

Psalm 84

July 7, 2019

There's no place like home. There's no place like home, or so the old saying goes.

That's exactly what one Friedrich Guggenberger was thinking as he sat captive in Camp Papago, a military prison camp located in Phoenix back during World War II. You see Friedrich was a German U-boat officer who had been captured by Allied forces and taken as a prisoner of war along with several of his shipmates.

But they didn't sit idly by at Camp Papago. Their desire to get home drove them to look for a way of escape. You see Friedrich had obtained a map of Arizona that showed a clear path to Mexico via a meandering chain of rivers. If they could somehow escape the prison camp and assemble a flotilla of rafts a clear path to freedom lay ahead.

So after digging nearly 200 feet underground undetected over a period of three months Friedrich and 24 of his German sailor friends managed to crawl out of Camp Papago to their freedom... or so they thought!

But what Friedrich had not counted on was that that bright blue Rio Salado depicted on his map was no

more than a dry bed of rocks with little water in it. Friedrich's dream of rafting home to freedom was a wash. He and his fellow sailors would have to walk hundreds of miles to Mexico instead. Needless to say they never got there. Over the next 5 weeks all 25 escapees were apprehended and returned to Camp Papago. Not one of them made it home until the end of the War.

But Friedrich's determination to get home resonates with each of us. For we too have similar misgivings about our place in this world. We too somehow know that this can't be all there is. We belong somewhere else, somewhere much better and in the service of someone much greater, and we long to discover it.

As we shall see, this is the very heartbeat of the Psalm we shall examine today. A Psalm composed three thousand years ago yet with a message that remains relevant for us today. For as we shall see:

Proposition:

We all desire to get home where we belong. But it takes trust in the life and work of another to actually make it happen.

So join with me as we peruse Psalm 84.

To the choirmaster: according to the Gittith.

A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

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 can lay her young,

at your alters, O LORD of hosts,

my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house,

Ever singing your praise!

Selah

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 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!

Selah

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
from those who walk uprightly.
O LORD of hosts,
Blessed is the one who trusts in you!

This Psalm is conveniently divided into three stanzas of four verses each. And as we shall see, each of these stanza's will serve up an important lesson.

Now, to our first point as summarized in verses 1-4:

1) Longing for His house

How lovely is your dwelling place
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;

These are the cries of a homesick man. One who so wants to be somewhere else... but not just anywhere else. This man longs to be back in the courts of the Lord. You see, it's pretty clear that the author of this Psalm is not where he should be. He's one of the

appointed worship leaders of Jerusalem. He's one of the famous "Sons of Korah". He's led worship in the courts of God's tabernacles. And he misses it. He so wants to be back there. His soul longs to be there, so much so that His physical body is weak at the knees from fainting...from longing to be home.

But it's not like he sees himself as deserving to be there. Look at verse 3. The Psalmist references sparrows and swallows, lowly unimpressive creatures by anyone's measure. He states that even they find a home and a nest for themselves in the house of God. Even the insignificant are welcomed and privileged to be there. Like the sparrow and the swallow, the Psalmist does not see himself as worthy to be in God's presence. He's just grateful to have the opportunity. His desire to be there is in no way about him. It's all about the one who dwells there. For as he says in verse 4, "**Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!**"

To him there is simply no better place to be. In fact, he states that very thing later in the Psalm. Look down at verse 10. In this verse he contemplates the reason for why he said what he said back in the first stanza. That's why he makes use of the word "for". The reason he longs and faints for God's house is because **a day in his courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.**

He knows this to be true because he's experienced a taste of it. He's led worship at the tabernacle. And he knows from personal experience that one day spent in God's presence is better than thousands elsewhere, including where he finds himself at present. In fact, it would be better for him to just be standing at the entryway into God's house ...as a doorkeeper...and do the most menial of tasks...holding the door open for others coming in... than to be where he is right now. For compared to God's place of dwelling, "tents of wickedness" corrupt every other place imaginable. That's why he longs to get back to God's house. It's the safest place, the best place, the dearest place on Earth.

By extension, we too can relate to the Psalmist's desire. For though we don't have tabernacles today, we do have a place where God dwells in a special way. It's called the local church. For it is in the context of the local church, that God's presence is most evident. For it is

In him (Christ) that you (the church) are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit,
Ephesians 2:22

God has chosen to dwell in his people in a unique way, especially when they gather to worship him.

It's no wonder, then, that we, his people, long to gather for a similar purpose. For like the Psalmist, we too know that **better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere.**

Or do we? Let's take inventory of what draws us to our local church, shall we? Why are we committed to church? Is it primarily because of

- The People
- The Programs
- The good preaching and worship?

Or is it because we know the Lord is here, in a special way.

Not that any of those other things are wrong...quite the contrary. But if our number one desire isn't to be with the Lord, then what is it?

I submit that for most of us, encountering God is the reason we come. When you stop and think about it, the presence of the Lord is the one constant that is always here to draw us. Because all those other reasons, as good as they are, will disappoint us at some point. But the presence of God...that never disappoints!

This is true even for those of you who claim not to be Christians, yet keep coming back. Why do you keep

coming back? It's because something draws you. More specifically someone is drawing you. You keep coming back to God's house because there is something attractive about this place...and according to Psalm 84 that attractive one is none other than the Lord of Hosts!

But there is more to Psalm 84 than just longing for his house. This longing motivates the Psalmist to get up and start walking towards that house. Which brings us to our second point. The point of verses 5-8

2) Walking in His strength

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

God not only has given the Psalmist a desire to go home, he's given him a road map to get there and the strength to do so.

Think about that phrase (**whose strength is in you**) for a moment. The strength belongs to the Psalmist, but where does he find it? Where does it come from? It comes from the LORD of course, and nowhere else. The writer of Psalm 84 knows that whatever strength he may have, comes from God and God alone.

And God hasn't just given him strength, but he has given him direction. God has placed in his heart **the highways to Zion**. The LORD of Hosts has not just given our Psalmist a desire to be with Him, but he's provided the way and the means to make it happen!

But that way is not easy. It is very hard. For the Psalmist the way to Zion is thru a place called the **Valley of Baca**, a dry desolate forsaken desert...an extremely inhospitable place with very little water.

Yet he is not going thru the Valley of Baca alone. Note the many plural pronouns in verses 5-7.

- Blessed are **those** in whose heart are the highways.
- **They** go through the Valley of Baca.
- **They** make it a place of springs.
- **They** go from strength to strength and each one (of many) appears in Zion.

The Psalmist is not alone. The Lord has graciously joined him to others who are on the same journey.

But more importantly God himself is with them. After all,

- it is God's strength that enables them to walk.
- It is God's goodness that brings rain upon them
- and it is God's provision that enables them to find springs of water in the desert.

And thru it all **each one of them appears before God in Zion**. Each one finds his way home! The Lord himself guarantees it!

But why? Why would the Lord do this? Why would God go out of his way to enable people to go from strength to strength thru a harsh desert landscape?

Curiously the Psalmist does not give an answer in the first eight verses. He is too busy celebrating the wonder of it all to stop and ask the question.

But he does start to broach it in his final stanza. In the final four verses of Psalm 84 he starts looking for reasons and possible explanations for God's gloriously gracious behavior to him and his traveling companions.

Notice that both verses 10 and 11 begin with the word "for". That's because each verse gives a reason for something that was stated earlier in the Psalm. As we mentioned earlier, verse 10 provides the reason for why the Psalmist longs for God's house. That reason is because there is no better place to be and the Psalmist simply wants to be there.

Similarly verse 11 provides the reason for how the Psalmist and his travelling companions can

successfully traverse the Valley of Baca. That reason is that the **Lord God is their provider and their protector.**

But Verse 11 says it symbolically, not literally. Verse 11 calls the **Lord God a sun and a shield.**

1. For just as the sun provides heat, light and nutrients so the Lord God gives life, guidance and the strength to walk thru it. Thus **the Lord God is a sun.**
2. And just as a shield provides protection from dangers, toil and snares, so does the Lord God as we walk along life's dangerous paths. Thus **the Lord God is a shield.**

**Therefore, the Lord God is a sun and shield,
a provider and a protector.**

And not only that but verse 11 goes on to say that God does much more. **He also bestows favor and honor!** Or as the New Testament writers will eventually call these two words: **Grace and glory!**

In other words, he gives us something we absolutely do not deserve (grace) and invites us to share in something we did not earn (glory).

And not only that, but **he also withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly.**

So those who walk uprightly thru the Valley of Baca walk with him every step of the way and ultimately appear before Him in Zion for one reason and one reason alone...because their sun and shield, their God, wants them to.

So to summarize:

- Verse 10 states that the reason we desire to be with God is because he's better and we want to.
- Verse 11 states that the reason God strengthens us to get to his place is because he wants to.

In other words, we want him and he wants us.

But why? Why would God want us? What does he see in us that would make him want us to come to him so ardently?

Does our Psalmist give an answer? I believe he does. But it's not in a place you might expect.

You see, in Hebrew poetry the most important point rarely occurs at the beginning or the end of a passage. It's usually somewhere in the middle. In a place we Westerners aren't expecting. To find it we have to look for it. It isn't always obvious.

And so it is with Psalm 84. The most significant point of Psalm 84 is not at the beginning or the end. Rather

it's in the middle. It's hidden away in a rather unassuming, seemingly unimpressive prayer.

Take a look at verses 8 and 9. These two verses are different from all the others. That's because these are the only two verses where the Psalmist talks directly to God and asks him to do something. Unlike the rest of Psalm 84 that celebrates God's greatness and goodness and the Psalmist's giddiness about God's greatness and goodness, verses 8 and 9 are a direct request of God. They make for a very simple yet, as we shall see, very profound prayer. They read as follows:

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!

In these two verses our Psalmist makes two simple requests of God.

First he begs God to listen to him ...to hear his pray. The very one who knows that he has a guaranteed appointment with God in Zion (v7) humbly asks for God to hear him out before he gets there (v8).

This is the very essence of what prayer is, a humble request for an audience with God... for God's ear... as we walk through life.

But verse 8 is just a set up for the request that follows in verse 9. And what an unusual request it is.

Instead of asking God for more help.
Instead of asking God for more strength
Instead of asking God for more assurance,

The Psalmist asks for something unexpected:

He asks God to look on someone else, which brings us to our third and final point.

3) Trusting in His Anointed One

Psalm 84:9 reads:

Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!

In this verse, the Psalmist is begging God to look upon someone else...someone he calls "our shield" and in the later half "your anointed".

You see, the Psalmist instinctively knew something about himself in relation to God. He knew that he did not deserve any of the blessings that God was so generously heaping upon him. He knew that God's favor and honor towards him was contingent upon

the work of someone else...someone called "our shield" and at the same time "God's anointed".

Back in the Psalmist's day this anointed shield of God would have been identified as a combination of two people. One would have been the king anointed by God to fight his battles. The second would have been the high priest anointed by God to make sacrifice for sin. In either case the Psalmist knew that his standing before God was contingent upon the work of another. It was God's anointed king who defended him from the evil one. And it was God's anointed priest who covered his sin.

So in verse 9, the Psalmist is asking God to look and keep on looking upon this anointed one, not himself. He doesn't want God to look upon himself or any person with him, because he knows no one with him is worthy. He desperately needs God to keep his gaze fixed upon someone else... someone who would shield him from the consequences of his own sin.

Now the implications of this prayer are astounding. For when the Psalmist penned the prayer of Psalm 84:9 he spoke much better than he could have ever known. For you see the word that he chose to use here is none other than the word "Messiah". And he could not have known that one day an anointed

Messiah would come... one far superior to the anointed ones of his day.

And he could not have known that this particular Messiah would experience something unbelievably traumatic. For this future Messiah, also known as Christ, would for a brief time experience a loss of God's provision and protection, and a loss of favor and honor. For a time every good thing would be withheld from him even though he had always walked uprightly. Ultimately this Messiah's strength would fail him and his God would leave him to die on a cross.

But he did not stay dead. For three days later he rose from the dead never to die again. And a few weeks later, he was taken up to heaven to perform a new function on our behalf as Hebrews 9:24 tells us.

For Christ has entered, not into the holy places not made with hands, which are copies of the true ones, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God on our behalf. Hebrews 9:24

You see brothers and sisters, our Christ, our anointed one, is standing before the face of God right now. God the Father has fixed his gaze upon him, and doesn't plan to take his eyes off of him anytime soon.

And where do we fit in this picture? All of us who have trusted him are “in him”. Christ intercedes before the face of God on our behalf. When God the Father gazes upon his anointed one, he sees us too! Because we are covered by his blood, indwelt by his Spirit and joined to his body.

Perhaps that is why the Psalmist closes out his song with these simple words:

Blessed is the one who trusts in you!

For that is all it takes to enjoy the blessings of this Psalm. Simple trust in God’s anointed one yields strength, favor, honor and an endless supply of the goodness of the Lord.

How about you? Won’t you do it this day? Won’t you trust in the Lord, perhaps for the very first time.

And make the prayer of Psalm 84:9 your own. “**Look on the face of your anointed one, O God**”, and **don’t stop looking**. For in so doing, our ticket to his house and our home is punched and our eventual arrival is guaranteed.

Yes, we all desire to get home where we belong. But it takes trust in the life and work of this anointed one to actually make it happen.

PRAY