

Our Beautiful Lord and His Beautiful Church

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Psalter: 228

Scripture: Psalm 84

Psalter: 386

Sermon Text: Psalm 84:1–4

Psalter: 227

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.

—Psalm 84:1–4

Uplifting godly music has long been an important part of the saints' worship throughout the ages. From the Old Testament time to our present day, both the preached Word and scriptural music have been inseparable. They augment each other. Many years ago, the poet wrote these touching words that reflect Scripture which the church still loves to sing today:

Beautiful Savior, King of Creation,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love Thee, Truly I'd serve Thee,
Light of my soul, my Joy, my Crown.

The beauty of the Savior as King and Lord inspires the heart of the saints to love Him in return and live for Him as an expression of Christian thanksgiving.

There is another beautiful song recorded in Psalm 84:1–4. The psalmist sings and the faithful church has always echoed his exaltation of God resulting in a desire serve Him within His church.

The Book of Psalms is a collection of divinely inspired lyrics meant to be paired with music and sung by the church. When you read Psalm 84, you quickly get the impression that the psalmist’s heart is filled with delight as he considers the Lord and His church.

In the first four verses, he sees the beauty of church and the Lord of hosts; his heart is longing after the living God. In verse 6, he is thinking of a man who goes through the valley of “Baca,” or a “desert of weeping,” and yet there is rain, a cooling refreshment. In verse 8, he sees God as a shield or defense. In verse 10, he confesses that one day in the Lord’s house is better than a thousand days anywhere else, and he would rather have the simplest responsibility in the church, such as a doorman, than to be engaged in a lifestyle of sin. In verse 11, the Lord gives grace and glory to the needy within the context of His church. Lastly, the psalmist writes that no good thing will the Lord withhold from them which walk uprightly in His way.

We can immediately glean that the psalmist’s heart is greatly cheered and encouraged in the Lord his God. From the abundance of his heart, his mouth spoke and his pen wrote these expressions of strong, joy-filled faith. Now to be sure, the psalmist was not always experiencing such praise-filled times like this. There were other times in his life when he was in the pit of despair, just as there are such seasons for every Christian. But here, his heart is bursting with gratitude and humble joy! From the first four verses of Psalm 84, let us consider this further.

In our original unfallen state, our first parents, Adam and Eve, would not only have seen the beauty in each

other as husband and wife, but they also would have known and seen the beauty of the Lord as the perfect Designer and Creator of all things. Sadly, that spiritual insight all changed with the tragic fall of mankind shortly after time began. In fact, the Bible tells us that the natural man, that is the unsaved man, cannot truly discern that which is good and spiritual (1 Cor. 2:14), and Isaiah writes that we have no desire for the Lord because we cannot see the beauty in Him (Isa. 53:2). Mankind by nature is spiritually blind.

However, our great and merciful God rescues His children from our self-made mess. Thanks be to God, He opens spiritually blind eyes with His life-giving grace. He graciously grants us sight to see the King in His beauty, Isaiah writes (Isa. 33:17). This is a result of His enlightening grace and saving power working irresistibly in the soul. David, the probable author of this psalm, was a man who was saved by the Lord's redeeming grace. He had his spiritual eyes opened to see the beauty of the King of kings. He is inspired by the spirit express his faith in what he writes.

In the first verse of Psalm 84, he saw the beauty of the church and her God in the tabernacles and courts of the Lord. In other words, the worship of God with His people in His house was not an ugly, negative experience for him. It was "amiable." It was beautiful. It was his delight! He did not go to worship in God's house with a bitter, indifferent, or a callous heart. He looked forward to the time he was privileged to spend with the Lord, hearing His Word and singing the praises of Zion with God's people. The psalmist's mind and heart and emotions were tuned to give God the glory in His house in all aspects of worship, and therefore the entire worship experience was a satisfying delight for him. Is the whole experience of church a delight for us also? Can we sing along with

this song from the very opening line? Does the weekly privilege of gathering with the people of God in your local church, sing His praises, and hear Him speak to us from His Word cheer us?

The psalmist sings of beautiful “tabernacles.” He refers to it in the plural form. Why is that? There was only one tabernacle in the Old Testament time, but he probably was referring to the tabernacle being set up in various locations as the Israelites traveled.

Most commentators agree that the tabernacle building was not beautiful in itself. It was not an aesthetically appealing structure in terms of architecture, but rather angular with all kinds of animal skins covering it. Yet David writes that it was beautiful! Consider several reasons why.

It was beautiful because of ownership. He sings of “thy tabernacles.” The church building is representative of the people within in her. So the psalmist sees beauty in that the church is owned and possessed by Lord. That is still true today. In what ways?

First, because the church has been purchased by Christ, she is beautiful. When you purchase something, you become the rightful owner. So also with the Lord’s purchased possession—the church. Since she has been purchased by the Lord, the believing church becomes His possession. Paul writes, “You are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19). Because the beautiful Lord owns her, the church is beautiful—even though she often feels ugly with sin. There is a folktale about Midas the king who was very careful what he touched, because everything he touched turned to gold. Similarly, when the Lord of heaven reaches down and touches a sinner with His saving grace, that sinner changes from being spiritually ugly to spiritually beautiful because of the saving touch and ownership of the beautiful King of kings.

Second, the psalmist also sees beauty in the church because the Lord owns all things, including His church. The psalmist addresses the God as the “Lord of hosts!” (v. 1). As Lord of hosts, He is Ruler and Possessor of all things. He owns the hosts of heaven and all on earth as well. Are you both humbled and cheered that He owns you, too? Due to our fallen nature, mankind sees no delight in being owned and ruled. In fact, fallen man desires to be his own lord without having to answer to any higher authority. However, by grace, we find comfort and security in belonging to our Lord and delightedly serve Him. The Lord’s saving grace changes our core desires and we learn to sing with the psalmist from Psalter 383:

All that I am I owe to Thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul amaze.

The psalmist goes on to sing of the beauty of the church because this is where God met with His people. This is why the tabernacle is referred to in the Bible as the “tent of meeting.” Our beautiful Lord visits His church; He does not stay away! God had said to Israel, “And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory” (Ex. 29:43). The Lord could righteously pass us by, but for the sake of His Son He condescends to meet with us! This is a beautiful truth. It is a wonderful thing to receive a visit from someone who truly loves you and has your best interest at heart. Likewise it is a beautifully wonderful thing that the Lord stoops low to visit us in our need and to encourage us by His Word and Spirit. He dwells, He tabernacles, with His church.

The tabernacle, however, was most beautiful because all within it pointed to Jesus Christ, the beautiful Savior. The tabernacle’s wide open doors reflected the

wide open arms of Christ. He said, "All that come to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). When one walked through the doors, there was a brazen altar where sacrifices were laid. That pointed to the offering of Christ on the cross and thus to a sinner's salvation. The bronze laver full with water the priest was to wash in pointed to sanctification, or making clean. Every sinner needs to be made clean in Christ, who Paul says is "our sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30). The golden candlestick in the holy place pointed to Jesus as the "Light of the world." The altar of incense with smoke constantly arising from it pointed to prayers offered up in name of our beautiful Savior. The table of showbread pictured Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. In the most holy place, the golden Ark of the Covenant represented the purity and holiness of Christ. On top of the ark was the Mercy Seat; the Lord has mercy only through Christ's blood. All of the tabernacle from the front to the back, from top to bottom—all of it points to the beautiful Savior! That is what moved Paul to write, "Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands" (Heb. 9:11). This Savior is altogether lovely! (Song 5:16). Is your heart also deeply moved by His beauty?

In the second verse of this song, the psalmist's heart was longing and fainting for the living God and for His church. In other words, his heartfelt desire was to meet with God and to be with His church. He did not go simply out of duty; not at all. His heart and flesh were crying out to meet with the living God within the Lord's courts where the people of God would meet! His heart and soul and emotions all were in tune to praise the living God of heaven! Is this our heartfelt desire and longing as well? Far too often even good Christians can get so busy, even with legitimate things, and inevitably the things of God and matters concerning His church can get overshadowed or

even displaced. J.C. Penny, founder of the chain store with the same name, once said, “If you are too busy to attend church twice on Sunday and the Wednesday night prayer meeting, then you’re doing more than God wants you to do.” When our spiritual condition is properly aligned with the Word we will sing, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Ps. 122:1). Gladness in God is what the psalmist was experiencing as he gathered with the Lord’s people in the Lord’s courts.

Note next in verse 3 that the house of God was even a lodging place for the birds. “Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.” C. H. Spurgeon wrote that the psalmist had a “blessed envy” of the birds that went to the house of the Lord and were close by the altar of God. The psalmist longed to be as close as possible to God in His church. There are some beautiful pictures of application we can draw from this.

Birds found security in the house of the Lord. The sparrow and the swallow flew in and called it home. They built nests by the altar. They were not scared away; they felt secure. It is the same with us when we fly to the Lord by faith and meet with Him and His people in His courts. Security is what mankind craves, and true and eternal security is what the Lord grants when we may follow His prescribed ways. There is security and comfort to be found in God as we like the birds make the worship of God in His church our regular practice. If the experience of church is just an occasional fly-in, then even the birds have more sense! But far worse, if we don’t flee to the Lord and His courts, we will miss out on the security that is to be found only in His presence.

The psalmist also saw the birds raising their broods there. Birds built nests in the church and settled there

to raise their young. This is a lesson for us also. We ought to raise our children within the safe confines of the church environment. The church environment is there to grant doctrinal, moral, spiritual, and social safety for both parents and children. The church is a place of multi-generational security. Birds teach us this! “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee.... Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?” (Job 12:17). One elderly person commenting on this verse put it this way: “I’m an old bird now, but when I was a tender and vulnerable hatchling, I’m thankful my parents were like wise owls to raise me within the safety of the Lord’s church.”

Lastly, in verse 4, we read that those who dwell regularly in God’s house still praise Him. We don’t know if the psalmist was still thinking of birds here, but we do know that the birds sing habitual praises to God—and if they do, we should, too! Then we see the beauty of God and His house and the beauty of the Son of God within His church. In other words, when we “dwell”—that is, live constantly—there, we will praise God. When by grace we abide and dwell with the Lord by Spirit-worked faith, and when we meet with His people in His house, our hearts will continue to praise Him! As it was true for the psalmist, so it can be true for us. Praising God continually is what the Lord deserves, and that is what the Lord desires of us.

By faith, the psalmist saw the wondrous beauty of the Lord in His church. His heart and flesh were crying out for the living God as he met with the Lord’s people in His courts. He marveled at God’s little creatures, sparrows and swallows, as they lodged in the Lord’s house and made their home there, too. He sees the blessing of regularly engaging in worship with the people of God in

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His house and rightly observes that those will be the ones who habitually praise the name of the Lord.

May the words of this psalm be our song! May our hearts be touched not only by the uplifting pathos, but also by the beautiful power of the Lord in the words of this song. By grace may our eyes be open to see the beauty of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord! And may our hearts may be tuned by grace to sing:

Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, Praise, adoration,
Now and forevermore be Thine!

Amen.