

Osaka International Church  
February 14, 2016

Dr. Roger Willmore

TITLE: A Heart Longing For God

TEXT: Psalm 84:1-12

How lovely *is* Your tabernacle,  
O LORD of hosts!  
<sup>2</sup>My soul longs, yes, even faints  
For the courts of the LORD;  
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

<sup>3</sup>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,  
My King and my God.  
<sup>4</sup>Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house;  
They will still be praising You. Selah

<sup>5</sup>Blessed *is* the man whose strength *is* in You,  
Whose heart *is* set on pilgrimage.  
<sup>6</sup>*As they* pass through the Valley of Baca,  
They make it a spring;  
The rain also covers it with pools.  
<sup>7</sup>They go from strength to strength;  
*Each one* appears before God in Zion.

<sup>8</sup>O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah  
<sup>9</sup>O God, behold our shield,  
And look upon the face of Your anointed.

<sup>10</sup>For a day in Your courts *is* better than a thousand.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.  
<sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>O LORD of hosts,  
Blessed *is* the man who trusts in You!

Verse 2, (NKJV) is the focal verse. “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

We have before us a beautiful expression of someone’s love for God. It is one thing to say we love God. It is quite another thing to express love for God. The language of Psalm 84, a Psalm of the sons of Korah, is the language of a heart longing for God. The sons of Korah were assigned to the care of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. In Psalm 84: 10 we see an example of the love the sons of Korah had for the House of God, “For

a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “If the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm be the most popular, the 103<sup>rd</sup> the most joyful, the 119<sup>th</sup> the most experimental, the 51<sup>st</sup> the most plaintive, this one, Psalm 84, is the most sweet of the Psalms of Peace.”

W. Graham Scroggie, a wonderful Scottish preacher, teacher and writer from the past, wrote of Psalm 84, “This Psalm must have been written at a time when the Temple and its services were established and when pilgrimages thereto were an established part of national life.” Scroggie then makes this gripping comment about the Psalm, “It fairly throbs with expectation and delight; the opening lines are the outburst of long pent up feelings.”

Ponder the words of verse two in light of Scroggie’s comments. Read the words as you think of a heart that is about to burst with affection for the Almighty. “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” You can see the Psalmist searching his mind for words to describe the emotion of his heart. He says, “My soul longs....and even more...it faints. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” Don’t miss the power of this language.

Whatever else this Psalm is about, it is certainly about a heart that longs for God. The New International Version uses a word a lot very much. The NIV, in verse two, says, “My soul yearns...”

I like the word “yearn.” We don’t use the word much anymore, but it is a very good word. It is the language of strong desire. It is the language of passionate desire.

Desire is a very important part of the Christian life. In fact, a person’s desire or lack of desire can be a good indicator of their spiritual condition.

Think about *desire* for a moment. A person can fake or counterfeit his words. He can speak Christian language in a very convincing manner and never mean a word he says. A person can counterfeit or fake actions. A person can wear a mask and pretend to be a Christian. This is what we call a hypocrite.

You can counterfeit or pretend many things, but no one can fake or counterfeit *desire*. Desire is an expression of the heart that loves God. Desire reflects the real condition of the heart.

When I was a college student, many years ago, I attended a conference in which Stuart Briscoe, an Englishman, was preaching. I was a young Christian and I was seeking to know the Lord personally and intimately. I cannot remember all that Stuart Briscoe said in that sermon, but he made one statement that pierced my heart. I have never forgotten it. Stuart Briscoe said, “God meets man on the level of his desire, a man can have as much of God as he wants.”

I heard that statement over 40 years ago and I am still gripped by it. Just think, you and I can have as much of God as we *want*.

If a person wants to know if he is truly a child of God he can examine the desires of his heart. His desires will reflect his condition.

Little things can reflect our desire for God. In verse three the Psalmist expresses a jealousy for the little birds that make their nests within the corners and crannies of the Temple complex. “Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself.” Do you see the envy the Psalmist has of the little birds that have such constant access to the presence of God?

The Psalm is divided into three stanzas:

First Stanza: vv. 1-4, ends with the first *Selah*

Second Stanza: vv. 5-8, ends with the second *Selah*

Third Stanza: vv. 9-12

I. The First Stanza: THE PSALMIST EXPRESSES HIS LOVE FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD. vv. 1-3

In verse one the psalmist says, “How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of Hosts.” In verse two he writes, “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord.”

May I suggest to you however, that the desire of the psalmist is not so much for a PLACE as it is for a PERSON.

Why does the psalmist long to be in the house of God? Why does he envy the birds that live in the house the God? It is not because they have access to the building, but because they have access to God.

It is true that the PLACE may aid our worship, but worship is not about a place, it is about a PERSON.

The drawing power of the Courts of the Lord was because the Living God resided there. God’s presence was the magnet.

Illustration: Years ago I was on a preaching mission in the Mombassa region of Kenya, East Africa. The missionary asked if I would accompany him to a new church start far out in the bush in a very remote area. I gladly accepted his invitation. We had to leave very early in the morning to reach this place at the appointed time. We drove and drove and drove. We drove until there were no more roads. We drove until there were not more paths. We reached our destination in open bush country. A mission team had recently built a little pavilion on that spot. It consisted of a few poles and a roof top of tin. Just a small little pavilion. When we arrived there were two or three people present. As we waited for the appointed time for the worship service I watched as men and women and children approached that place from every direction. Seemingly coming from nowhere. One by one the crowd gathered. The missionary told me that some of those precious Africans started their journey early in the morning, before the light of day. Some of them had walked for hours. Why? Because a little tin roofed pavilion stood in the middle of nowhere? No! But because they knew they could meet the God of heaven at that pavilion. I will never forget that day. The missionary told me to preach as long as I had strength and voice to speak. (I have never had that invitation anywhere else in the world.)

Many Bible scholars speak of the pilgrims described in Psalm 84. They refer to those who are traveling on a pilgrimage to the house of God. But, the former pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, the late Dr. James Montgomery Boice, takes a very different view. He writes that the Psalm is not about pilgrims making their way up to Jerusalem. Nor is it a pictures in which the swallows and sparrows represent the psalmist. Nor is it about those who are separated from the house of God and long to return. Dr. Boice says the Psalm is about people who were already present in the house of God. He says it is about the servants of the house of God who were already in the house of God and who expressed how intensely their souls yearned for God.

Are the worshippers separated from the house of God and desire to go there? Are the worshippers already in the house of God and are now expressing their profound gratitude that they have the privilege of being there? Which is the correct question?

I decided that it did not matter which question the text is answering because every true Christian who is away from the house of God will desire with all of his heart to be there. And, every true Christian who is already in the house of God will rejoice with love and appreciation that he is in the house of God.

When you are away from the house of God do you long to be here? Do you anticipate the times of worship and fellowship with joy?

When you are in the house of God, present in the services of worship and fellowship, are you happy to be here? Do you enjoy your time in the house of God?

These are the questions.

## II. The Second Stanza: vv. 5-8, THE PSALMIST DESCRIBES HIS PILGRIMAGE.

Please note that the word *Blessed* is used three times in this psalm, vv. 4, 5 and 12. The word carries the idea of being happy. The psalmist is saying, happy, happy, happy is the man whose heart is set on a pilgrimage to the house of God.

Translators struggle with the meaning of the second part of verse five: “Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.” (New King James Version)

NIV says, “Who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.”

KJV says, “In whose heart are the ways of them...”

RSV says, “In whose heart are the highways of Zion.”

NASB says, “In whose heart are the ways of Zion.”

We must admit that it is a bit difficult to fully understand the language of verse five. However, I think a French theologian, Louis Segond, has given us a great insight. He says verse five could read: “In their hearts the pilgrims find ways already mapped out.”

Illustration: What the French Theologian is saying is that God has put a GPS, a Global Positioning System into the heart of every Christian.

God is not hard to find. The Lord has promised to be found by those who seek Him with all of their heart and all of their soul. (Deuteronomy 4:29)

As a pastor I have many times been at the graveside for the burial of a Christian. Many times I have seen a “Dove Ceremony” at the conclusion of the graveside service. The person conducting the “Dove Ceremony” will have a cage filled with beautiful doves. He will retrieve one of them and place it in the hands of a member of the family. He will speak a few words informing those present of the symbolism of the Dove Ceremony. He will release the doves from the cage and they fly up into the sky. Then the person who is holding a dove will be instructed to release it. Upon release the dove flies into the sky. All of the doves fly in a circle around the grave. They will circle the grave several times and then they fly away into the distant sky.

One day I asked the director of the Dove Ceremony where he was from. He told me where he was from and it was many miles from the place of the burial. I then expressed my concern for his doves that had just flown away. He told me not to worry because his doves would arrive home before he did. How did they know the way? God has placed in the heart of a dove a GPS. The bird knows its way home.

God has put a GPS, a God Positioning System within the heart of every Christian. We are drawn to the presence of God. We hunger and thirst for the presence of God.

The psalmist reminds us in verse six that our Christian pilgrimage may not always be easy. It may not always be a smooth path. See verse six, “As they pass through the Valley of Baca.” The Valley of Baca was the place of desert, and weeping and sorrow.

Has anyone ever told you that following Christ would be easy and painless?

The Christian life is not easy. Sometimes it is very painful and lonely. But even in the Valley of Baca the Lord provides rain and refreshment and encouragement.

In Acts 16 we find Paul and Silas in prison, beaten and bound. It was a dark place, but the light of Jesus shone through Paul and Silas. It was a lonely place, but they were not alone. The Lord was with them. The prison was a place of crying and moaning, but Paul and Silas made it a place of singing.

*Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan, is one of the greatest books ever written. It is a classic and its sales are second only to the Bible. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* while he was in Bedford prison in

London. He was there for preaching the gospel. He could have become angry and bitter. He could have resented his circumstances. But he turned his Valley of Baca into a place of blessing.

No one ever pursued God without going through trials and tribulations.

### III. Third Stanza: vv. 9-12, THE PSALMIST DELIGHT IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.

In my closing remarks I want to focus on the joy which is to be found in the house of God. This closing stanza is one that puts some light on who the sons of Korah were. One of them wrote this Psalm. What kind of man could write such a magnificent Psalm? The writer was a son of Korah.

A study of First Chronicles 26 reveals that the sons of Korah were of the third branch of the Levi's tribe. They were chosen to be gate keepers or doorkeepers. Today, in our language we might say "care taker", "house keeper" or "janitor." It was humble work, but the men chosen to do this work, these sons of Korah, were capable men, strong and honorable men and wise counselors.

A place of humble service in the presence of God is better than a thousand anywhere else.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Are you happy to be in God's service, in God's presence, in God's house.

Your level of desire reflects your spiritual condition.

Conclusion: Reminder: Stuart Briscoe said, "God meets man on the level of his desire. A man can have as much of God as he wants."

It is my prayer today that God has stirred up your desire for Him. I pray that you will leave this place wanting to know God more personally, more intimately than ever before.

I am reminded of the words of Jeremiah, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." 29:13

Ask the Lord to stir up your desires for Him!

Prayer.

End.

Dr. Roger Willmore (USA)  
February 2016  
Japan