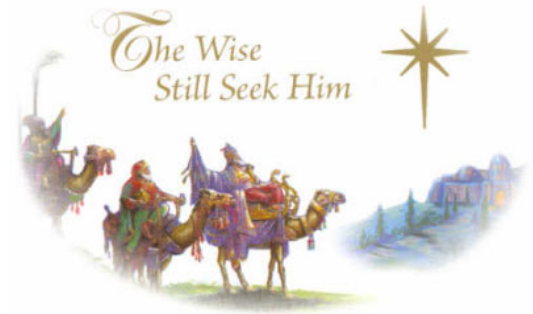


Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 84

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

Matthew 2:1-12



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HOW LOVELY IS THY DWELLING PLACE

Psalm 84 is a psalm of great peace and personal comfort. The words heard by the shepherds on the night of Christ's birth were, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*" (Luke 2:14, KJV). Psalm 84 foretold the peace that would be in the hearts of these shepherds when they gazed on the newborn Christ child, and in your heart also as you offer its words back to God.

Charles Spurgeon loved Psalm 84 as a psalm of peace and comfort. He said, "If the 23rd be the most popular, the 103rd the most joyful, the 119th the most deeply experimental, and the 51st the most plaintive, this (the 84th) is the most sweet of the Psalms of Peace." Spurgeon was ill when he wrote these words. He feared that his life would end before he finished his commentary on the Psalms, and Psalm 84 in particular spoke to the heart and calmed the fears of Spurgeon – one of the great preachers of the modern era.

In most Bible translations you will see the words "*A Psalm of the Sons of Korah*" at the beginning of Psalm 84. In all, eleven of the psalms are attributed similarly to the Sons of Korah. Different Korahs appear in Jewish history, but this Korah is special. Levi was his great-grandfather, that is, Korah was a Levite, set aside by God to serve as priest. Numbers 16 describes how Korah was with the Israelites in the wilderness and became jealous of Moses – not a good thing to do. With leaders of the tribe of Ruben he rose up before Moses and asked, "*Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?*" (Num 16:3). The end result of this was the destruction of Korah and all who stood with him.

Yet, the *sons* of Korah did not die (Num 26:11). This is how God works. He knows each person as an individual. He "looks on the *heart*," the Bible says. In the Bible, families and communities and nations have *spirits*, and individuals have *hearts*. So God looked on the hearts of the sons of Korah, and spared them.

Their descendants lived on, and two centuries later, when King David was old and making assignments for service in the temple (yet to be built), he assigned the descendants of Korah, known then as *Korahites*, to serve as gatekeepers (1 Chron 26:1). As we shall see, Psalm 84 refers to this fact.

Ps 84:1-4. *How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!*

²*My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.*

³*Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.*

⁴*Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise! [Selah]*¹

• *How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!* (v.1). This is the subject of our discussion today: How lovely is the dwelling place of God! When David planned the temple and assigned the sons of Korah as gatekeepers, he believed the Lord would dwell there. He said, "*The house that is to be built for the Lord must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands; I will therefore make preparation for it*" (1 Chron 22:5). And so the temple of Solomon, David's son, became the "house built for the Lord."

The reason many find peace and security in Psalm 84 is that the dwelling place of God becomes not only the temple in Jerusalem, but any place where God is present. It may be your home, or your church, or on top of a mountain – wherever you happen to be close to God. There are sound Biblical reasons for interpreting the Psalm this way. Discuss the following verses, and suggest other verses that come to mind.

Isa 57:15. *For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the*

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise noted. Most translations include "Selah", which means "rest."

high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

John 1:1, 14. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*

John 14:23. *“If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*

Heb 11:6. *Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Rev 21:3. *“Behold, the dwelling of God is with men.”*

Answer the following two questions based on these verses: (People give all sorts of answers!)

(1) If you were God, what would persuade you to allow a person into your presence?

(2) If one longs to know God and draw near to him, what can he or she do?

Ps 84:5-8. *Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*

⁶*As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.*

⁷*They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*

⁸*O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! [Selah]*

• *Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee* (v.5). These verses speak of the pilgrimage of life. Those who go through life with Christ – in the presence of God – are blessed. Their strength is in the Lord rather than in themselves. They come on hard times as all do, and they go from strength to strength.

• *The valley of Baca* (v.6). The valley of Baca is a symbol for the desert – the dry places in life’s journey where the living water of Christ seems to have evaporated. Yet those who go in the presence of God feel his strength where theirs has failed, and the dry valley becomes “a place of springs.” This is a picture of the difference Christ makes in the lives of those who follow him.

Ps 84:9-12. *Behold our shield, O God; look upon the face of thine anointed!*

¹⁰*For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

¹¹*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.*

¹²*O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!*

• *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness* (v.10). This is something the sons of Korah would say. They actually were doorkeepers in the house of God, and content to remain so. They were in God’s dwelling place, and doing what God wanted them to do, and that was good enough for them. There is likewise contentment with anyone who is content to dwell with Christ and live according to his will regardless of the circumstances. The world argues strongly and often successfully against this. Which side are you on in the following differences of opinion?

The World:	The Bible:
“You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can.” – Schlitz	<i>It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.</i> – Heb 9:27
“I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.” – William Henley	<i>I can do all things in him who strengthens me.</i> – Phil 4:13
“Anatomy is destiny.” – Sigmund Freud	<i>He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ.</i> – Eph 1:5

• *Blessed is the man who trusts in thee!* (v.12). Jesus said, “*You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (John 8:32). The sons of Korah had learned this great truth, that fulfillment and contentment in life come not in selfishness and reliance on the flesh, but in selflessness and reliance on God. May we all be blessed in learning this same great truth!