

How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place

Psalm 84

David Sunday

August 25, 2013

From You, through You and to You be all things. To You be glory forever and ever. We pray that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful things in Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have a Bible, please turn to Psalm 84. It had been my plan to continue on in our series in the Gospel of Luke. However, this past Tuesday night in our elder meeting the Lord met us in such a sweet way as we were meditating on this Psalm that several of the elders encouraged me to make known to you the things that the Lord was speaking to us that night. Think of this as a devotional exhortation from the pastor's heart at the beginning of a new school year as we stand for the first time in this renovated sanctuary. Psalm 84 will guide our hearts and minds as we think about the Lord and what He has for us. Hear the Word of the living God.

¹ *How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!*

² *My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.*

³ *Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.*

⁴ *Blessed are those who dwell in
your house,
ever singing your praise! Selah*
⁵ *Blessed are those whose strength is in
you,
In whose heart are the highways to
Zion.*

⁶ *As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.*

⁷ *They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.*

⁸ *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*

⁹ *Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!*

¹⁰ *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.*

¹¹ *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.*

¹² *O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!*

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in the sight of this great God. Let God's people say, "Amen."

"The last thing one knows is what to put first." So said the French mathematician Blaise Pascal. It's so easy to lose sight of priorities and the main thing. I regularly catch myself getting distracted by things that are not that important or making a big deal about things that are relatively insignificant.

There's a joke that I've heard since I was a child in Christian circles about churches splitting over the color of the carpet. Why do we tell that joke and laugh about it? Because we realize there's a grain of truth in it. We can be a bit embarrassed by how petty and immature we can sometimes be and how distant we can get from the main things which are of first importance.

In our newly designed bulletin, you will find the New City Catechism. It was a kind providence that today's question is, "What is idolatry?" From the answer we discover this isn't something with which only the ancient Israelites struggled. Idolatry is something much more subtle and pervasive in our own lives. Idolatry is: "Trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security." That's a good answer.

Times like this are ripe for distraction. In addition to our children returning to school, we even have a newly remodeled building. We've been together now for 3 1/2 years as a church and it would be easy to settle in and start getting worked up about lesser things than those that first brought us together.

This Psalm reminds us about what really matters. We are thankful we can celebrate what God has done for us this summer in allowing these renovations to take place and we are thankful for the people who worked so hard to do this project. Yet I know they would agree that in the grand scheme of things this is not really a big deal. There are massive realities that are infinitely more important than what we celebrate in the renovation of this building and these massive realities should be consuming our hearts' affections and captivating our vision every day of our lives.

Let's look at five priorities of life:

1. The being, presence and worship of the living God
2. The people of God
3. We are a pilgrim people
4. We live in a world full of lost people who do not know this Savior and don't know a single Christian believer
5. The gospel message

Worship of the Living God

The psalmist is a temple singer who is distant from the place where he longs to be—in the worship of God's people. He is writing with an eagerness and homesickness—a longing to be with God in the

presence of God and His people. He writes love poetry about it. *“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts”* (Psalm 84:1). How beautiful to me is the place where You dwell, O Lord of hosts. This man is not coming into worship, checking his watch and fuming on the inside like the restless merchant in Amos 8:5 *“saying, ‘When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale...’”* Some barely tolerate corporate worship and when they do come to church all they are thinking about is how long will it last, when will it be over and when will they can get out of here and get on with business.

But not this psalmist. Here is a man whose soul is “longing and pining for the courts of the Lord” (verse two). He is thirsty for God and crying out singing for joy to the living God because there is a ravishing hunger raging in his heart and a deep-seated longing to know more of God and God's glory and to experience more of God's presence. Worship is a staggering privilege for this man and he can't wait to go with God's people and worship. Why is this? In the words of John Piper: “God is a very important Person. He is a staggering reality. He is an infinitely grand and magnificent Being worthy of all our adoration. He is the rightful object of all our affection.” We need to be reminded of this because we are not going to hear it in the media today or read about God in the news. We live in a culture that ignores and belittles God. Piper says, “The absence of God in most spheres of life is perceived to be normal and even Christians feel it as normal, which is why absorbing the culture all around us and its priorities is so dangerous.” We live in a culture that thinks it is normal to marginalize the Creator of all things—the Source of all being, without Whom we could not take a single breath. The One Whom we were made to worship.

You are created for God, to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. He alone has the ability to both satisfy your hunger and to make you hunger for more of Him. There is an old hymn which says,

We taste Thee, O Thou Living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.

(From Jesu, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts by Bernard of Clairvoux, 1160)

He alone can do this because He is the living God. Verse two says He is not far removed but active and alive. He is able to penetrate your heart, satisfy your deepest longings and enliven your life with glory and goodness.

He is also a sovereign King. The psalmist calls Him, *“my King”* (verse three). There is nothing outside His control or too difficult for Him. He is the King under Whom every aspect of my life needs to be brought in submission. He is my King and God. He is able to care for us infinitely and personally, and to do that for every single person in the world who trusts in Him. Only the living God can do this.

The psalmist gives us a beautiful picture in verse three of sparrows and swallows finding a home at the altars of God in the dwelling place of God. A sparrow is a very insignificant bird. Jesus said, “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny [or ‘farthing’—the smallest coin]? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father*” (Matthew 10:29). Even those who feel their lives are incredibly insignificant or who feel themselves worthless can know they are created in the image of God. You can find a home in His dwelling place where you find that the purpose of your life is being fulfilled by knowing Him.

A swallow is a different kind of bird. It flits about, swiftly darting from one branch to the next; hardly ever finding rest. At the altar in the dwelling place of God the swallow who is darting about restlessly can find rest in His presence. Jesus says, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Our souls and hearts will be restless until they find their rest in Him.

The worship of this God, longing for and desiring Him is a big deal. If you have ever found yourself in a situation where you were cut off from worship, felt as if God was distant from you or were unable to come into His presence with His people, you would realize how precious it is to be able to worship this God.

I was thinking about times in my life when I have sinned and felt God’s displeasure. I realized my grief and shame. At times like that, this longing and desire has welled up in my heart: “O God, how I need You. I long for You and desire to be in Your presence.” I also thought about times when I have been in a magnificent building in Europe designed for the worshipping God. The Word of God is no longer central in many of those places and it seems they are just historical relics where the glory has departed. As magnificent as the building is, it is worthless if there is no presence of God. There are other times when I’ve been in very primitive conditions and God’s presence was there and it was beautiful, glorious and alive.

Friends, this is what matters: to be with God in His presence to worship Him. Every Lord's day as we meet in God’s presence, if you are finding your heart distracted from seeking this God, I'd encourage you to pray with A.W. Tozer:

O God, I have tasted Thy goodness,
and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more.
I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace.
I am ashamed of my lack of desire.
O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee;
I long to be filled with longing;
I thirst to be made more thirsty still.
Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee,
so that I may know Thee indeed.
Begin in mercy a new work of love within me.
Say to my soul,

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."
Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland
where I have wandered so long.
In Jesus' Name, Amen.

(From The Pursuit of God, A.W. Tozer)

We were made for this.

The People of God

Loving God's people is a big deal. "*How lovely is your dwelling place, a Lord of hosts*" (Psalm 84:1). Where is God's dwelling place now? Move forward in your Bible to the New Testament to the Gospel of John 1:14 where it says of the Lord Jesus Christ: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" As Jesus walked this earth, He would often call Himself the Temple because He was the place in which God's glory dwelt. You go to Jesus to meet with God because He is the dwelling place of God.

Move further into the New Testament to Ephesians 2. This was the first sermon we heard when we gathered as New Covenant Bible Church on our dedication day in May 2010. Pastor John Sale preached from this text about the church being the dwelling place of God. God's people are His dwelling place now. I'm going to read Ephesians 2:18-22:

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you [the people of God] also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The renovation project is not done yet. The building project continues in the lives of God's people because we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Put that together with Psalm 84. The question we have to ask is this: "Are God's people lovely to you?" It's easy to say, "*how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts*" (Psalm 84:1) when you think of it as a private worship experience, but what if God's dwelling place looks like people you rub shoulders with every day? God is at work in them, building them together into a holy temple of the Lord, so they are much more important than a building. The building is only a place for people to meet. God could take this building from us at any moment but it wouldn't change our identity as the people of God. It wouldn't change our covenant, mission or purpose.

When you look at God's people, do you think to yourself, "what a lovely person he is because God is at work in his life"? I encourage you to be thinking of Psalm 16:3 when you look at one another: "As

for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” I urge you if there is any kind of jealousy, strife, bitterness or unforgiveness in your heart or if you are holding anyone in God's church at a distance to resolve these issues right away. It is a big deal to care for and love the people whom God has put in your life. This is more important than new carpeting, paint or new renovations in the building. How do you care for and consider the people who dwell in this building because they are the people in whom God dwells.

The picnic is a perfect opportunity to pursue fellowship with someone you might not have spoken with for a while. Look around and be thinking in your heart (you might not need to say it aloud): “That person is lovely because God is at work in him or her.”

We are a Pilgrim People

We are en route to a glorious destination and we forget this truth to our own peril. We start to trust in created things rather than the Creator. In our hope and happiness for our significance and security in this earth, we want to settle down with deep roots here but find our dreams are dashed and hopes are disappointed because we forget that we are not meant to get too comfortable. The truth that we are pilgrim people en route to a glorious destination comes across in Psalm 84:5-7. The Christian life is a journey—a pilgrimage. Pilgrims are en route to a home; they don't settle in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. They are looking for Jamestown or Plymouth Rock on the other side. We are not to settle here. This pilgrimage is not characterized by weariness but by ever increasing vitality. *“They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion”* (verse seven).

The nearer we get to glory, the greater the glow should be on our faces. Derek Kidner says, “The nearer the goal, the stronger its pull.” As you get closer to your destination of Zion, there is a highway in your heart (verse five). The goal of the Christian life is to be on that Highway of Holiness to Heaven and to put the pedal to the metal and move along the highway, not to take a detour or get off course. Rather, to set your heart on God and realize you are journeying toward a heavenly city with foundations, whose Builder and Designer is the Creator Himself. This world is not my lasting hope. The hope of glory transforms our experience of hardship. Psalm 84:6 says:

*As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.*

The Valley of Baca is a dry and dusty place. It's a place of tears. They make it a place of springs because they have their hearts set on where they are heading. That hope of glory enables them to rejoice in

tribulations. In that dry and barren valley, they find their faith is able to dig out blessings and they find God more than able to deal with their dryness.

As I thought about the reference to “*early rain*” and the truth of pilgrimage, I was reminded that three and a half years ago when we merged as one church, there were people worshiping with us who will never worship in this renovated sanctuary because they have graduated to the heavenly sanctuary. They are worshipping now with the Holy Saints, Prophets, Apostles and Martyrs of the Church Triumphant! As the great cloud of witnesses gazes down on us they might think, “That’s a nice building but it can't compare to where you are heading. Fix your eyes upon glory and gaze upon the goal.” I was also thinking that it's quite likely that three and a half years from now, there are people in this room (I know not who; I could be one of them), who won't be worshiping in this sanctuary anymore. They will have graduated into the heavenly sanctuary.

We believe in the communion of saints. Those in the church who have gone before us are there in the grandstands watching us run this race. They are saying to us, “Keep the main thing the main thing. Keep your eyes on the prize.” One day you are going to see that it was worth every ounce of blood and spiritual sweat and tears, so run the race that is set before you and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus—the Author and Perfecter of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). Don't get distracted by lesser things. One day in Heaven “*is better than a thousand elsewhere*” (Psalm 84:10a). One day in heaven will infinitely outweigh the richest and most pleasurable experiences and more than amply repay all the hardships and sufferings you've experienced.

So in the meantime we walk on this pilgrimage. As someone has said, “God’s worst is better than the devil’s best.” I’m going to stick with God, go with whatever He gives me and keep my heart set on pilgrimage, because manna from Heaven is better than châteaubriand from hell. I'd rather eat what the Lord provides for me and be in His presence. I'd rather be “a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of the wicked” (Psalm 84:10b).

Lost People Who Don't Know Christians

We live in a world full of lost people who do not know this Savior and don't know a single Christian believer. I read an article from [Christianity Today](#) called “The Craziest Statistic You'll Read about North American Missions.” New research by Gordon-Conwell’s Center for the Study of Global Christianity found that one out of five non-Christians in North America doesn't know a single Christian. Twenty percent of non-Christians in North America don't know a single believer personally. That's about 13,447,000 people in North America don't even know a Christian, they don't know these lovely dwelling places or the satisfaction of God for their spiritual thirst. They are roaming around restlessly like a bird or

swallow who can't find a nest in this world. They're looking for whatever satisfaction they can find in this life and don't know the hope of glory that we read about in this passage. They dwell in what this passage calls "*tents of wickedness*" (verse ten). They don't know anyone who can tell them about Jesus.

- 65.8% of the Buddhists in our country don't know a single Christian
- 74.9% of those who follow Chinese folk religion don't know a single Christian
- 77.8% of Hindus...
- 81% of Sikhs...
- 42.5% of Muslims in our country don't know a single Christian

That's a big deal! Much bigger than what we are celebrating in this building.

Kate and I are not great examples of outreach to non-Christians but we have gotten to know our neighbors from Macedonia who are Muslims—they love Kate. Not too long ago, we had them into our home for a meal and learned that they have lived in the United States for about 20 years and that was the first time they had ever been inside an American home. This is a big deal!

I was thinking, "It would thrill my heart to see all these new chairs filled because members of New Covenant Bible Church are opening the Bible with people who have never heard about Jesus before, explaining God's Word and pointing people to Jesus. What would be a good focus for us as a church to be praying in order to get our mindset on what is really a big deal? What if each of us started praying earnestly: "God, I pray You would give me a deepening relationship with an unbeliever this year, with the hope of promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ in that relationship." Are you praying for that? What if we were to see 50 new believers become part of our church family this coming year? That would be gloriously messy. Is it possible? Why not? We have a great God so let us make it a priority to ask Him earnestly to give us a deepening relationship with an unbeliever this year, with the hope of promoting the gospel.

The Gospel Message

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and it is what we are all about as a church. "To bring glory to God through Spirit transformed lives by the beauty and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ." We are going to sing that gospel and say:

I was blinded by my sin
Had no ears to hear Your voice
Did not know Your love within
Had no taste for heaven's joys

(From O Great God by Bob Kauflin)

During times of blindness, God's dwelling place is not lovely to us. Our hearts and my flesh are not crying out for joy to the living God. We dwell in tents of wickedness and restlessly wander through this life with no hope and without God.

Then Your Spirit gave me life
Opened up Your Word to me
Through the gospel of Your Son
Gave me endless hope and peace

(From O Great God by Bob Kauflin)

We see the gospel right here in this Psalm as we see there is a Savior for sinners. I love how God's Word calls Him "*Jacob's God*" (Psalm 84:8). I love that because Jacob was a schemer and deceiver—a treacherous guy by nature—but God became his God and saved him. He does that for sinners like us.

We see the Savior in Psalm 84:9 as the One Who is God's sovereign, anointed Messiah King—the Who has the power to rescue us from the dominion of sin and Satan himself. As we put our trust in this God Who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the good news is that God in His justice is pleased to put all our sins on Jesus. He bore them away at the cross, clothed us in His righteousness, looking on us as pardoned, forgiven and complete in Him. But the gospel goes further and tells us that this God is able to change our hearts, transform our affections and revolutionize our conduct so we become people "*who walk uprightly*" (verse 11). We become people whose lives and conduct have been transformed.

The gospel in this passage tells me "*For the LORD God is a sun and shield...*" (verse 11). He shines life and light into all my days and shields me from all dangers. The gospel tells me in this passage that He "*...bestows favor and honor...*" (verse 11). Some translations say "grace and glory" — everything I need for this life and for eternity. Grace is what keeps my heart pure and at peace within and glory is the outward expression of that grace. It begins now in a life of thanksgiving, radical joy and obedience to the Lord. The gospel tells me wonderfully that this God of grace and glory is delighting in doing good to His people. Do you see that at the end of verse 11? "*No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.*" That is good news and a big deal.

I saw an old acrostic from the 1960s: "JESUS: Jesus Exactly Suits Us Sinners." That is great. He is a complete and perfect Savior, a "*...sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly*" (verse 11). How blessed we are when we trust in Him.

Is there anything that feels like a bigger deal to you than the living God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the people of God, the fact that you're on a pilgrimage to heaven and the fact that there are many people in your life who do not know this God? Does anything but feel bigger or more important than these things? If so, remember the admonition from last week. Jesus says to us, "You are distracted by many things.

Choose the better part. Find your portion and pour your energies into making Me known. Love My people.” These are the things that really ought to be priorities in our lives.

Blaise Pascal said, “The last thing one knows is what to put first.” Here we have the instruction to put these things first:

- worshipping the living God
- loving God's holy, lovely people
- traveling toward heaven on this pilgrimage
- reaching out to those in darkness
- delighting in the good news of a God Who does not withhold anything from those who walk with Him

Please join me in prayer.

O God, I confess to You how easily distracted I can be. I thank You for the beauty of the book of Psalms. All these songs, hymns and poems kindle the affections of our hearts. As we enter into a new school year and as we enter a new phase of our life together in this renovated building, we pray Lord that You will be kindling in our hearts an intensified longing for You as a people. Lord, free us from our distractions and help us set our hearts on this pilgrimage, seeking Your face earnestly. Father, I pray for a deepening relationship with someone who doesn't know You this year and through that relationship, I'll be able to promote Your gospel and point someone to Jesus. I pray that these chairs would become filled with people who are coming to know Christ for the first time and finding You to be such a lovely God.

Help me now to live a life
That's dependent on Your grace
Keep my heart and guard my soul
From the evils that I face
You are worthy to be praised
With my every thought and deed
O great God of highest heaven
Glorify Your Name through me

(From O Great God by Bob Kauflin)

We offer ourselves to You as an offering of praise and thanksgiving. Use them for your honor and glory. May Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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