

God calls us to come into His presence to worship. It's not so much that we are going to Church, but the Church is going to God! This is the command of the God of heaven.

But how do we come? How do we obey the Call to Worship? Do you have to be pushed? Do you have to be pushed out of bed, pushed into the car? Does your spouse have to push you? Do your parents have to push you?

Or do the glory and beauty of God pull you to the house of God? Do you have to be pushed? Or does the goodness of God's house pull you there? This is the theme of Psalm 84. Psalm 84 views worship *from the other side*. Psalm 95 looks at worship as the command of God; Psalm 84 views worship from the side of the desire of the human heart. Both are important. God calls us to glorify Him by obeying the call to come to worship; and He also calls us to glorify Him by desiring the come to Him to worship.

Psalm 84 has much to say about the right approach to God in worship – *the loveliness of God creates a delight in the saints that pulls them toward the house of God where He blesses them*. It contains 3 sections:

- in the 1st section we read of the believer's longingfor the house of God (1-4)
- in the 2nd section we read of the believer's journeyto the house of God (5-7)
- in the 3rd section we read of the believer's blessingin the house of God (8-12)

1) In Psalm 84 God teaches us the desire/longing that characterizes true worship

But notice that as this worshiper is getting ready to go to temple to worship God, he does not begin by talking about his longing for the house of God (84:2-3). He starts by talking about the loveliness of God's house. His longing to meet with God isn't the most important thing, but the God Whom He longs to meet is what is most important! God is the central focus of this man's heart: **How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!** (84:1)

He declares that the temple in Jerusalem which God has chosen as His home in Israel, His tabernacle [dwelling place or residence] is lovely; it is a delightful place. What made it so lovely? Was it the beautiful pillars? Was it the gold? Was it the engraved pomegranates? Was it the building itself? No, when you read about the loveliness of the temple in the Old Testament its beauty was seen through the eyes of faith: in the glory of the God of the covenant, and in the grace that came out of the ministry that took place at the temple.

Listen to what Psalm 84 and other psalms say about this:

- **My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.** (Psalm 84:2)
- **Praise awaits You, O God in Zion...iniquities prevail against me but You will provide atonement for them. Blessed is the man You choose...that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple.**(Psalm 65:1-4)
- **So I have looked for You in the sanctuary to see Your power and Your glory; Your love is better than life!** (Psalm 63:2)
- **We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness, in the midst of Your temple.** (Psalm 48:9)
- **Behold how good, how pleasant when brethren dwell together in unity [in Zion] for there the LORD commanded the blessings – even life forevermore.** (Psalm 133)

The loveliness of God's house was seen not in the building itself, but in the living God who revealed Himself there. There, in the gathering of the saints for worship, He showed his lovingkindness and His glory. He forgave their sins. He taught His people through the priests. There Aaron pronounced on them the blessing of God's grace and peace. The loveliness of God was the loveliness of the place. This was the whole reason this believer longed for the temple worship!

At the temple the people met the living God at His altars (verse 3). At the first altar, the altar of burnt offering, animals were sacrificed as a sign that God forgave their sins by putting their punishment on Someone else. At the second altar, the altar of incense, the priest brought live coals from the sin-offering for the people into the presence of God and put incense on those coals. God would smell the offering and accept His people and then the priest would come out and stretch out His hands over the people with a blessing from God. God's holiness and grace were very, very beautiful to the worshiper!

It pulled him toward worship. It planted in his heart and body a deep longing to be with God's people in worship.

Do you see that when they went to the temple they met Jesus Christ in the offerings and in the blessing? Jesus was there! All that happened at the temple was a picture and prophecy of Jesus Christ who offered His life on the altar of the cross so that His people would be forgiven and blessed by God. This is the beauty of worship: we meet Jesus Christ, and in Him we meet the living God, His lovingkindness, His grace, mercy and peace. And at the same time we meet His awesome holiness and majesty.

So what brings you here today? Do you have to be pushed by forces outside of you? Or are you pulled by the loveliness of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, which lives in your heart by faith? **My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.**

His longing for worship in the house of God is so strong, that he expresses his envy for the sparrows and the swallows! **Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young – even Your altars, O LORD of hosts.**(84:3) These birds are free to live right there and watch the ministry of the temple, see the beauty of grace, every day, all day long. They get to live there! And He is jealous for the priests too who get to work and dwell in God's house: **Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You!** (84:4)

How strong is this longing for worship in your life? If this longing is weak, do you know how it will become stronger? Go to His house, hear His Word, witness the sacraments, sing His songs, and get to know Him more and more. The more you get to know Him through His Son, Jesus, the stronger the pull will become! In everyone who is bored with worship you will find it is because they are bored with God. They are not taken in by His glory and beauty revealed in Scripture; they have not met Jesus.

2) Next we meet the believer on His pilgrim journey to the temple (84:5-7)

To put it in today's terms, we see the believer as he leaves his house, gets into his car with his family, and rides the streets to Zion (Jerusalem). (Every Sabbath they went to their local synagogue and at least 3 times per year they went to the temple in Jerusalem. Today in the new covenant the synagogue and temple have become one, because we are the temple of Christ and that temple is found wherever local churches of Christ meet around the world.)

In verse 5 the LORD pronounces a blessing: **Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.** Literally it says: **in whose heart are the highways**, referring to the highways or roads that lead to the temple. Blessed are you not only when you desire to worship the LORD at His house, but when that desire gets you out of your house and puts you on the highway that will take you there to see the beauty of the LORD.

There are times we simply cannot make it to join the church at worship – like in Psalm 42 – and then the psalmist confesses his soul is downcast, and his tears are his food day and night. I hear this testimony often from the saints: the hardest part about being sick is that I cannot go to church! **The highways to Zion are in their heart, and not being able to travel that highway makes them heartsick and homesick for Christ!** Is your heart set on pilgrimage?

If we are honest, we will admit that our zeal and energy for getting out of our comfortable homes or away from the other things we could be doing instead, and going to worship is often not as strong as it should be. Our spiritual longing can drag, and our zeal for God's house can drag, and it can be hard to step out onto the road that leads to the worship of God! But take heart – our God is lovely, and He will care for our sagging, dragging hearts. With Him there is forgiveness to cover our halfheartedness, and with Him there is strength to renew our hunger and thirst for Him. Repent of your sin, and ask Him for His grace; do not stop asking, and He will strengthen you for your journey.

He will give you strength to say to yourself: *Now, soul, get out of your easy-chair, and get in the car. You have an appointment with God, the King of the Universe, your Beautiful Saviour!* You can admonish yourself. Or if there is a family birthday you are expected to be at, the LORD will teach you to say: *"We will have to come another time. We have a meeting with God which we do not want to miss."* And you quote Psalm 87:1 to yourself: **His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.** This is what it looks like to have the highways to Zion in your heart.

The psalmist talks about the many hindrances that could get in the way of the pilgrim's trip to worship God in Jerusalem.

- (84:6) There was the **Valley of Baca** (weeping), but the pilgrims would turn that into a place of springs, a place of pools or showers of blessing! The trip to Zion could take as long as 3-4 days! Water was not always plentiful and many dangers lined the way, but they committed themselves to going to worship. The life of going to worship is not without tough spots and sacrifices, but the Lord turns the hardships into blessings, and the tears become springs!
- (84:7) There was also physical weakness – but God would supply strength for the journey and they would **go from strength to strength until each one appears before God in Zion!** The LORD would provide protection, rest areas, and renewal along the way.

The point is that the believer's desire and commitment to journey every Lord's Day to worship often meets with hardships and hindrances, it's not a pathway without struggle, but God will richly bless the pilgrim in whose heart is set on pilgrimage. **When your heart and soul are set on meeting God's Christ in His temple He will refresh and strengthen you, and protect you until you arrive at God's dwelling place!** This is true not only of our frequent trips to worship, but also of our whole journey of life to the Promised Land of heaven. There are many troubles and distractions and disappointments along the way. But, take heart! Trust in Your great God and Saviour. He will lead you the whole way to your eternal home! **Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!** (Psalm 23:6)

We live in a time of shallow commitment to the Lord Jesus and His house, and a very strong sense of serving our own convenience. If anything gets in the way, I won't be at the meeting with God. But this is not a heart set on pilgrimage, this is a heart set on ourselves. But what do we gain from being set on ourselves? There's only sin there, and misery! We can't save ourselves, we can't heal ourselves. This is a hopeless life. If we give up on ourselves and trust in the God and father of Jesus Christ, then He gives us a new heart that is set on Jesus Christ, and on coming to God in Jesus' Name.

Do the highways to worship live in your heart? Is your devotion to Christ strong enough to push through the hindrances? *Lord, plant in our hearts those highways to the house of the Lord! Give me a Psalm 122:1 heart.* What is that heart? **I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the LORD!** (Psalm 122:1) On the one side you have the saint happy to hear that it's time for worship. On the other hand you have people around you reminding you: "It's time to go to worship!" Let us live on both sides of that verse: eager to hear the call to go on the highway, and ready to remind others that it's time to go.

3) in the third section we read of the believer's blessing in the house of God

Finally the pilgrim reaches the temple. As he comes, he prays a personal prayer to God: **O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear O God of Jacob! O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed.** (84:8-9) This is the prayer we should pray as we prepare to worship God, and as we enter the assembly: that the LORD will take us to heaven in the Spirit, accept us into His presence, receive the worship we bring. We should not merely assume God will accept us and bless us; we must pray for that.

And we must also plead with God to accept us for the right reason, on proper grounds; not because we are such good people who have tried so hard to do what is right, and deserve a seat in His temple. **O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your Anointed** [Your Messiah]. He is praying: *O God, look upon Jesus, Your Anointed one, and for His sake, accept us into your presence, for we come to You in Jesus' Name and in Jesus' righteousness, not our own!*

Here is the source and reason of all blessing in worship: Jesus Christ, our Shield and Anointed. When you come trusting in what Jesus has done for you, not what you have done for Him, God will certainly receive you at His feast and satisfy You with the good things of His house! Jesus is the One God loves and accepts; if you come in His Name, God will accept and love you!

Then the psalmist describes the blessedness of being with God in His house: **Just one day in Your courts is better than a thousand** [elsewhere]. Better than a 1000 days at Disneyland, a 1000 days at the cottage, a 1000 days on computer games. Let us value our time together in God's temple in heaven more than time spent anywhere else. There is no place we would rather be, and no time so important in all of life than the time spent in worship. All time is God's time, but when we assemble with Him in worship He is present in an especially powerful way to bless us with grace and strength!

Why is this time in the house of God so important? (84:11) **For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.**

- As the sun is crucial for a plant to grow and bear fruit, so God is the Sun whose presence is crucial to our life – without Him we cannot live. Without Disneyland and the cottage we can live; they are not a sun and shield for man! But the LORD God is. He saves us and then preserves us in our salvation, protecting us from the evil one and increasing our faith.
- And the LORD is a Shield of protection from all that would harm and endanger our lives – Disneyland and cottages cannot protect me from false doctrine, from idols, or from falling, but God can and does. There is no total security for your life and salvation besides God the LORD.
- The LORD gives grace and glory. He is the one who shows His favour every day to save us and keep us, and will be with us in His grace until we reach final glory. Grace and glory – that covers everything! With Him you lack nothing of all you need to trust in Him and walk with Him until you reach the finish line of your pilgrimage.

Conclusion

The believer's conclusion, inspired by God in this psalm, is found in verse 12: **O LORD God of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!** Indeed, how blessed is the man who spends his life trusting in and pursuing God, the Beautiful Saviour, who has given us Jesus Christ for our Bridegroom and High Priest! How rich is the one who uses every opportunity to join with the saints to go to heaven and worship God in Jesus' name! For this reason Sunday, the Lord's Day, has been called the market-day for the soul, and the house of God has been called the market-place for the soul!

For on that day we go to heaven to meet with the God who promises us: **Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance!** (Isaiah 55:1-2)