

Grace and glory

Psalm 84

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This beautiful Psalm gives prophetically the latter day experiences of the godly remnant of Israel, when, delivered from their long captivity, they travel back to God's dwelling place in Zion.

The spirit of grace that breathes throughout the Psalm makes it easier, than in many other Psalms, to draw from it an application to the Christian, as he too passes on his pilgrim way to the Father's house on high.

There are three themes which mark the three divisions of the Psalm:

1. The beauty of the house of God, to which he is travelling, and the blessedness of those who dwell within that house (1-4).
2. The experiences in the path that lead to the house, and the blessedness of the one who treads this path (5-7).
3. The comfort of prayer, and the blessedness of the man who confides in the Lord (8-12).

Thus there is brought before us a threefold blessedness:

1. The blessedness of dwelling where God dwells;
2. the blessedness that is found in treading the path that leads to God's dwelling;
3. and the blessedness of trusting in God while treading that path (4, 5, 12).

The Dwelling of God (Ps 84:1-4).

The Psalm opens with an expression of delight in the house of God – “How amiable [or how “lovely”] are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.” The godly soul sees that he is called to dwell with God, in God's own dwelling. What makes that dwelling so lovely to the soul of the Psalmist is that God Himself is there – the living God. Everything in those courts speaks of the glory of God. There God is fully displayed, and being fully displayed can be fully known. The soul longs to reach those courts of glory, the heart and the flesh cannot be satisfied apart from the living.

In like spirit the Christian looks on to the Father's house. A house where everything speaks of God the Father. The believer finds himself in a scene of contrariety where the godly suffer; where evil is increasing, both in the world and among the professing people of God; where the will of man prevails and the glory of man is displayed; and where, to sight, there is no intervention of God – God apparently being silent and still. Nevertheless, faith knows that God lives, and faith looks on to the dwelling place of God. There it will be manifested that God is the living God, and all declares the glory of God. The home to which we are going is indeed perfect in holiness and love; but what would a perfect scene be without the One to whom the home belongs, and without Christ, the One who makes the Father known?

The soul of the true Israelite realizes that the One who finds a home for the worthless bird, and a rest for the restless bird, has surely a resting place for His people – “Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.” The Christian can say that God has found a resting place for His people in the accepted sacrifice of Christ – “Whom God has set forth a mercy seat, through

faith in His blood, ... to declare at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believes in Jesus.”

If, however, God has secured a solid resting place for His people in His altar, it is in order to bring His people to dwell with Him in His house. In that dwelling “They will be constantly praising Thee” (verse 4, N.Tr.). If Christ becomes the great sacrifice on the altar of Calvary, it is to secure a praising people for God in His house. The One who uttered the cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” alone could give the answer, “But Thou art holy, O Thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel” (Ps 22:1-3, (N. Tr.)). He died to meet the holiness of God, and secure a praising people. There rises up before our vision the loveliness of the dwelling place of God – where God will dwell in the midst of a praising people,

*There will Thy love find perfect rest,
Where all around is bliss,
Where all in Thee supremely blest,
Thy praise their service is.¹*

The Highways (Ps 84:5-7).

Very happily the Psalm opens with the blessedness of the dwelling place of God. Then it sets before us the path that leads to that dwelling place. This, too, is the way of the Lord when unfolding the truth to His disciples in the last discourses. He does not tell them of the trials by the way, and then end His discourses by presenting before them the blessedness of the Father’s house. The Lord takes a better way: He commences the discourse, of John 14, by unfolding the loveliness of the Father’s house. Before we are called to face the journey, with its trials and difficulties, we are assured of the blessedness of the home to which it leads. Like the Psalmist we take the journey through the valley, in the light of the City that is set on a hill.

This journey is brought before us in verses 5-7. In verse 5, we are viewed as treading the highways – we are passing on. In verse 6, we are in a valley of tears, which we are passing through. In verse 7, Zion is in sight – we are passing in. The “highways” that lead to Zion pass through an enemy’s land. At times the way may seem long, and rough, and dreary, and the soul may long and faint for the end of the journey. Thus the very first need will be strength for the journey. This strength can alone be found in God; hence the Psalmist says, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee.” The passage in the New Testament, that above all others, marks out the pilgrim path in an evil day, opens with the exhortation, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim 2:1). If the dwelling place of God is an object to the heart, the way that leads there, will have a place in the heart. If the pilgrim path has little attraction for our hearts, does it not tell a tale of hearts that have been little touched with the sense of the blessedness of the home on high to which we have been called.

The character of the path is then brought before us. It passes through the valley of weeping (for such is the better translation). It is not simply a valley of trial, but a valley of weeping. The “weeping” speaks not merely of trials, but of the experiences in the trials. The trials, in themselves, might harden; the experiences learned in the trials – the “weeping,” that expresses the deep feelings of the soul before God in the trials – become a source of blessing

to the soul. The one who draws his strength from God, and brings his sorrows to God, will turn the “valley of weeping” into a “well-spring” of spiritual blessing. In the spirit of the Psalmist the Apostle can say to Timothy that he was “mindful of his tears.” It was not only that he was mindful of the trials of Timothy but of the “tears” that were called forth by the trials.

Moreover, in the highway that leads to the house of God there is “the early rain” that “covers it with blessings” (verse 6, N. Tr.). The rain speaks of that which comes from above – all that ministry of Christ which the Spirit of God brings from above to refresh and gladden the heart. The word is really “early-rain,” and refers to the soft and gentle rain that refreshes the ground in seed time (Deut 11:14). The “valley of weeping” prepares the soul to receive the gracious ministry of Christ from above.

Thus the soul, refreshed by the well-spring from beneath, and the early rain from above, passes onward from strength to strength. These words hardly imply a store of strength, to which strength is ever being added however much strength may increase. They set forth, rather, a fresh supply of strength from day to day.

The assured end of the journey is that “(each one) will appear before God in Zion” (verse 7, N. Tr.). We may, and alas! we do, break down on the journey. We may halt on the way, we may grow weary of the way, we may follow on faint yet pursuing; but in spite of all failure and feebleness “Each one will appear before God in Zion.” If the Lord has said, “My sheep ... shall never perish,” we may be sure that all His sheep will reach home at last. They pass on their way: one by one they go out of our sight, but “Each one appears before God in Zion.” And there at last shall they meet.

*Away with our sorrow and fear!
We soon shall have enter'd our home,
The heavenly city appear,
The day of our glory have come!*

*All tears shall have passed from our eyes
When Him we behold in the cloud,
And taste the full joy of the skies,
The love of our Father and God.²*

The Prayer (Ps 84:8-12).

The Psalm closes with the prayer of the godly soul who takes this path that leads to the house of God. Very blessedly he appeals to “the God of hosts” and “the God of Jacob.” The Psalmist turns to God with a sense of His Divine Majesty and power as the God of hosts; and to One who has all grace, and with whom he is in covenant relationship, as the God of Jacob. With Jacob God entered into relationship on the ground of sovereign grace, and with failing Jacob all through his wanderings God showed all grace. The God of power and the God of grace, with whom we are in relationship, is the One who alone can bring us on our way to glory.

Then, in his prayer, the Psalmist expresses the ground of his confidence in looking to God,

“Behold O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.” Who but Christ is God’s anointed? The basis of all our blessing – the ground of all our confidence – is that Christ is all that God would have Him to be, and has done all that God requires to be done, in order that His grace may flow out in blessing to unworthy sinners. God looks upon Christ as One who was anointed to do the great work, and God is satisfied with Christ and His finished work. Thus God can be a shield to the believer. He can shelter him from judgment, death, and all the power of the enemy, because of what He has found in Christ. Well, indeed, for the soul to ever plead the satisfaction that God has found in Christ, and say “Look upon the face of thine anointed.”

In the light of the coming glory, the world and all that it can offer is left behind. What can the tents of wickedness offer in comparison with the courts of the Lord? A day in His courts is better than a thousand spent in the most favourable circumstances in the dwellings of men. At best the world has but a temporary tent for its dwelling: the Lord brings us to an eternal home.

With the God of power and grace before his soul; blessed and accepted in the Anointed; with His back on the world and his face to the glory, the believer can pursue his way in all the blessed sense that God is a sun and a shield. He is a light to guide us in a dark world, and a shield to protect us from an evil world. Day by day, He gives the needed grace; and grace begun on earth will end in glory on high. Nothing but glory is the suited answer to His grace. The eternal weight of glory is the only adequate answer to the exceeding riches of His grace. At the start of our journey grace sought and found us, at the end glory awaits us. Between the grace at the start and the glory at the end, “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

Thus assured of “grace,” “glory” and every “good thing,” the soul may well conclude, “Blessed is the man that trusts in Thee.” Well may we sing:

*Haste thee on from grace to glory,
Armed by faith, and winged by prayer,
Heaven’s eternal day’s before thee,
God’s right hand shall guide thee there.³*

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Footnotes

[1] From the hymn “Blest Father, infinite in grace” by J.N. Darby.

[2] From the hymn “Away with our sorrow and fear” by Charles Wesley (1707–1788).

[3] From the hymn “Jesus, I my cross have taken” by Henry Lyte (1793–1847).