

A Heart For God

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[0:00] Please turn to Psalm 84. Psalm 84. We're winding down in our study through the book, Walking with God, Walking with God, Walking!

And though I should know this, Pastor, is this the final week or is next week? This is the final week. So this is the last Psalm we'll be looking at in this series.

Well, I've noticed a trend in the workforce, at least in the areas where I work, where it seems that young people today have exceedingly short attention spans. They become bored with their jobs within months, sometimes weeks, and are constantly demanding something new.

There's a profound restlessness that's settled over our society, it seems. But this restlessness is nothing new. In Augustine's famous prayer from his Confessions, he states, Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.

Well, simply put, Psalm 84 pronounces the blessedness of those who have had their restlessness quenched by God. Psalm 84 is a beatitude, and it's organized in three sections.

[1:22] The first section is verses 1 through 4, the blessing is having God as their home. The second is found in verses 5 through 8, the blessing is being, or having a pilgrim's heart.

And the last section, verses 9 through 12, the blessing is being one who trusts and delights in God. So three sections, and we're going to launch right into it.

We have much material this morning. And we begin with the blessedness of having God as one's home. Psalm 84, verses 1 through 4.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young, a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

[2:18] Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you. Selah. Why are animals so content in their earthly homes, yet man is ever restless?

It never amazes me, or ceases to amaze me, how our dog can just lie there all day long and get all excited as we go out and let her come in the house for a few minutes at night, and then, after wagging her tail for about five minutes, lies down and lies there all night long.

Just so content. Why are animals so content, yet man is so restless? Well, it's because man was created with a God-shaped hole in his heart.

And as such, he's only going to find fulfillment in the presence of God. The problem is that when we're left to ourselves, we attempt to fill this void through anything and everything except God.

In our current culture, the fulfillment is sought in such things as entertainment, electronics, sports, vacations, music, houses, cars, careers, hobbies, challenges, challenges, and responsibilities, families, alcohol and drugs, sexual relations, even religion.

[3:32] Everything but God. While most of these things aren't evil in and of themselves, man seeks his fulfillment in them rather than in the giver of them.

But no matter how hard he tries, man remains restless, unfulfilled. He's unsatisfied. Why? Because only God is big enough to fill the soul that he created for himself.

Isaiah summarizes man's restlessness. But the wicked are like the tossing sea which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

What is Christianity really? Is it a set of rules and regulations? Is it the reciting of a prayer or the following of certain rituals?

It isn't about how one escapes from hell and lives forever in some bliss in the afterlife, doing everything that we dreamed of wanting to do here on earth.

[4:36] No, when it all is boiled down, Christianity is about a person. And it's about man's relationship with that person. It's a love affair between a bridegroom and his bride.

It's restored fellowship between the creator and his chosen creatures. It's about a child who is in awe of the glory and strength and wisdom of his heavenly daddy.

The man who professes Christ but finds no fulfillment or beauty in the person of Christ should soberly question his allegiance to that person. If we find ourselves excited about this world's offerings, its latest gadgets and electronic gear and movies and sports stars, fill in the blank for yourself.

We seem to never tire of making conversation over all these earthly things. I say if we find ourselves excited by these things but bored by a sermon that dwells on the glory of God and on his works, our heart betrays our true love.

But on the other hand, if we're strangely warmed by those churches and people and sermons and prayers that extol and worship our God, if you feel at home where the gospel is preached, because the gospel to you isn't a set of dry facts about how one gets out of hell and into heaven.

[6:03] It is something, even though you've heard it and learned it over and over, it's not something that's just a well-worn yawn. No, for you, you feel at home whenever the gospel is preached because it's a love story, a love letter from your beloved Savior to you personally.

It is one of God's magnificent works that so extol the glory of his person. If you feel at home when you get among people that are excited and talk about the greatness of their God, not people that get into intellectual debates and arguments over doctrines and difficult passages, maybe, of Scripture, much like a group of college professors might get all excited as they debate some latest religious trend, but rather you feel at home whenever the people of God are talking about God because they do it in a way that extols and praises and worships him, much as a group of boys will get together and talk about their latest sports heroes, constantly going over the same set of facts, never bored, if you can be in a strange city, writes Phillips, feeling awkward and out of place, but you go to where God's people are and your heart is at rest.

It is almost as if you were at home. If these things are true of you, then God says that you are blessed. Why? Because God is your home.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you. Selah. Could there be a more defining test of man's true heart condition than this?

We can pray prayers. We can join churches. We can learn liturgical language. We can deceive ourselves in all the process of it, but we cannot bridle our restless heart and make it find a light in God.

[8:06] Only the power that raised Jesus from the dead can do that for us. Amen. And when such a transformation has occurred, the newly created child of God's, God finds his soul strangely at rest, at home, wherever God is the center of attention.

So the first cure for the restless soul is making God himself one's home. And the one who has made God his home, by definition, has made this life a journey, a pilgrimage, that's taking him to that home.

And that is the second section of the psalm, the blessedness of having a pilgrim's heart, verses 5 through 8. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The autumn rains all to cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty. Listen to me, O God of Jacob. Selah. This blessing, I've broken down into three subsections.

[9:21] And the first is that the one whose heart is set on pilgrimage does not have the world as his home. He doesn't have the world as his home. Again, this just follows from the first beatitude.

The place we dwell is not our home. It's but a hotel. It's a campground. It's but a temporary abode where we look forward to our final journey home.

Whenever I think of the concept of pilgrimage, I think of some of the original pilgrim settlers of our country, those who fled England for religious freedom.

But many who left England didn't immediately sail to our shores. Instead, they first stopped off in Holland. And while in Holland, their hearts were never at home.

They feared losing their children to the language and the ways of their host country. They longed for a land where they could raise their children according to their own beliefs and traditions. So

although they dwelt in Holland, they appreciated the kindness that was shown to them there.
[10 : 27] Their hearts were ever set on pilgrimage. When they finally did set sail for the new world, they left everything behind to reach the place that they longed to call their own.

Many families were separated by the great ocean, never to see each other on this side of glory again. Some gave up not only earthly possessions, but even their very lives to fulfill their pilgrimage. This is the same picture for the Christian whose heart is set on pilgrimage. Jesus puts it this way, If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Such passages of these have been argued vigorously against in those in the camp that are against what has been dubbed lordship salvation because they see it as some great work that we must do and it compromises grace.

[11 : 46] And yet if we look at the heart of what Jesus is saying, for the one whose heart is set on pilgrimage, there is no requirements here. This is only natural. It is the very same thing that those original pilgrims who left England did who came here.

It was an added weight on their shoulders. And so it is with the believer. Although we live in the neighborhoods of this world, the pilgrim never really feels at home here.

While we work to provide for our loved ones and serve those God has put around us, we view our employment as temporary. It's meaningless outside of its connection to our God.

Even as Solomon concluded, meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Everything is meaningless. Now all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.

It is all meaningless outside of God because our hearts are set on a very different land. And not just a very different land, but a person.

[12 : 53] Think of a dear wife who remained behind in Holland as her husband sailed across the ocean to begin this new home for her. She wasn't yearning for a new land so much as she was yearning to be back in abode with that husband who had left her.

She yearned to be back with her loved one. And Jesus has left us a letter in which he says, In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you.

I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to me so that where I am there, you may be also. Sorry, I mixed up the NIV and the King James there.

Abraham became the spiritual father of all who would be justified by faith. And what characterized Abraham's life in this world? Hebrews 11, By faith, he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country.

He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

[14 : 09] How different it is for the unbeliever. He lives for this world and its pleasures and its promotions. His ego is wrapped up in what he can do in his self-perceived importance among his fellow earthlings.

It is very much his home. And the only kind of heaven he can imagine is the one that provides more of the good life that he is experiencing and hoping for here.

And by the way, that's what is so abominable about the jokes that deal with heaven in such an earthly way.

Because it's promoting a kind of heaven that does not find God in his person as everything that is important. It trivializes what heaven is all about.

But the believer has a very different home. A home that is as real as your street address here in Bremen or Plymouth or Warsaw or South Bend.

[15 : 13] For the Christian's name is written on the books of heaven as surely as it is here. As surely as it's in the database as the citizenship of the United States of America. As Philippians 3.20 states, but our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This attitude, this heart that's set on pilgrimage is in fact a defining characteristic of every true believer. But then the second section of this second beatitude, the one whose heart is set on pilgrimage derives his strength from heaven.

He derives his strength from heaven. We find this in verse 7. They go from strength to strength till each appears before God and Zion.

A pilgrim has no strength of his own in the land through which he's passing. He has no resources. He's dependent on a supply line from home. Richard Phillips comments, I want to apply this especially to the weary Christian.

Burdened by besetting sins, and who look upon the life of faith as a long and almost hopeless journey. You may be in the grip of sin and entrenched in the ways of the world, frail in spirit and discouraged by your weakness.

[16 : 38] If all did depend on your strength then the pilgrim would be without hope. But the psalmist says to God, blessed are those whose strength is in you. While the worldling lives for this world, the Christian is tortured and is so by the world.

while we often become caught up in its evil, its trappings surround us, its earthly pleasures we sometimes give ourselves over to.

In the end, does not it turn to gravel in our mouths? So it is for the true believer. But this experience leads the child of God to cry out to his great helper for strength, to not fall under the weight and the temptation of such sin.

Phillips goes on to say, the pilgrim's heart is not only one that seeks God but one that looks to him to provide all that is needed, to supply the strength for the weak, to keep the strain on course, to help, to lift up the downcast and restore the fallen.

And this is all to say that thirdly, the one whose heart is set on pilgrimage is truly blessed. Why? Well, we see it in verse 6, because as they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs.

[18 : 00] The autumn rains also cover it with pools. This verse images a path with which the Hebrews were undoubtedly familiar. Baca means weeping.

And as the Jewish settlers and travelers would set out on pilgrimage to the temple, they would sometimes have to make their way through the valley of weeping, through the valley of tears and sorrows.

The analogy is clear. The Christian life is often filled with trials and tribulations, many that bring us to weeping as we prod along the pathway of glory. But I ask you, and I want a response, how is this a beatitude?

How is this a blessing? What do you expect to find as the blessing of this section the fact that we are going to be going through the valley of Baca, the valley of weeping?

What do you think? If you want to cheat, you can turn to 1 Peter 1, 6, and 7 on the sheet there.

Roger. Roger quoted in Matthew 5, blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted.

[19 : 27] So he says it's a means through which we receive the blessing. Okay. We're going to be going through it. It's not our destination. It is something on the other side of the country.

It's a great wonderful choice. Okay, we're going to be going through it. So it's not our destination. Very good. Jim. What does David tell us in Psalm 23? While we walk through the shadow of the valley of the death, you're with me.

So God is with us even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Anyone else? Dale. Also, we also in Matthew 5, 10, blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Part of that building of here is being persecuted for you standing for right, for you standing for right. God bless us because we're standing here because we're here.

Dale quoted blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Continuing on in the Beatitudes in Matthew. Okay, we'll look at 1 Peter 1, 6 and 7.

[20 : 44] 1 Peter 1, 6 and 7. Wow, I thought you were all going to cheat, but I hear a lot of Bibles turning now. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

That's it. The trials refine our faith and prove it to be genuine. And what greater blessing could there be than to have our faith shown to be real?

Once upon a time, there was a child who loved to play in the woods, and he loved rocks, and he was always digging and pulling rocks out of the hillsides, and one day he found a really large, ugly rock, but in a few points, it sparkled of gold, and he proudly dug it up, and he took it, and he set it on his dresser.

And for all his friends that came by, he would show them this rock. So proud of it. And one day, some bullies came into his room, and they made fun of him in his rock, and as was their nature, they dragged him outside, and they made a big bonfire, and they grabbed this iron pot, and they threw his rock in the pot, and as they held him to the ground and watched it, he watched his rock melt into that pot, and this gunk and ugliness bubbled to the surface, and the rock that he wasn't so proud of became nothing but this bubbling cauldron, and they laughed and laughed as he cried and cried.

[22 : 38] And as he lay there and they ran off to do some more mischief, clouds formed overhead, and it began to rain, and the rain mixed with his tears, and it quenched the fire, and as he looked up, he took the pot, and he dumped it upside down, and tried to force the rock out, and it finally fell on the ground, and as it continued to rain, it started washing that rock off, and then the sun broke through the clouds, and it shone, and the rock glistened with a beauty that he had never imagined.

This was no fool's gold. This was the real thing, and it was worth thousands and thousands of dollars. When we first come to our precious Savior, and place our weak and faltering faith in Him, while we hope that our profession is real, our many sins and our failings often create doubt in the genuine child of God, and certainly Satan comes along like those mean bullies, and he's bent on destroying that little faith remains in us.

He does so by dragging us through many a trial, making fun of our faith and our strange affections. He accuses and mocks us of our hypocrisy and double-mindedness.

But God, in His infinite wisdom, takes these very same trials, which the devil intended for evil, and He uses them to reveal the genuineness of our faith.

He passes us through the fire so that the genuineness of our faith might be revealed. So while we may weep all the way through the valley of Gaza, on the other side, we're filled with an indescribable joy, because our faith, which is more precious than gold, is proven to be genuine.

[24 : 39] This leads us to the third and final beatitude of this psalm. It's found in verses 9 through 12, the blessedness of trusting and delighting in God.

The Blessedness of Trusting and Delighting in God. Look upon our shield, O God. Look with favor on your anointed one. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you. And again, we've broken this into three sub-points.

The first, what does trusting in God look like? Please turn to Isaiah 30, verse 15. Isaiah 30, 15.

Psalms 84, his prayer is a plea to look upon our shield and to look with favor on your anointed one.

[25 : 52] The Hebrew word for anointed is Messiah, which points us to the attitude of dependence with which every prayer should be couched. I can only come to God.

I'm not deservedly in hell this very moment because God has purposed to look on Jesus and pardon me. So when I come in prayer to my God, I do so seeking His favor through His Messiah.

I ask Him to forgive my sins and hear my prayers because Jesus is my shield. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

God took on the wrath of God. And in so doing, He became our shield. What I find truly profound is that justice is what guarantees God's forgiveness for this sin-bound, or not sin-bound, but sin-controlled sinner.

Justice is what guarantees God's forgiveness toward me. In 1 John 1, 9, we hear the familiar verse, if we confess our sins, He is what?

[27 : 15] He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness. In Isaiah 30, verse 15, we read, this is what the sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel says, in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.

Jump down to verse 18, the Lord longs to be gracious to you. He rises to show you compassion, for the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him.

How is justice the sinner's plea? Well, it's because God's wrath has already been spent on His Son. My sin is great.

My guilt towers over me. What am I to do? Repent and rest. Become still. Quit working for favor and trust.

Why? Because the Lord is a God of justice. And if I am found waiting for Him, resting in His salvation, hiding behind the shield of His Son, then I am truly blessed.

[28 : 28] The application is simple, yet needs repeating. I dare not come before God in any posture other than that of hiding behind Christ. And my prayers will reflect the degree to which I approach God in this spirit.

While there's no value in words and phrases that are mimicked ritualistically, our inner attitudes and beliefs are reflected in our words. And if I rarely pray in Jesus' name, if it does not occur to me to put into words in one way or another that I am approaching God through my great shield, then something is seriously amiss with my professed Christianity.

But then secondly, in this beatitude, what does delighting in God look like? What does delighting in God look like? We looked at what trusting in God looks like.

We look at verse 10 in Psalm 84 for this. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

As Phillips puts it, delighting in God is learning that the meanest godly service is better than the greatest worldly acclaim. The smallest act rendered to God is far greater than the pleasures of unbelief and of sin.

[29 : 49] What is the heart of sin? Is it not failure to esteem and worship and rejoice in God as he deserves?

Sin isn't just breaking some rules. And the world knows nothing of this adoration and gives God no glory. This is what's so abominable about the theory of evolution.

It seeks to strip God of the glory that do his name for his great works. This is why one will not be held guiltless who taketh the name of the Lord his God in vain.

Because to do such is to strip him of his glory and to trivialize him. Why do people use Jesus Christ for a swear word but they don't use Allah for a swear word?

Is not Satan's greatest desire to disrobe God of the glory due his name and substitute it for flippant disdain? But it isn't just the world that's plagued by this sin, but even we as Christians, and certainly the broader Christian church, or what's called, fits under the umbrella of Christianity.

[31 : 08] Listen to Revelation 2. So Jesus speaking in the vision, in John's vision, to the angel of the church in Ephesus write, These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary, yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love.

Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

We may be rightly smitten when we allow ourselves to think lustful thoughts, or speak out of a proud heart, or become lax in our prayers and Bible reading, when we do not defend the truth as we should, when we do not hate the evil that God hates.

[32 : 19] But is not our greatest sin a dull heart that is bored with the person and works of God, a heart that yawns with indifference when we hear everyone around us cursing God and using his name in vain?

Psalm 84 gives us the cure for this. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. God's house, God's courts, are those places where we especially meet with God.

Those places and times and means where he chooses to meet with us. Maybe it's our special devotional time in the morning or evening when we spend time in prayer and meditation.

Certainly his courts refer to his holy day, the Christian Sabbath, his meeting with us through the preaching of his word and through corporate worship. So what about it?

[33 : 19] Do I find one day in God's courts better than a thousand elsewhere? Do I pant for the living God? I can't say that I pant for him while I'm just despising those places, those courts that he chooses to meet with me.

Or do I esteem the pleasures and treasures of this dying world such that I find it difficult to even set aside a few hours that are devoted to adoring and worshiping him? What's on the tongue of my prayers?

Is it all about me or do I come to God as we see in this psalm modeled? And first adore and praise and worship him is the best part of my prayers getting caught up in the wonder and the glory of who he is.

Well, what's the blessing in this beatitude? What's the promise to those who rest and trust in Jesus, who glory in God, who rejoice in his person? It is this.

Psalm 84, 11 and 12. For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

[34 : 35] In this last beatitude, we find a three-fold blessing pronounced on God's people. So I'm sorry we've now got three sub-points of the third sub-point of the first sub-point.

First, he has promised to be their sun and shield. Second, he's promised to bestow upon them favor and honor. And thirdly, he's promised to give them every good thing. So first, he's promised to be a sun and shield.

I fear I'm going to be one of those who is going to end up with night blindness. I'm already feeling very insecure driving at night. Lou's probably sitting back there laughing.

I'm already feeling more and more insecure as I go to strange places. When I was recently in Boston, I flew in to the Boston airport at night to drive through the tunnel and around and about 45 minutes to get out into the country where I was to be the next morning.

And as I'm going down this lonely country road, it's raining, it's dark, and I can't see a thing. I'm trying to find this hotel. And I felt more and more tension and nervousness, unable to read the road signs as I'm going past intersections.

[35 : 58] And finally, I had to stop and curve my car at an angle and point it towards the road sign and squint to try to read it and then make a phone call to the hotel, thankful for cell phones, and have him take me blow by blow to get to the hotel.

I'd have given anything at that moment for a bright, sunny day. Well, God likens himself to a sun and a shield, which is a very fitting analogy for pilgrimage.

For the child of God, he's in a strange land. The surroundings are foreign to him, which makes the need for light all the more pressing.

Even though I can see the same here as I could in Boston, it was something about the strange surroundings that made it that much more difficult. And so it should be for the pilgrim who's on his way to heaven.

But God has promised to be a bright light within this dark world through which we must traverse. He will guide and direct our path. And in the days when pilgrims had to walk lonely roads, having a company of soldiers to be one shield against bandits and robbers would have been a great comfort indeed.

[37 : 21] And so God has stated that he will be both our sun and our shield as we go along pilgrimage. But not only will he be our sun and shield, our guide and protector, he's also promised to bestow favor and honor.

And that's the second blessing. Or literally grace and glory. We've already spoken much of the grace we find in Jesus, our shield. But if this grace were not enough, he also grants us glory. When we think of the glory for which the world clamors, to have one's name engraved on a stone or on a building, to have great fame, great power, to gain the next promotion at work, become a little more important with one's minuscule little set of people that you are around.

How does this compare with the glory which God bestows on those that he pronounced blessed? Well, it is this. In this life, to become more Christ-like in character.

And in the next life, to become fully like Christ because we will see him as he is. Can there be any greater glory given to a creature than to become like his creator and savior?

And that's the third beatitude. He has promised to give every good thing. Nothing that is for our good will he withhold. Of course, from the New Testament, we read the same thing in Romans 8.28. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose. So in conclusion, do you get the feeling that God is in a love affair with us?

[illegible]