of a highway, it's part of who we are, our heart, our emotions, our mind, everything that we think and act with, that we're blessed if that points us towards God.

Such a high place in verse 5, a wonderful image in verse 5 of the Christian. It's not saying that sometimes we feel otherwise, and we do.

Perhaps even this evening, we're feeling lost, we're feeling as if we have no strength, but verse 5 reassures us that we trust in the one who does have strength.

Even when we feel lost in this world, we're trusting in the one who has imprinted on our hearts, who has guided our hearts, shaped our hearts to point towards him.

A high point in verse 5 and then in verse 6, reality is it where it strikes. A high point in verse 5 and verse 6, we then see what happens for journeying, it's all going well, and then they go through the valley of Bacchia.

[11 : 48] The word Bacchia comes literally from the Hebrew, Bacchia, weeping, sorrow, sadness, that kind of image. A real strong word, it's used for mourning, it's used for the loss of a child, it's that real deep sadness.

We're going through this valley that's called sadness. There's argument and arguments in the commentaries and everywhere else about was this a real place or not, it doesn't really matter.

Where Vesemes is using a real place to describe this situation or he was just using this word to describe the situation itself, it's no difference. Either way it's clear what he's trying to say.

Vesemes is here saying they will go through this place of sadness, this place of misery. There's one thing to note, it's a certainty.

It's not an if they go through the valley of Bacchia, it's as they go through. Part of the journey of Sam 84 will in some way, in some form at some time, or various times for many Christians, they will find themselves walking through this place, this place of sadness, this place of misery, this place of darkness, of hopelessness.

[13 : 11] This place that's beyond anything we can understand is a place which symbolizes all the sadness and worry and pain in our minds and in our lives and in our walks.

It's a certainty. They will go through this place. They will go through.

Very often we turn our walk into an individualistic thing, it's me and God. But what do we see them in New Testament again and again? Who does Paul write to? In Ephesians in the morning, who does Paul write to? Christians.

Every time Paul in Ephesians says the word you, it's plural. Yous, you all. The Christians, the journeyers, the pilgrims in this Sam in verse 6, they go through this valley together.

As they go through the valley of Bacchia, there's no point pretending that we have it all sorted. There's no point pretending, speaking to myself and holding myself up as well as everyone else.

[14 : 23] No point pretending we have our walks sorted. No point pretending that everything is rosy in our lives, that there's no sin in us, no problems in our lives, no issues with us.

The reality is we all go through the valley of Bacchia. We all go through times of suffering, in times of pain, in times of misery. However that may look in our own lives. The glory and the gift of God to us is the church.

He's given us people, brothers and sisters, friends to go through this valley together with. So it's so important that we do remember each other in prayer. We do visit each other in everything else that we do anyway.

This is praise for us here in this congregation. That we remember each other, we care for each other. That as a church we are right now, sitting beside people we'll be with for all eternity.

We said that last week that the church right now is in the smallest of ways a glimpse into eternity. Together worshipping God.

[15 : 30] We're in it together for the long run, for all of time. Thankfully verse 6's and stop there. They go through this tough situation. They travel through this place of dryness, of pain, of tears.

Perhaps in our life it looks like physical pain, mental pain, spiritual pain, dryness in our spiritual lives, distance from God. Whatever it may look like, we go through it and they go through it.

But what happens? They go through it but they make it a place of springs. This place of misery is then transformed by the people going through it into a place of hope.

There's hope here. Still hard going, perhaps still hard underfoot. Perhaps it's still a tough slog. But it's better now. There's springs here now.

There's a small glimmer of hope. Small springs are there because the people of God are there. Because the people of God are worshipping Him even the midst of their misery become together and worship Him.

[16 : 48] Even the midst of their dryness, even the midst of their pain, they keep worshipping God. And that worship, what's happened to it looks like springs of water.

How often when we feel far from God, what's our first reaction? When we've sinned against God, what's our first reaction sometimes to our shame? To close our Bibles, stop our words and dread perhaps going to church.

To dread coming to the prayer meetings, to dread coming of God's people. But in reality when we are dry and in pain and distant from God, the best thing to do is to come together and to worship Him together.

And understanding as we do that, these springs will bubble up from the surface, as it were. Then what happens? So that's a good start. That's also amazing.

But then the early rain also covers it with pools. The Christians presence makes the small springs appear in this dry place.

[17 : 56] That'll keep them going. But God is more merciful than that. So one thing, see, they are doing. But then the early rain also covers it with pools.

This other thing happens, it's beyond their power. So they bring a few small springs into this desert wasteland. But then God comes in his power, the rain comes and covers it with pools of water.

God comes in there and takes this dry place and transforms it. Transforms into somewhere where as people can again worship Him. Where as people can again live out their lives as they're meant to.

I'm sure we've all had this experience. That night of tears, that week of misery, that month, that year, whatever it may be in our own lives.

We've been so far from God, so immersed in pain and misery that we think this will never end. This will never end. I'm stuck here in the valley of Bacchus where I'm stuck here trudging through this desert land.

[19 : 05] This place of weeping and misery and what's happening, nothing's happening. But yet you still carry on. You carry on and you carry on.

If you don't see them, these small springs are appearing all around you. Eventually God comes and He takes you through it.

Again, we all know this is not just nice words. We've all experienced this in some way, I'm sure. Where we've been so far from God, so needy of God, so desperate, now a sudden.

He has intervened in our situation. And whilst we're in that place, it's so hard to imagine a time we weren't there. So hard to imagine a time we weren't trudging through the valley of Bacchus.

But once God and the rain comes in through His power and turns it to a place of pools, we forget very quickly, just how awful that place was. We think awful wonder and provision of our God.

[20 : 06] It's only God who turns our weeping, the valley of weeping into a valley of pools. That's negative, awful thing into this wonderful place of sustenance and beauty and help.

So we then, I don't know, up again, is it where? We've gone through the valley. And now into chapter set in verse seven, we see this wonderful exaltation of the people of God.

They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in Zion.

We've just come through the valley of Bacchus. We've just walked miles and miles through this miserable landscape. And in verse seven, we should see, they've made it through, but they should be exhausted. They've made it through, but they should be knackered.

They've just been dragging themselves to the end. But no, verse seven tells us they go from strength to strength. As they go on in their walk, rather than going slowly downhill, they get better and better and better.

[21 : 23] I was telling the kids a little bit of the cliché I had a few weeks ago, I was talking to my friend who I went up with and they remember, the story different than I remember, they remember me, way behind them, half way down the cliché, and them laughing a whole way up ahead of me.

As they were laughing at how ridiculously slow I was. At the end of the cliché, as we walked back down, it was even slower. We slow down as we get more and more exhausted.

But here in verse seven, we see as the journey gets closer and closer to the end, we're getting strength and more strength and more strength.

Like we said, that night or that day or that month or that year where you thought you could never go on through it and never pass through it, yet God is taking you through it. And here you are here this evening.

Each one of us attests the money to the perseverance and mercy and care of our God. But he has brought us this far and we're here with our many concerns and worries and cares and all of that.

[22 : 25] So careful and so true, but yet here we are. God has taken us from strength to strength. He's taken us this far.

And then we're reminded in the second half of verse seven, this journey is not going nowhere. It's not going on forever. One day this journey will end and where does it end?

It ends before God in Zion. For the pilgrim travelling towards Jerusalem, towards the place of worship of God, they knew that they'd get there eventually. It's a long way to go, they'll get there eventually.

When they're there, they can worship God at his temple. They can sacrifice to God at his temple. Be close to where that kind of glory would rest.

And in some ways, like we're seeing in our study in Micah, we had a veiled sense of something bigger coming, something greater coming, a bigger promise, a better promise.

[23 : 31] That's the promise we have this evening. We're at verse seven, what is our end? We know that as we travel and journey through our life just now, at each one of us and now we're back into the singular. We're travelling together, travelling, journeying together, but now in verse seven, we're back into the singular here in the second half.

Each one will appear before God in Zion. It's quite a sense of strange. They go from strength to strength, journeying, and at the end, each one appears before God in Zion.

The wonder of God, the closeness here. We worship God together, yes, but also as individuals. As individuals, as you and I, we will appear before God forever.

We will appear before Him and worship Him, appear before Him and find eternal rest in Him, appear before Him and find our eternal joy with Him.

The promise of verse seven is that glorious promise of the future of the Christian. See, the poor pilgrims here, eventually they'd have to go back home and start this journey again at some point along the lines.

[24 : 50] I've only once, twice, or three times a year. Some did more than that actually, but at least once a year they'd have to do the same journey if they were wanting to remain faithful.

But for us, we know this is our journey. And that our end, our end where we appear before God in Zion, that won't be just one of a few times in our lives, that'll be it.

One glorious final entrance into our eternal temple of God, that eternal, eternal Jerusalem we read in Revelation, where all things have been made new, including ourselves, our new body, sinless, perfect, eternal.

That's the hope we have even just now. So we journey through this week, if we journey through Thursday and go into Friday and go into weekend and go on and start a new week, we're journeying through in a real sense, but in our minds we should always have verse seven.

Verse six is so often in our minds, this place of misery, but verse seven should be there too. God has taken us this far and He promises to take us home to Himself.

[26 : 09] From strength to strength. This is the direction we're going in. This is the destination of the Christian here this evening. We're travelling together with that glorious hope of arriving together and appearing before God together forever.

But also that special sense of appearing before God as individuals, that He will see our Saviour, see our God. See my God and see my Saviour as He is. I will see Jesus as He is. We will see Jesus as He is.

That wonderful collective sense, that individual sense, the wonderful reminder of the care of our God for us.

Then in verse eight we're back on the slog again. To finish off the section in verse eight we're back onto the slog. This glorious thought in verse seven and back in verse eight, but I'm still walking.

One day we'll appear in Zion, one day this walk will be over, but right now we're back in verse eight. I am still needing the help of God. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer, give ear, O God of Jacob.

[27 : 22] What he's saying here, hear my prayer and give ear, but that's imperatives. He's not just meekly asking. He's begging God, God listen to me, please hear me.

We go back in verse eight to reminding ourselves and to being reminded that we are dependent on God. Even as we journey just now and have the sure hope ahead of us, it's there, but it's also there.

We are here. Right now we must keep going on under and with the help of God. Again, how to describe God, same way he calls them in verse one.

Again now in verse eight, O Lord God of hosts. Again, using the covenant name of God, Yahweh, God of hosts, that close personal God who cares for his people.

You, your covenant God who is in charge of the armies of heaven, who is in charge of all things, please hear my prayer. God of Jacob, the God who has looked after me and my people for all generations.

[28 : 35] The God who has taken me generations home before me. The God who I place all my hope in to take me home one day. Right now, please, please hear my prayer.

Verse eight is a wonderful place to end. It brings us back to ground again. Verses four, verses five down to verse seven, we're thinking big things and trusting God in the big things.

In verse seven to the final things that one day will be there in verse eight. But in the meantime, in the meantime, Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer. I still need you now, Lord.

As I keep walking this journey, please keep going along with me. That should be our prayer this evening. This section is a great journeying section.

Lots happening in verses five to eight. This great hope for the future, this great hope for being taken through the tough situations and the place of weeping.

[29 : 36] This hope that one day we all come together going in strength to strength to appear before God, finishing off in this second section of the Psalm.

The singers of old taking this say la pause. They were saying their shake then pause. It's reality that right now we're still dependent fully on God as we will be for all eternity.

But right now we need the listening ear of the God of the armies, the sovereign God, the sovereign, personal, close, caring God.

The one who's in charge of all things, but also the one who's close to all those who cry out to him. The God who journeys with us, but also the God who has gone before us.

That's a God we're worshipping here this evening. It's a God we worship as we carry on this week. The God who's promised to keep us through, keep us going through our lives. God has promised to walk alongside us, but also the God in verse seven who has gone before us and who we will one day appear before and worship forever.

[30 : 53] That's better heads and a word of prayer. Our Lord God, we do thank you Lord for the great promises we read in your word. As we come together to read you things and to study things for a short time, Lord humble us and keep us.

We give you praise for the wonder of the things we read. We are people of old who walk through these places and journey to your temple. Lord how you kept them and you took them to worship each year.

We thank you for their commitment to you. We do thank you for that great, wonderful, inspired Sam there. We ourselves know we are on the journey Lord that we will one day come before you.

We do thank you and we do humbly pray as your Samus has prayed in that verse Lord that in the meantime, in the meantime Lord keep us. In the meantime we thank you that you do hear our prayers.

You are the God who is close to all your people. You are the God who walks alongside all of us as your people. God help us to rely on you, to trust in you, to take you at your word.

[31 : 54] You are truly our God. You are truly the God who keeps his promises. You are the God who has made a way through your Samus. Lord help us not to ever forget that that way has been made open for us.

He promises never to lose one of the ones that have been given to him. Help us this evening to never grow tired of worshipping him.

Never to grow tired of giving you praise, the work you have done in sending him. All that he did in coming. Help these things to be precious to us.

Help us to be mindful of all these things. One day we will appear before you. Worshipping the risen Lamb, worshipping our Saviour, worshipping the One who deserves all praise and all glory.

Help us to come to sing our final item of praise, to do so with hearts and minds full of praise for you. It's always in Christ's precious name. Amen.