

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

Introduction

We all like to read accounts of people who not only survived but overcame terrible situations. We enjoy stories of men and women who could have melted under the weight of a horrible circumstance but in fact turned it around to be a unique victory. The Bible teaches us that circumstances come our way and they can either produce good (James 1:2f) or it makes things worse. The Bible has one word for these circumstances, no matter how they turn out. It is the Greek word *peirasmos*. It is a neutral word describing the same event. One person can go through the event and they are tempted to sin and maybe even give in to sin. The other person goes through the exact same event and they are tested and tried — and come out as gold.

All of us have gone through and are still going through what we call COVID-19. The pandemic of 2020. The question is this: Are you coming out as gold or did it prove to be a snare for you? Let us find out, by allowing God's Word, the Mirror, to help us.

Prayer

Exposition of [Psalm 84 \(ESV\)](#)

What we know about Psalm 84 is what we can understand from the psalm itself. We understand that the sons of Korah wrote it for the worship leader to be sung as part of Israel's shared worship. A Gittith is a musical term describing either the type of music or the instrument that is to accompany the song. Because there is a prayer for the king, the song was probably written before Israel went into exile.

When Israel would gather on Mount Zion to worship in the Temple, they would travel up the ascending slope from all parts of Palestine. The sons of Korah wrote a song about their pilgrimage up to the Temple. They wanted to capture the anticipation, the longing, and the joy of the worshippers as they made their way. Some may have come from long distances. For some the trip may have been exceedingly difficult.

I took some clues from the psalm itself noting 3 stanzas of "blessing" and the 2 indicators of "Selah" to determine the structure¹ that the songwriters used. It came out this way:

- I. The Longing Heart of the Worshipper (vv1-4)
- II. The Confident Care of the Worshipper (vv5-8)
- III. The Parenthetical Prayer for the King (v9)
- IV. The Testimony of the Worshipper (vv10-13)

I. The Longing Heart of the Worshipper (vv1-4)

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Let's read the first stanza of the song: *"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 may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Selah"* (Psalm 84:1-4, ESV)

Picture a procession of worshippers moving upward toward the Temple. Do you sense the longing, the yearning the craving they express? There is a holy envy here as they spot common birds like sparrows and swallows flying in and around the Temple. Why can't they just stay there and just dwell in God's Presence — ever singing? Their hearts are starving, famished for the reciting of psalms, listening to the Levitical choirs, hearing the Law read and explained, interacting with fellow Israelites. Oh, what longing was placed in their hearts!

Do you know anyone like that? Famished for fellowship. Starving for spiritual food. That is how they felt! Here we see our first heart test. Could it be said of all of us that one thing this pandemic has produced is an increased passion for shared worship? Could it be said of you that every week we have been in isolation, that there has been an insatiable longing to be in God's Presence with God's people?

Let us look further.

II. The Confident Care of the Worshipper (vv5-8)

The picture now turns to the journey itself. It is mountainous. It is rugged. It is dry. *"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 also 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"* (Psalm 84:5-8, ESV)

The picture here is of a group of pilgrims going through a fearsome "valley of Baca" but their excitement turned the barren, dry place into a lush pastureland with plenty of rain and water. This of course is poetic language. For those worshippers, whose heart is truly set on being in the presence of God, He not only gives strength to strength, He makes their travel a blessing. These worshippers are certain that God will enable them to appear before Him.

Do you see that? ***Because their heart is set on worship, God will enable their feet to move.*** The grace of God turns what is normally an arduous journey into blessing. These people knew that when they gathered to worship, they would appear before the God of Zion, the Lord God of hosts. Therefore, the journey to get there, even if difficult, becomes a journey of joy.

They have full confidence. The goal will be reached in Jerusalem, the city of God that is called Zion. For there, the God above all gods will show himself to His people in worship. Notice again: because their heart was set on worship, the experienced God's enabling grace.

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When you recount these COVID days, I wonder if you and I will be able to say, “What a blessing these days were?” The days were tough and arduous but because our hearts were set on God every day turned out to be a blessing. Can we say that?

Now the worship singers pause to pray for their king.

III. The Parenthetical Prayer for the King (v9)

“Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed!” (Psalm 84:9, ESV)

We don’t know what’s going on, but for some reason the King needs help. They prayerfully sing that God will bless His anointed representative here on earth.

I think this short insert is important for us. It ought to bring me and possibly you to humble confession. Have we prayed for our leaders? Have we honored them in this crisis as God’s servants (Romans 13:1)? I haven’t. I need forgiveness.

Now the singers return to the joys of worship.

IV. The Testimony of the Worshipper (vv10-13)

Now the songwriters share a common testimony: *“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!” (Psalm 84:10–12, ESV)*

The climax of the pilgrim’s worship experience is to declare that one day spent in God’s house is far superior to a thousand days spent somewhere else. Just to be a doorkeeper is better than being welcome any other place. That thought arrests us in this contemporary society. A day in God’s presence is better than the cumulative days spent doing other things. I wonder how that thought falls upon you? Would those words be equally yours as they were with the sons of Korah?

The worshipper testifies that God is both sun (source of life) and shield (protector). God blesses and never withholds good for those who walk uprightly. “The last phrase (“no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is upright”) is a close equivalent of Romans 8:28 (“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him”).”¹

Imagine the common testimony of Elk Point Baptist Church after this is all said and done? Imagine if every person we talked to heard: “No good thing did God withhold from me. He was my source of life and my protector.” What a testimony!

¹ Boice, J. M. (2005). [Psalms 42–106: An Expositional Commentary](#) (p. 693). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

APPLICATION

There is both a contemporary application and an eschatological application. Today as we hear this psalm read and expounded, we find a certain connection to it. We have been isolated from one another for 15 weeks. Many of us have expressed the same longing. "My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord."² This longing is the attitude of the genuine child of God – the true expression of the true worshipper. I pray that this is the true of you. Beloved brother and sister, the heart that does not long for the communal, shared worship of God needs instant repair. It is a dangerous heart. I rejoice to hear of my church family longing to regather and worship together. I am fearfully afraid for those who don't care.

There is also an eschatological implication to this song. It is captured by the songwriter, Isaac Watts when he penned these words:

*We're marching to Zion
Beautiful, beautiful Zion
We're marching upward to Zion
The beautiful city of God.*

*Then let our songs abound
And ev'ry tear be dry
We're marching thru Immanuel's ground
We're marching thru Immanuel's ground
To fairer worlds on high
To fairer worlds on high*

For those of us like Abraham who are looking for a better city, a city not made with hands, the eternal Zion (Hebrews 11:10), do you not find in yourselves the same longing and desire to be in His Presence, to worship Him with the innumerable angels and the elect of God beyond number? Just like the Israelites of old, for those worshippers whose heart is truly set on being in the presence of God, He not only gives strength to strength, He makes their travel a blessing. These worshippers are certain that God will enable them to appear before Him. ***Because their heart is set on worship, God will enable their feet to move.***

During this COVID-19 isolation, it was very likely that some of you found deeper and richer ways to worship God. Extra time allowed you to read more, study more, meditate more and access more ministries than you normally have the opportunity. For some of you this restriction drew you closer to Christ and your heart is warm with affection for Him. For some of our families the extra time meant more time for Mom and Dad to have family worship.

But it is possible that for some, the lack of fellowship, the encouragement of the gathered church, has led you into barren country. You have been starving spiritually. All the one-another's of the Bible have

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 84:2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

been missing from your life. Today you see and feel what you need. Your heart is crying out for refreshment from the living God. Today is the day to start the journey home. Remember the point: When your heart is set on the things of God, He will enable your feet. Ask Him today to grant you the grace to genuinely believe that one day in His Presence is better than all other days combined.

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!**

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