PSALM 84: A HEART FOR WORSHIP

John Piper says, “The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.” It’s an amazing thought really…We were made in the image God. We were made to worship Him and to have fellowship with Him. This morning we’re going to talk about worship, the overriding theme of Ps 84.

READ title to Psalm 84

We don’t know who wrote Ps 84. This particular psalmist is anonymous. We know he was a Levite because he identifies himself as one of the “sons of Korah.” And we know he didn’t live in Jerusalem because in this psalm he’s longing to go there. He very likely lived in one of the 48 Levitical cities that was scattered around Israel. Most likely this psalm was written in the time between the reigns of King Solomon, when the temple was built and the reign of King Hezekiah. The psalmist, whoever he was, had a deep longing to go to Jerusalem, to the temple located there, and to worship God. He expresses a deep emotion and a passion for worship. He had this intense yearning to go and worship God. He wrote this psalm “to the choirmaster,” the chief musician, the worship leader in the temple and had in mind that it should be sung while accompanied by a particular musical instrument, “the gittith,” which was probably a stringed instrument similar to a harp.

Now in O.T times, from the time of King David on, God’s people were required to make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of several feasts (Tabernacles/Unleavened Bread, Passover, Pentecost). Depending on where you lived in Israel this could be quite a long and dangerous journey. For this reason Jewish pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem generally travelled in large groups for safety. The O.T. Jews viewed the temple in Jerusalem as being the dwelling place of God Himself. There’s a dramatic scene in 1 Kings 8 right after Solomon’s temple was completed. The ark of the Lord was brought into the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place as it was also known. When the priests came out of the Holy Place a cloud filled the house of the Lord. The Shekinah glory of the Lord was so intense that the priests could not stand to minister – the Bible says that “the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.” So Solomon’s temple was a special place where God’s people gathered from all over to worship several times a year, to meet with, the one true God, Yahweh. And feasts and sacrifices and ritual cleansings accompanied their corporate worship.

But all that changed after Jesus came, right? God came to dwell with us in human flesh. John says that “we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” But Jesus was rejected by His own people; He was betrayed by one of His own disciples; He went to the cross and died for the sins of the world. No longer was there a need for a sacrificial animal to pay for sin. Jesus became the sacrifice for our sins, once for all. Jesus fulfilled the Law. He took our place on the cross. He was our substitute and paid for our sins; He redeemed us from the curse of the Law; He satisfied the wrath of God against sin; He reconciled us to God. Because of what Christ accomplished, we are no longer under the old covenant, under Law, but we are under a new covenant, a better covenant, under grace. Jesus after His death was resurrected and ascended back to heaven, but He didn’t leave us alone. The Holy Spirit came and indwells, guides, comforts and empowers believers. So, hear me… we don’t need to go to the temple in Jerusalem to experience the presence of God, do we? God us in us, in our hearts. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

So while a lot has changed since the time the psalmist wrote Psalm 84, I believe that we can learn a lot about the heart of worship from this psalm. So as we read and study Psalm 84 this morning I want us to do so thru the lens of New Testament grace as we make application for us today.

READ Psalm 84:1-4 (after the title)

Such emotion, such passion about worship! This man is expressing what’s in his heart. So talk to me. To what extent is our worship here at FBC Rockwall an emotional experience? Sure, we may cognitively know truth and believe it. But doesn’t that then stir up within us some emotion.

V 1, “How lovely is Your dwelling place” – he’s talking about the temple, the place where he went to meet with God. That place was special, it was beautiful, it filled him with joy just thinking about it. V 2, “My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord.” He couldn’t wait to get back there. His heart and his flesh “sing for joy to the living God.” You get the sense that this man has a deep personal relationship with God.

V 3, he mentions “Your altars, O Lord of hosts.” The altars were an important part of Jewish worship. They represented where sin was dealt with. For us we approach the altar figuratively whenever we focus on what Jesus Christ did on the cross for us. The psalmist witnessed the sacrifices of those animals and reflected on his own sin. [Lord’s Supper] Whenever we remember what Jesus did on the cross for us, we are reminded that it was our sin that put Him there! We cannot get around the need to reflect on our own sin. So worship not only involves joyous praise but also meditatively involves us doing business with God in areas in which we need to. Sometimes, many times as we do this, there are tears shed. It’s an emotional time. It’s a deeply personal time. It’s a special time.

As I read v 3-4 I get the sense that the psalmist, whenever he is in Jerusalem at the temple really loves being there and doesn’t want to leave. Why, even the birds – the sparrow and the swallow – get to live there, make their nests in that wonderful place! And then in v 4 the Levites, those who dwell in the house of the Lord, get to always sing His praises. They are so blessed!

“Selah” – at this point there is an interlude, a pause for effect, to think about that.

With all of his heart this man expresses how much he loves to be in the house of God worshipping His great God with the people of God. He loves it so much he longs to be there and to never leave. But alas, he’s a pilgrim and when the worship time comes to an end, he must return home. You get the sense that he’s disappointed that he has to leave.

So, how about us? Do we long for Sunday morning? Do we long for worship? Do we long to be with God and His people in His house? Do we feel like maybe we miss out on a blessing whenever we can’t make it? While you are worshipping are you so caught up in the experience that you wish it would never end? Is it like this man? He is expressing the joy he feels when he worships God corporately. He feels warmth, joy, delight in being in the house of God. That’s where his heart yearns to be.

Example of my mother – how she misses going now that she cannot physically go every week.

READ Psalm 84:5-7

I believe in these verses the psalmist has in his mind his own pilgrimage from wherever he lives to Jerusalem. V 5, his journey required God’s strength. I see this as a picture of the Christian’s life. In the N.T. the Christian life is often referred to as our “walk.” To make it to Jerusalem, to walk on foot, this man needed God’s strength and he needed the encouragement of his fellow pilgrims. In our Christian walk we need God’s strength daily, don’t we? We also need the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ. And hopefully we can get that here.

V 6, the valley of Baca is an unknown place to us. It refers to a dry desert place. The word Baca means tears or weeping. Sometimes our pilgrimage through this life will take us thru places where our physical strength is drained and maybe even emotionally or spiritually we feel like we are in a desert place. We may even go thru places of personal difficulty. But the rest of v 6 mentions how God, just like in those dry places of Israel, produces springs, replenishes them in the autumn rains. In the same way, spiritually, God brings refreshment to our souls.

In v 7 there were times when the Jewish pilgrims who were headed for Jerusalem had to negotiate thru some hot, dry, and harsh landscape. But as they were doing so they had to keep in the forefront of their minds the joyous end of their journey – when they would get to meet with God. In the same way, we Christians as we walk thru some difficult days ahead must keep in our minds the glorious end to our journey. We’ll get to see Jesus face to face. What a glorious thought! It’s what keeps us going. We don’t just give up. We have too much to look forward to! And so it is that we will remain faithfully moving forward with eager anticipation of what lies ahead.

READ Psalm 84:8-9

V 8, during the long, difficult journey the psalmist prayed. God was his constant resource for encouragement and strength. As John Phillips says in his commentary on this verse – “No matter what, no matter where, no matter when, no matter why – we can pray!” What is prayer? It is talking to God. And that is what the psalmist is doing. “O LORD God of hosts” reflects upon God’s mighty power. “O God of Jacob” reminds him of God’s great mercy.

V 9 “Behold our shield, O God” recognizes God’s protection of him. Perhaps the psalmist is praying for his own king who was the Lord’s anointed, the one designated by God to be the protector of God’s people. But as we Christians read this we recognize that the anointed one is Jesus Christ (the term “Christ” means “anointed one”). Jesus is our shield and our protector. When God looks at us He sees Jesus. It’s because of Jesus, what He did, that we believers can stand safe and secure in God’s presence!

READ Psalm 84:10-12

V 10 “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” To put it in terms we would use today: One day in the house of the Lord worshipping Him with His people is better than 3 years anywhere else I might be.” Can’t you just see how much the psalmist loves being in the temple, in the courts of His God? It’s a point he drives home throughout this psalm. “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” The sons of Korah were just that, doorkeepers. They did all the menial tasks around the temple to keep it running. In other words, the psalmist is saying, “I would rather be doing anything in the house of the Lord than being out there in the world.” The temple, God’s house is where he longed to be. Do we feel the same way about going to church, to God’s house?

V 11 “Sun” represents God’s giving of life, His nourishing; “Shield” speaks of His protection; He bestows “Favor” which is His grace; and He bestows “Honor” which looks forward to when we are glorified – one day we will be confirmed in holiness in His presence forever. The psalmist recognizes God’s blessings upon him now and on into eternity. And that should be our focus as well.

“No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.” Who are those who walk uprightly, who walk blameless, who are righteous? Who are they? Positionally, in Christ, that would be us, those who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ. Our deepest needs for forgiveness & reconciliation have been accomplished in what Jesus did on the cross. As we worship God this is a time for us to reflect upon, to be reminded of, all our blessings in Christ. And as we do this we cannot help but ask “Why should I be so blessed?” What amazing love and grace God shows us! And as we think about Him and all He has done for us, our hearts will be stirred and we will express our gratitude to Him. We will praise Him with thankful hearts. Worship experience will be emotional, deeply personal for us.

As I read thru the Bible, particularly the Psalms and the O.T., I notice how emotional the various writers are as they expressed being in the very presence of God. Their emotions run the gambit of our human experience – emotional highs and lows. For example in Habakkuk 2:20 there is silence before God; in Ps 33:8 there is awe; in Ps 51:17 David expresses his brokenness; In Ps 63:8 David speaks of clinging to God; in Ps 30:11 David expresses how his mourning has been turned into dancing; in Ps 130:5 the psalmist waits and hopes; in Is 6:5 “woe is me for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips!” Worship, coming into the presence of almighty God stirs our emotions. That’s what we see here in Psalm 84 from our psalmist.

Married couples, think about your wedding anniversary. Do you do anything special on that day? I give roses to my wife every year. Suppose though that on one particular occasion I give her roses and she hugs me and kisses me. I respond to her, “O don’t mention it. It’s my duty.” How do you suppose she would react to that? I mean, after all, isn’t the exercise of one’s duty a noble thing? Don’t we honor those we dutifully serve? No! My giving my wife gifts must be a sincere expression of my deep love for her. “O honey, nothing makes me happier than to be with you. I am so blessed to have you as my wife. I love you so much!”

I think about that analogy whenever I come before God, in His house, to honor Him, to praise Him. Is my worship out of a sense of duty, because it’s what is expected of me? Certainly going to church is expected of us believers. Hebrews 10:25 says that we are not to neglect meeting together. But our worship should be driven not out of some sense of duty, but by our deep sense of love and thankfulness to God for who He is, for what He has done and what He continues to do in our lives. Like the psalmist in Psalm 84 our attitude, our heart of worship should be, “Nothing, O Lord, makes me happier than to be with You, and Your people, in Your house today. I love you Lord!”

And this love we have for the Lord, just like in a husband-wife relationship, allows us to trust Him more and more and more each and every day. V 12 “Blessed is the one who trusts in You!” We are indeed blessed, aren’t we?

We’re going to sing that chorus, “I love you Lord.” Let this be our prayer to the Lord this morning as we reflect on God’s goodness and faithfulness to us...