

Thriving in the Days Ahead

Psalm 84

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What kind of person will thrive in the days ahead? Is there a place of safety regardless of how political events unfold? Is there a place of blessing regardless of what the economy does? How do we position ourselves for future blessing?

Psalm 84 gives us some insight on that subject. Follow with me as we read.

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! 2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

3 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. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah

5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. 6 As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

8 Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Selah

9 Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one. 10 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. 11 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.

12 O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.”

This Psalm is arranged into three sections. The first section concludes at the end of verse 4 with the word “*Selah.*” *Selah* is an instruction to not rush ahead; pause and think about what has just been said. We are prone to read the Bible too fast. There needs to be some *Selaha*s in our reading of Scripture. Don’t just read the words; ponder the thought; meditate on what has been said: *Selah.* Verses 1-4 is section one. Section 2 concludes at the end of verse 8 with the word *Selah.* And verses 9-12 make up the third section. There is a blessing pronounced in each section. Verse 4 says “*Blessed are those who dwell in your house....*” Verse 5 in the second section says, “*Blessed are those whose strength is in you....*” And the last section concludes with “*...blessed is the man who trusts in you.*” So Psalms 84 addresses the subject of blessing. The Amplified Bible embellishes the word “blessed” with the words “happy, fortunate, to be envied.”

People who thrive in the days ahead will be Christians who are:

I. RESTING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD! (vs 1-4)

This Psalm opens with a longing for that presence.

Verse 1 *“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!”*

What is the attraction for the house of God in this Psalm? It is the fact that God dwells there. It is the PRESENCE of God in the Tabernacle that makes it lovely. I have grandchildren who reside at 1346 N. Washington in Springfield, MO. I have other grandchildren that reside at a house in San Clemente, CA. I love visiting those houses. The reason I love to visit those houses is that my grandchildren dwell there. You take them out of the house; and I lose interest in the place real fast. I care very little about the physical structure at 1346 N. Washington. I go there to meet with people I love.

The Tabernacle was *lovely* because God dwells there. His PRESENCE was what made the place lovely. In Ps 16:11 David said to the Lord, *“You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”* (NKJV). That’s why we come together for worship every Sunday morning. We want to enjoy the presence of the Lord. Jesus promised in Matt 18:20 *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”* (NKJV). In one sense God is always with us wherever we go. But there is a special promise of God’s presence when we come together in His name. That means we are gathering under His authority and unto Him. Did you know that there are church services that happen every Sunday in which the people don’t actually gather in His name (in the way I just described)? They call themselves Christian; but they gather for a different reason than meeting with the Lord. They may just enjoy the social interaction with each other. They may just be fulfilling a perceived duty. There are many reasons people go to church that fall outside of what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 18:20 (*“gathered together in My name...”*). The national of Israel made that mistake. God instructed the prophet, Zechariah, *“Ask all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? 6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?’”* (7:5-7).

But when we gather for the right reason and with the right focus, God comes and meets with us. That’s what makes church *lovely*.

In Ps 84:2 we can feel intensity of the Psalmist’s desire for the presence of God.

“My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” The desire is toward *“...the living God.”* He’s not just wanting to go through a religious exercise. He’s not interested in dead ritual. He wants to meet with the Lord. And his desire for that is fervent. He *yearns* for it; but the desire goes beyond that: He *“even faints, for the courts of the LORD...”* When he says *“...my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”* He is saying “heart & soul,” my whole being is engaged in this desire. From the depth of my heart, I am crying out to encounter His presence. *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for*

righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt 5:6). The promise is not to everybody. It is to those who hunger for it. It is to those who are consumed with a thirst for more. Most Christians do not hunger and thirst for more of God. They are occupied with other things; and a revival would actually be an inconvenience to what they really want to do. How healthy is my appetite for God? We can kill our appetite for healthy things by snacking on junk food. That same principle works in spiritual matters as well. Snacking on the world can affect our desire for the word of God and His presence. In the natural most Americans are dehydrated and don’t even know it. Most Christians are dehydrated and don’t even know it. It’s strange how the more water you drink, the more you want. The more of God you get, the more you want. *“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good...”*(Ps 34:8 NKJV). *“As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee. You alone are my heart’s desire. And I long to worship thee.”* That comes straight out of Psalm 41:1-2 where David writes, *“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”* (NKJV). Those who thrive in the days ahead will be people who have cultivated an appreciation for the presence of God. Their appetite for the things of this world will be minimized; and their appetite for more of God will be maximized.

Ps 84:3 *“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.”* When I read the word “altar” what kind of thoughts cross your mind? I think about prayer; I think about intimacy with God. The sparrow was considered the most insignificant of all birds. Yet they were allowed to come in. The swallow is known to be a restless bird. Yet they have found in the presence of God a place for nesting. When a bird is building a nest, what kind of place are they looking for? They want a safe place for their young. Even this restless swallow has found a rest in God—a place in Him where she can feel safe. Turmoil is in the world, but at God’s altar there is rest and peace. *“You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You”* (Isa 26:3 NKJV). Is perfect peace found in having your money invested in the right stocks and bonds? Is it found in having the best safe house? No, it is found in staying focused on the Lord (no matter what is going on around you) and in trusting Him for the right outcome.

“Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you” (Ps 84:4). There is a difference between dwelling versus visiting. Occasionally coming to God when you have a crisis is not the same as settling into a day-by-day communion with Him. Jesus said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5 NKJV). *“Blessed are those who dwell in your house...they will have plenty of reason to praise You. I has become a part of their lifestyle.” Selah.*

So in this first section the Psalmist expresses his intense longing for the presence of God. He sees the altar as a place of safety and rest. People who thrive in the days ahead will be resting in the presence of the Lord. Secondly, people who thrive in the days ahead will be:

II. RELYING ON THE STRENGTH OF GOD! (vs 5-8)

Verse 5 makes that observation. *“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.”*

They know where they’re going and their heart is in the process. They are serious about their walk with God. Not easily distracted from the real objective of life. There is a sense of intentionality and purpose in the phrase *“who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.”*

And they have learned to draw upon God’s strength rather than relying on their own.

Ps 84:6 *“As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.”*

The Amplified Bible calls it the Valley of Weeping. In the blessed person’s life, there can be some valleys; there can be some times of weeping. But I want you to notice two things about this person’s journey. (1) He does not get stuck in the Valley of Baca. He passes through it. He is not exempt from such experiences. But at some point he reaches the other side of that valley. There is wisdom in grieving a loss. Denying the realities of life is not a healthy path. But we also learn to process our pain and move on in life. They *pass through* the Valley of Baca. More technically, Baca refers to a tree or shrub that grows in arid places. By extension from that it is a place of weeping. (2) As they pass through that dry, difficult valley, they transform it. By the grace of God instead of being changed themselves into a bitter, anxious person—they transform the environment around them and *“make it a place of springs.”*

Of course, the picture here is people on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Their desire for His presence drives their momentum. On the journey, they pass through some dry, dusty places. They could decide: This is too hard, let’s turn back. But the desire for God is too compelling for that. Instead they rely upon the Lord as their strength and He enables them to not only get through the valley, but transform everything around them along the way. Remember Jesus’ promise in John 7:37, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”* They dig into the dry ground by faith and God pour out showers of blessing: *“... the autumn rains also cover it with pools.”*

Psalm 84:7 *“They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”* The destination is Zion/Jerusalem. They will make the destination. The Valley of Baca will not stop them. Each one (all who walk with God this way) will *“appears before God in Zion.”*

How do we thrive in the days ahead? We do it one day at a time. We do it by going *“from strength to strength.”* That indicates a progression in strength for the person who will walk this out. It takes a certain amount of strength to just make it to a Sunday morning service. It takes more strength to encourage others when you get there. It takes more strength to teach a Sunday

School class. It takes more to lead a congregation. If at each level, we will find our strength in the Lord, that experience will prepare us to carry more responsibility in the future.

The Psalmist offers up a prayer in verses 8-9. The prayer is to “LORD God Almighty”: Yehovah (the Covenant-keeping God of Israel) who is also the Sovereign, Almighty God of all the earth. When I address God that way I am speaking assurance of His ability to answer the prayer and of His willingness to do so out of His covenant relationship with me. The prayer is addressed to the “*God of Jacob*” (imperfect, flawed Jacob) yet you took care of him. Hear me the way you heard him and take care of me.

Selah. Pause and think about that. We have seen how the God of Jacob can strengthen us for the journey. We can go from strength to strength by His grace. People who thrive in the days ahead are relying on His strength of God. Then in section three people who thrive are:

III. REAPING THE REWARDS OF GOD! (vs 9-12)

The prayer continues in verse 9 “...*look with favor on your anointed one.*” Who is the Anointed One? Christ means “anointed.” We are anointed only because we are “in Him.” Favor comes to us from the Father as He sees us “*in Christ.*” As He looks with favor on the Christ and sees us in Him, our prayers are answered.

Verse 10 “*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.*”

Doorkeeper is a lowly position; but life is better in that lowly place living for God and in His favor than to have all the luxury and comfort the world has to offer.

This is the kind of thinking that will get a person through the ups and downs of life. If our delight is in the Lord and the market rallies, that is very nice. We get to enjoy God and maybe a few extra material things as well. If our delight is in the Lord, the market crashes and we lose our jobs, we are not shaken because the most important thing for us is still there. “*For the LORD God is a sun and shield...*” He will light up our path and He will protect us from the fiery darts of the enemy. He is my Sunshine. He is my Protector.

Ps 118:6 “*The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?* (NKJV). “*If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:35).

Isa 44:2-5 “*Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring; 4 They will spring up among the grass Like willows by the watercourses.'* 5 *One will say, 'I am the LORD's'; Another will call himself by the*

name of Jacob; Another will write with his hand, 'The LORD's,' And name himself by the name of Israel" (NKJV).

Bottom line: God will take care of you and yours!

Verse 11 *"For the Lord bestows favor and honor...."* King James Verses translates this grace and glory. God will the grace or favor needed for the occasion and He will bring you into honor, not shame. Look at the honor God brought on Daniel even when the nation as a whole was under the judgment of God. There was a time in David's life when his name was slandered by Saul and he was pursued like a criminal. There was a season of hardship: a Valley of Baca. But in time the Lord brought him into a place of honor that continues to this day. There were some valleys in Joseph's life. But God did take care of Joseph.

Good Things are coming your way as you take the path described in Psalm 84! Listen to the rest of verse 11, *"no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless."* Sometimes we think good things are being withheld from us. That's because we see through a glass darkly; that's because we only know in part. We may not be seeing the big picture from God's perspective; we may not fully understand what is best for us. This is why the just shall live by faith. Know this: God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

These promises are seldom manifest immediately. There is a space between the time seed is sown and the time it is harvested. But God is always good for His word. This is His word: *"no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless."* If it's good for you, he will give it to you when you're equipped to receive it. There is a condition attached to this promise: We must walk with God blameless (not perfect as we would understand that term). The Hebrew word is *tamiym*. It's root meaning is entire or whole, complete, with integrity. It means without blemish, sincere, sound, undefiled, upright. In other words, these promises are for people who are genuinely serving God with a sincere heart. For those people these promises are *"yea and amen."* They are not dependent upon the actions of the Supreme Court or the whims of our society. They are guaranteed by the LORD God Almighty!

Ps 84:12 *"O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you."* This is what this Psalm is calling for in us today. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths"* (Prov. 3:5-6).

Stay close to the Lord; walk with integrity before Him; trust Him with everything—and you will be just fine!

Pray

