

## 1. Information

This is a Sermon to be preached in a Preaching Practicum on August 17, 1994. Length 18 min.

Text: Psalm 84  
Theme: The Worshiper  
Purpose: Worship is powerful

## 2. The Words Preached

### 2.1 *The Pilgrimage*

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

I would like you to picture in your mind a mountain range far away like the San Gabriel mountains but with much more green. You see a beautiful city up there between the mountain peaks. It is the city of God, Jerusalem and up there is the Holy Place, the temple, where God is present. But you are still far below in the valley longing to be up there.

The air is warm, the sun is shining bright in golden colors down here in the valley. It is green around you, there are beautiful green trees. Some of them have already a little spots of brown, red, and some combination of these colors on them. Birds are jumping from tree to tree producing a concert as they sing.

It is autumn, the heavy work of the year is finished. Your burden with the work is gone. The grapes from the vineyards have been gathered in, the harvest from the fields has been stored. Finally the time for the great autumn festival in Zion in Jerusalem in the temple of God has come. Everybody is excitedly talking about it.

The time for the great Festival has come! A time of joy and celebration is at hand. Thanks be to God! You and I, we! are getting ready to go up to the mountain of God to worship him at the festival with singing and dancing. We are preparing for the pilgrimage to the house of God, the God Almighty.

In this expectation of the great things awaiting us, we sing Psalm 84 worshipping God already before we are on the festival! Psalm 84 is a pilgrim Psalm usually sung before going up to Jerusalem to the great festival of the Lord. Me and you, we! are pilgrims on the pilgrimage to

attend. Listen to the words of God found in Psalm 84. I would encourage you to keep your Bible open at Psalm 84 because I will be referring to verses frequently:

### **2.1.2 Reading of the Text**

0 To the leader according to the Gittith. A psalm of the Korahites.

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

2 My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my 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 Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.  
Selah

5 Happy 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; the God of gods will be seen 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 live in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the LORD withhold - from those who walk uprightly.

12 O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

### **2.1.3 The longing**

Come with me, join us in the pilgrimage to the house of God. Is there a longing to be at the place of God? A longing to be in his presence?

Let us turn our eyes away from our problems and daily struggles, from our tasks and our labors to Zion, the mountain of God. Forget about us and think about him and worship him. Is this longing not often in you?

This longing for God certainly was in the writer of this psalm. He loves the dwelling place of God so much that he has used a plural in Hebrew to emphasize this special place.

In the time of the Israelite kingdoms there was one special place where God was present. The dwelling place of God. The Temple at Jerusalem. Traveling to the festivals meant to come before the Lord, before the Holy One of Israel.

There was *the* place of worship *the* place where the Israelites longed to be.

Longing to be with God started for the Israelites at the place where they lived and where they worked and it led them up to the place where God lived into the presence of God. The Israelites had a concrete place to go when they wanted to worship him. How about us? Look at John 3:21+23 where Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman at the well. And Jesus says to the Samaritan woman:

Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

We do not need a plane ticket to Israel to worship God. A place to worship to God is everywhere for us. We just need to come in truth and in the Holy Spirit. The House of God is everywhere for us, everywhere where there are worshipers in the spirit and in truth. The Psalm is an illustration, a spiritual story containing lots of descriptions telling us about the worship of God. Longing to be in the House of God is a common theme throughout the Psalms. Let me read you some other passages that express this desire to be with God in his presence:

Psalm 27:4:

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to seek him in his temple.

Then we have this passage about a deer in Psalm 42:1-2 that has been made into a popular song:

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you o God,  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and  
behold the face of God?

Look at Psalm 84:2. The Pilgrims are singing in expectation of the joys that will await them in “the courts of the Lord”. The desire is that strong that the soul is nearly wasted in this deep longing for God. The Pilgrims are consumed by their deep desire to be with God.

#### **2.1.4 The Way**

The way up to Zion is not an easy one. Look at verse 6. We - the Pilgrims - go through the Valley of Baca. The consonants in Hebrew for Baca can also be read as referring to tears. The pilgrims have to pass through the “Valley of Weeping” as some Bibles translate it. It is a valley of weeping because it might have been extremely hot and there was no water but only dust in the valley. We, the Pilgrims are thirsty and exhausted in the heat. And we ask ourselves, is it all the trouble we go through -- worth the effort? Will we make it to the festival? Will the festival and the joy we will experience be worth it? But still we, the Pilgrims, have that old song, the Psalm 84, in our mouths.

Then suddenly the blessing of the Lord comes to us, the Pilgrims, even before we reach the place of God and the valley suddenly is converted into a place of springs. Rain is falling - a big blessing of God in our desert climate and in that area as well - and is gathering in pools. There is power in worship.

We are refreshed and we gather strength and even more strength. Look at verse 7. The Pilgrims are refreshed. “They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion”. We have experienced God in our weakness and now we know that he is strong. He is the God of gods and we will see him in his Holy place in Zion! The blessing of God has already found us here and has turned parched valleys into oases. It has covered slopes with flowers. How much more will we see in Zion, on God’s Holy Mountain!

We experience God in the same way today. There are sometimes Valleys of Baca, Valleys of tears when life seems dull, barren. Everything seems to be dead. God nowhere around. Nothing does give us joy anymore.

Exactly at this point we need to continue or start God's praise. We need to orient ourselves to God to his greatness and turn our eyes away from our misery to his richness. When we continue in God's praise, then we will see suddenly see life springing up again - flowers are blooming here - and we rejoice in him and worship him even more. Praise the Lord! Worship is powerful.

### **2.1.5 God's dwelling place**

And finally we arrive at God's dwelling place, at the place of his temple in Jerusalem. Birds have found their nesting places there. Verse 3. There is security in God's temple and the sparrow and the swallow fill the air with joyous songs of praise. Even small birds find their refuge there. How much more will He care for us who are much more important to God.

It is interesting to see that one of the sayings of Jesus is alluded to here.

Matthew 6:26+27 says:

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

So we cannot add something to our life by worrying, but we might just be able to do it by praising and worshipping God. Look at verse 10 "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." One day in the presence of the Lord is worth more than 3 years elsewhere! God can make our lives rich and fruitful so that we can live to our full potential that God has given us. God can do it! He has constructed us!

Don't worry, be worshipping!

### **2.2 What is Worship**

It is about time that we ask ourselves what is worship? Worship is a very flexible word and can refer to many things. In the Christian sense I would say it primarily means the devotion to God. That devotion to God is

expressed in many ways. For example the singing of Songs can be an expression of our worship of God. That is why we often call singing worship.

But we also call a whole Sunday morning service “Worship”. All that we do on a Sunday morning with singing, liturgy, preaching and so on is done in devotion to God and therefore is worship.

And worship can also refer and should refer to our whole lives that should be lived in worship to God. All our lives shall give praise to him, not only Sunday morning, not only in a song, but our whole life shall be a worship to him. Worship in essence is an inner relationship a devotion to God that shapes our lives. Worship is a holistic lifestyle!

### **2.3 Requirements of Worship**

We have to ask ourselves are there any requirements for a worshiper? Since worship is an inner relationship of devotion to God this is difficult to find out. God must be somehow already at work in the life of the worshiper through the Holy Spirit. But if the Holy Spirit is there then worship is the regular breath of the Spirit in our life. Then worship expresses itself in outward actions.

And so the Psalmist speaks of the good things that the Lord bestows on those that walk uprightly. V11. Those that worship will do no evil but they will walk in the light before God.

And again in verse 10 the Psalmist abhors wickedness to such a degree that he prefers the low job of being a doorkeeper to living with wickedness. Life in worship is more joyful and more fulfilling than sin and evil!

Obedying God is worship and a joy! The upright ones will do it because they love to from their hearts to do the will of God. When obeying God becomes something that is forced on us then something is wrong with our worship and our faith!

### **2.4 The Blessing as a result**

God blesses his worshipers in a rich way. God is the living God who intervenes on behalf of the people that love him. Here is a list of things that God does for those who worship him in Psalm 84:

- ⇒ As the sparrow and swallow find a nest in the house of God, so God takes care of his worshippers. Their home is in the house of God and they are safe there.
- ⇒ He blesses those that lead a life in worship (V6) with an abundant happiness.
- ⇒ Their strength is in the Lord (V7) and not in their own accomplishments.
- ⇒ And their hearts are roads on which others will travel to find the dwelling place of God (V7). They are the effective witnesses for the faith. They will lead others to this source of life that is within them.
- ⇒ God is with his worshipers wherever they are. Nature suddenly starts blooming and comes alive again in places that were formerly dead (V7). Suddenly everything becomes fruitful again since the power of God is coming down to earth where his worshipers are. Rain is falling where it had not fallen before. God makes their life and the lives of those connected with them fruitful.
- ⇒ The Lord is a shield to those who love him. His grace shines on his lovers and he gives an abundance to those who walk with him uprightly (V11).
- ⇒ There is an unspeakable happiness in those that trust him. Let us not forget to praise him and experience his grace in the midst of all difficulties that we are facing here.

### ***2.5 Praise is an attack weapon***

We often forget how much power there is in worship. Worship is an attack weapon of God!

Remember Saul, when he had disobeyed God, an evil spirit was on him. David was hired and whenever he played praise to God the evil spirit would flee from Saul (1 Sam 16:23).

I remember in the first years of my being a Christian an encounter like that. I was playing my guitar to myself in a room adjacent to someone who tried to do sorcery.

I had played for some time and suddenly he came out of his room and complained about me hindering his powers. There is power in worship.

Remember Jericho fell only because of the continuous praise of God. Do not forget to praise him!

### ***2.6 Finally join us on the Pilgrimage***

Come with us to the mountain of the Lord! Be a pilgrim, go on a journey to worship and be continually in worship. Worship is the most important thing in Life. Worship is powerful.

And especially as future pastors we need to be aware of the need to worship for us. A burn-out is the result of doing everything in our own power. Let us call down the blessing from his Holy Mountain that furthers our ministry. The Lord will give us the fulness of his blessing (V11).

We are pilgrims we worship Him who is from eternity to eternity. We experience His presence among us now and we rejoice. How much more will we rejoice when we finally arrive at the dwelling place of God.

Amen.