

The Second Sunday After Christmas—Psalm 84—Blessed is The Man Who Trusts the Lord

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I. Introduction

- A. The extent that you love a thing is demonstrated in your actions to have it. Let me say it differently—the amount you spend on an item or a person reveals how much you want it.
 - 1. Relationships, by their very nature, require ongoing pursuit. One reason is that we always pursue what we love and if you are not pursuing the one you love then something is wrong—either with you or the one you are pursuing. Sin by its very nature separates.
 - a) It dampens or extinguishes our affections in marriage and they must be restored.
 - 2. To what extent would you go to have what you love?
 - a) Let's imagine that my wife, Kimberly, has packed up my belongings and put them in the yard for good reason.
 - b) The locks have been changed and I cannot get in the house.
 - c) However, if I slept outside on the front porch enduring the cold, wet nights of living outdoors, sleeping on concrete without blankets or pillows, then you would think that eventually the extent of my actions would communicate my desire to be on the inside with my wife.
 - d) The affections I have are demonstrated in my actions.
 - 3. Actions like this speak more than words. Words are necessary but words can be empty without sincere desire and action.
 - 4. Indeed, religious activity can be empty without holy affections for God.
- B. Our text this morning puts on display how much the psalmist loves the Lord.
 - 1. The measure of love for God's presence is seen in the extent to which he is willing just to be on near the Lord is in amazing.
 - 2. The measure of love for God's presence is seen in the extent to which he is willing to refuse the pleasures of this world.
 - 3. This is a beautiful picture of holy affections for the Lord in pursuit of his eternal joy.

II. Main Point

- A. Spend your life in pursuit of God through Christ for your joy

III. Outline

- A. Longing for the Lord
- B. Walking with the Lord
- C. Waiting for the Lord

IV. Exposition

- A. When things do not go your way, you have a choice to make. I think there's evidence to prove the people of God have gone into exile and they are awaiting redemption and restoration. But until that happens, there must be some good decisions made, changes to be implemented and waiting on the process to work. In this first point, we must have the right desire first—Longing for the Lord.
 - 1. You all know this idea of eagerness very well, practically speaking. If you plan to trim a few pounds off in the new year, you must want to do it or you will fail. If you have cancer, you need some fight in you to make it through the treatments. If you have broken relationships, the longing for reconciliation is required to have any hope of seeing that happen.
 - 2. As we begin here in Psalm 84, the first step in the process to full restoration from exile to the presence of God is longing for God. No longing for God, no restoration in God.
 - a) You can acknowledge that God was right in his verdict. You can receive disciplinary action. But while you are being disciplined (life in general), there are many things to work on as you wait.
 - (1) If you do not work on changing the things that got you into God's discipline, then I'm not sure why you would have any expectations of restoration.
 - (a) "Keep doing what you've been doing and you will keep getting what you've been getting."
 - (b) If the consequences do not compel your heart to pursue God by changing, then you are in danger of abandoning the faith to pursue whatever it is that you love.

- i) Nor are you left to yourself to do this. God has provided everything you need to pursue him.
- b) Therefore, the first indication that you love the Lord is your longing for him.
 - (1) Beginning there in verse 1, the sons of Korah write—How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts.
 - (a) We are familiar with how the son of Korah write because we recently worked through Psalm 42 together where it begins—As a deer pants for water, so my soul pants for you, the living God. This first verse sounds very similar.
 - (b) The dwelling place of God is beloved!
 - i) Does that mean the psalmist loves the tabernacle and not God?
 - (1) That's like saying, I love not being alone but not my wife. The benefits...not her.
 - (2) If I said our house was lovely in the introduction, it was not meant to indicate that I love our house more than my wife. It simply meant, I love this house because that's where my wife is.
 - (3) We can see the psalmist means the same thing because at the end of verse 2, he cries out to the living God not the tent.
 - ii) But God must be lovely to you or you will not long for him.
 - (2) Notice there in verse 2 how the loveliness of God shows itself in longing for him.
 - (a) This longing must endure day by day. This is a hunger that can only be satisfied in God.
 - i) Notice there in verse 2 that it says—my soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD.
 - (1) It's as though you have pursued so long and so hard that you fainted.
 - (2) Or to say it differently, you have been spent in your pursuit of God.
 - (a) You've left it all on the field.
 - (b) If in my illustration I told you that I camped out on the front porch for a couple of hours that would not communicate that I thought much of my wife.
 - (c) What does your longing look like for God? Does it flash on an off? Are you distracted? What are you spending yourself on?
 - (b) The psalmist says—my heart and flesh cry out to the living God.
 - i) This is what longing looks like.
 - ii) What he longs for in his heart is outwardly expressed even with his flesh...his mouth, his disposition, indeed all of who he is.
 - iii) Longings do not become visible until they are seen or heard in action.
 - c) The psalmist gives us a couple of illustrations to explain what he means by longing for the dwelling of God.
 - (1) The first one is that of a sparrow finding a home and the next one a swallow finding a nest.
 - (a) These two birds have sought a place to land and live. A place to put their young.
 - i) Obviously, the connection is that of dwelling place, the courts, a home, and a nest.
 - ii) Like the sparrow and the swallow, this man has found his home with the Lord.
 - (1) In fact, he has found much more than a home. He has found God.
 - (2) He has found the reason he exists.
 - (3) He has found his mission in life.
 - (a) To be sure, he may be a carpenter or a king but either way he knows that those things serve his greater mission to pursue God.
 - (4) "His answer is simple: the good life is where God is." (Hamilton 100).
 - iii) Yes...his home is at God's altar and it is worth spending yourself to be with him.
 - (b) The Lord is everything to him—my King and my God.
 - i) Indeed, he lovingly submits to God authority over him and he ultimately worships the greatest and highest of all beings—God himself.
 - d) When you see God this way, you know where true happiness is.
 - (1) That's why the psalmist concludes this first stanza with—Blessed are those who dwell in your house all the time, they praise you!

- (a) He is the source of all joy because he is all good.
 - i) It is good to love God first and foremost.
 - ii) It is good to love your neighbor as yourself.
 - (1) Other gods have other ways—ways that are not good.
 - (2) To live for yourself is not good. To live for the Lord and for others is where happiness is.
 - 3. The first stanza ends with Selah—a place to pause and reflect.
- B. As we have reflected on being restored to God's presence, that process must start with a deep desire for God himself. But that's not enough. The evidence of the longing reveals itself in our actions. Let's see how walking with God works in the process of redemption.
 - 1. I heard Iain Murray talk about the Christian life this way—"We underplay the grace and giftedness of just doggedness of just day after day, getting up and going on." (missionary.com)
 - a) Like where is that in the church these days?
 - b) More and more evidence is coming out that students are looking for more than Christianity light. They want the real thing...all of it. They despise lukewarm churches. They want to be among those who are hotly pursuing God.
 - c) We just got home from a missions conference in Louisville over the last couple of days and there were 15,000 high school and college students gathered to consider taking the gospel to the nations who have not heard.
 - (1) I watched many submit to that call. They even cut the livestream for those who were already assigned dangerous places to go so that they could not be easily identified.
 - (2) If hell bound sinners all over the world need to hear the gospel and I do nothing—goer or a sender—then my love for the sacrifice of Christ means very little to me.
 - (3) It seems very clear to me that God has gone to such lengths by sending his Son to save sinners that we too ought to have a longing to see that "the Lamb receives the reward of his sufferings" through action—proclamation of the gospel.
 - 2. Verses 5-8 appear to be the movement of a journey to the Lord—Action...doing. To say it differently, they are going to God but the path to God is by God's high-ways.
 - a) As Christians, we know that way to be through Jesus Christ. We must have a relationship through him and that begins through repentance and faith.
 - (1) When that relationship begins, for the rest of our lives we spend ourselves following Christ until we safely arrive home!
 - (2) Not to follow Christ ends at the wrong destination. It will end in eternal exile in hell.
 - (a) Our actions will have communicated very clearly that we did not long for God or see him as our greatest and highest joy.
 - (b) That is the greatest of sins—unbelief—to reject God's gracious offer of salvation in his Son who is your eternal joy.
 - b) But that's not what the psalmist believes or wants to communicate.
 - (1) He believes that happiness is found in the man whose strength is in the Lord.
 - (a) But what does it mean that the Lord is your strength?
 - i) Notice the parallel statement—whose strength is in the Lord, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
 - ii) There's joy in the journey because the journey ends in the presence of God. But also glory to be seen as God strengthens you to endure what you cannot do on your own.
 - (b) To follow God...to long for his presence is to walk in his ways...in his strength. His ways are in your heart. They have been written there according to the new covenant. And he will cause you to walk in them.
 - i) To love God is to hide his word in our hearts so that we might pursue him as he demands.
 - ii) If I say that I long to be in the presence of God but I willingly and gladly disobey his ways then it seems pretty clear that I write my own rules and I am god of my own life.
 - (2) All believers need strength to endure the journey to the Lord's presence.

- (a) Life is incredibly difficult. The nights are long. The darkness is consuming. How will I make it? How will I endure?
 - (b) How does walking with God in his ways give you strength for the journey?
 - (c) Verse 6 helps us answer that question.
 - i) Notice how—Passing through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.
 - ii) The Valley of Baca means the place of suffering. It is the place of exile. It's what some call the Vale of Tears.
 - (1) It was a literal place but it became a metaphor of the place of suffering.
 - (2) What is the Vale of Tears in America?
 - (a) There have been lots of them, I suppose. I don't know that we have a place like the Valley of Baca that takes on this meaning.
 - (b) But we might say—this is another Vietnam or something like cancer.
 - (3) However, the valley of exile and suffering is made into a place of springs.
 - (a) Imagine the Valley of Baca as a desert like place but the Lord turns it into an oasis!
 - (b) Indeed, so much so that this Vale of Exile looks like fertile fields after the spring rain.
 - (4) The Valley of Baca can be deceiving. It looks treacherous and dark. Indeed it is impossible to traverse this valley in your own strength.
 - (a) However, your affections for God spur you to walk this valley and by walking in God's strength it's as though you are walking the garden of Eden.
 - (b) You will say some day, I sacrificed nothing. Every suffering was worth it.
 - iii) That still doesn't tie everything together just yet.
 - (1) Let me ask it this way. Do we not rightly go to battle in the journey of following Christ by putting on the armor of God?
 - (2) Sure! Let's ask what does it mean to put on the breastplate of righteousness?
 - (a) What will protect my heart on the journey? To be sure it is the righteousness of Christ but it is also doing righteousness.
 - (b) That's how you traverse the Vale of Tears in the Lord's strength. You put one foot in front of the other by faith and you are certain that God is not only at the end but with you in the journey.
3. Think about journeys you have been on. I can't imagine anyone saying that you woke up and started the trip and after a long, hard day you ended with strength.
- a) However, this spiritual journey to God's presence is described in verse 7 like this—They walk from strength to strength.
 - (1) Unlike any journey, "they start from a place of strength, and in spite of the challenges, setbacks, hardships, and afflictions, they proceed in strength to places of strength because God is their stronghold (Hamilton 101).
 - (2) Strength for the journey is sustained by praying.
 - (a) Prayer is the plea of passion for the presence of God.
 - (b) Prayer is one of the most obvious actions by which the longings of our hearts are revealed.
 - (c) Show me the prayers of a man and I can probably tell you what he loves and believes.
- C. As we move to our last point, happiness is found in the man who is trusting in the Lord, we must pause and ponder where we are in our own journey through the Vale of Tears—life itself.
- 1. We know not when the journey is over but we know who is in this journey and who we get at the end—the God of heaven and earth!
 - 2. We see the word "Behold" periodically throughout the Bible. It's not something we do very often.
 - a) I've never seen the Grand Canyon but I imagine that's what I would do as I stood there on the rim. I would drink in the glory of God's creation. Now he draws our attention to our shield and we should behold it.

- (1) A shield is a defensive weapon not an offensive weapon. It is meant to stop arrows, spears and swords.
 - (a) They are the weapons of the enemy as we travel through this life of suffering to God.
 - i) We could discuss all the ways by which the enemy tries to stop our pursuit of God.
 - ii) These weapons are more dangerous than the cold steel of a sharp blade.
 - iii) The tactics are lies mixed with truth. Any and every form of deception is game on. There are no rules of engagement. The means justify the end—destruction.
 - (1) I could not in any stretch of the imagination know or explain all the weapons of the enemy.
 - (2) I mean Jesus called out the apostle Peter—get behind me Satan. He will use the people we love to do his bidding.
 - (3) That's why are focus must be on our shield.
- b) Our shield is the Anointed One!
 - (1) But who is the Anointed One? Who is the Messiah? Who is the Christ?
 - (a) Look down at verse 11—For the LORD God is a sun and shield.
 - (b) The Anointed One is God but also the King—he is the God-Man. He is Jesus.
 - (2) And if our shield is God, then no weapon of the enemy will eternally harm us.
 - (3) The only reason you will find yourself making it to the end of this journey to God is God.
 - (a) He is one who keeps us. We must trust the shield is there. Do not give in to the temptations!
 - (4) The psalmist prays—look on the face of your Anointed.
 - (a) He is our Savior and our God.
 - (b) He is one who shepherds us home through the valley of the shadow of death.
 - (c) The psalmist battles his way through life...through difficulty...suffering...persecution because his affections for God are his ultimate desire.
 - i) Indeed, he spends himself for his highest and greatest and longest joy—God himself.
 - ii) Notice there in verse 10—For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.
 - (1) It's like saying, "Gathering for worship just one day is better than 3 years at Disney World."
 - (2) Have any of you seen those bump stickers that say a bad day fishing is a better than a good day at work?
 - (3) If you could put into words how much you love God how would you say it?
 - (4) He says he would rather stand outside on the threshold of God's house than IN the tents of wickedness.
 - (5) My illustration in the beginning was shaped by this idea.
 - (a) If I loved my wife, I had rather live on the front porch than to pursue anyone else for all the pleasures of this world.
 - (b) Inside the tents of the wicked is full of temporary fun but your affections for God will become cold and lifeless and you will not pursue him.
 - (6) Here's what the psalmist knows is coming—v. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield, the LORD bestows grace and glory. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.
 - (a) The tents of wickedness are darkness but God is light—life!
 - (b) The tents may hide your wickedness but no tent can shield you from the wrath to come.
 - (c) You think that God is withholding good things from you in the tents of wickedness.
 - (d) No. They are not good. They are death.
 - (e) But for those who walk uprightly—who protects their hearts with the shield of righteousness, guess what becomes of it?
 - (f) O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in the you.

3. Do you want to be eternally happy and live in joy now and forever? Long for him. Follow him. And trust him.