

Better is One Day in Your Courts

Psalm 84 (Saints Triumphant)

Back in March because of health concerns we were told that we couldn't gather for worship in groups of more than ten people, I have to admit, it made me sick to my stomach. The thought of God's people not being able to worship together here in God's house was upsetting. Maybe you felt the same. For a time we accepted that reality even though we didn't like it. The first week or two you managed, but then Holy Week came. On Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, days that we especially love to be in God's house, God's house was reduced to being a filming area. Worship was limited to online streaming or receiving sermons in the mail. Even though I was here, I felt cut off from God's house and from God's people. Were you feeling that way too? Then we offered those drive-in services in our parking lot. That helped, but it still wasn't quite the same. I still felt a little cut off from God's house as I stood outside in the back of a pick-up truck looking at cars with the church still empty. Even though those gathering restrictions were lifted and we are able to worship here in God's house again, perhaps you still feel cut off in some way from God's house and from God's people.

It seems that the writer of Psalm 84 is feeling something similar. This psalm is attributed to the Sons of Korah. This was a group of people who were of the tribe of Levi. The Levites had a special role among the people serving as caretakers of the temple and priests who offered up sacrifices on behalf of the people. These particular Levites were like the hymn writers and musicians. In this particular psalm, or song of Scripture, the writer is longing to be in God's house. It appears that something is making it impossible for the psalmist to join in the pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem. Hear the longing in his song, **"How I love your dwelling place, O Lord of Armies. My soul grows weak and even wastes away, as I long for the courtyards of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a nest for herself, where she may place her young near your altars, O Lord of Armies, my King and my God."** (vs. 1-3) The birds have access to God's house and are able to build their nests, but the psalmist has no access. He feels the separation. He feels cut off and he has a deep longing to be there.

Why does he feel this way? Why did we feel that way? Why do we still feel that way? Is it feeling cut off from God's house and from God's people here on earth? Yes! But is it something more than that? Because of all the sickness, sorrow, and pain we endure in this sinful world, do we feel cut off from God's heavenly house and his visible presence where triumph over sin and suffering and death cannot harm us again? Do we feel cut off from those who are already there? My friends, we recognize what the psalm writer concludes - better is one day in God's courts, his dwelling place, than a thousand days anywhere else.

We long to be in his glorious presence where all God's saints are gathered triumphantly. Did you hear the longing in the psalmist's words? "My soul grows weak and even wastes away, as I long for the courtyards of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." He may be speaking with God's earthly temple in mind initially, but ultimately he is longing to be in God's heavenly presence. Why does he long for that? Why do we long for that? It's because we know life there, even just one day, is better than life here in this world. Being there means eternal triumph, eternal victory that is ours only through Jesus who won that victory for us through his death and resurrection. Many are there. Many have already been given that triumph dwelling in God's visible presence, but we aren't there yet. That's what makes us long for it even more.

We examine our own lives. We look around the world in which we live. What we see all too often even on the best of days is quite the opposite of triumph and victory. The presence of sin makes it very clear to us we are not there. We may not be able to comprehend a perfect life without sin, but we love the thought of being there and we long to be there. Those who are already there are forever blessed. The psalm writer said, **"How blessed are those who**

live in your house. They are always praising you. How blessed is everyone whose strength is found in you. The highways to Jerusalem are in their hearts. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, it becomes full of springs. The autumn rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one will appear before God in Zion.” (vs. 4-7)

Dwelling in God’s presence, the saints in triumph are always praising the God who saved them, God who alone deserves all praise and glory. We get a glimpse of that praise in Revelation 19. John records for us what he heard from the saints triumphant in heaven, **“After these things I heard what seemed to be the loud sound of an immense crowd of heaven, saying: Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just. (Revelation 19:1-2a)** God receives unending praise for his saving grace and the victory that God’s people have through Jesus. He was their saving strength while living in this world. As a result their hearts were focused on the triumph they knew was theirs because Jesus was triumphant over sin and death. This coming triumph is what gave them comfort in this life while on that road to get there.

The psalmist said that as they pass through the Valley of Baca, it becomes full of springs. The autumn rain also covers it with pools. That word “Baca” in Hebrew sounds a lot like “sorrow” or “weeping”. That valley of sorrow and weeping because of sin became full of springs and pools - blessings on dry valleys in the desert. In their sadness, they were comforted with the blessing of forgiveness and life. When their journey was over, they were brought into God’s presence where triumph was finally theirs. No more sin. No more sadness. No more tears. No pain. Only life forever in God’s house. With the psalm writer we say of the saints triumphant, **“How blessed are those who live in your house...Yes, one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather wait at the doorway of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord is a sun and a shield. God gives grace and glory. The Lord does not withhold any good thing from those who walk with integrity. O Lord of Armies, how blessed is everyone who trusts in you.” (vs. 4a, 10-12)**

The sun gives life and life to the world. A shield protects from danger. The sun may go down and set only to return again the next day. A shield may not protect us from everything. With God as our sun, his glorious life-giving light will shine on us forever. He will shield us forever not withholding the best thing of all - the joy of worshipping in his presence forever standing in glory as saints triumphant.

Truly how blessed are all who trusted in God as Savior and Lord! Glorious triumph was and is theirs. Truly blessed are we who trust in Jesus as our Savior. We, his saints washed clean of sin, will one day be numbered among the saints triumphant. We long to be there in God’s house with all his people standing in his glorious presence. Until we are there, we feel cut off from where we really want to be and know we will be. So while we wait, we love and long to be in his house even now to worship him for the same reason we long to be in his heavenly home - one day in God’s courts is better than a thousand anywhere else in this world.

Remember the earthly place the psalmist is longing to be. During the Old Testament the full joy of worshipping God was possible only in one city and in one building since the sacrifices could be offered only in the temple of Jerusalem. Today our worship isn’t limited to one place or even a particular day. Yet we keep longing to be in God’s house.

It is true that we can worship God anywhere on our journey toward triumph whether it’s in this building, in a parking lot, or even streamed on our computers. All of these are great blessings for God’s people on their walk of faith. God does not need us to come to his house, but his house is where we love and long to be in so that gathering together we are blessed together. We don’t want to willfully deprive ourselves or become indifferent toward being in God’s house. We watch so that new lazy habits do not form. We test our reasons for remaining distant from God’s

house so that they are not just excuses. We know that one day or even a part of a day in God's courts, his house, is better than a thousand anywhere else.

There is blessedness in worshipping together. Our praise, even though muffled by masks, is raised together to God. Our faith is strengthened together through Word and Sacrament. We are comforted in all our sorrows together. We are encouraging each other so that our eyes remain focused on the eternal joy we will share together in our coming triumph in God's heavenly courts forever.

"O Lord of Armies, how blessed is everyone who trusts in you," the psalmist said. Trusting in Jesus our Savior, eternal joy awaits us with all the saints already numbered among the triumphant. We may feel cut off from God's house because we aren't there yet. We may feel cut off from those who have gone before us. We rejoice at their triumph and long for our first day of an eternity of days in God's dwelling place numbered among the saints triumphant. Amen

