

Summer in the Psalms

Week 7: Psalm 84

I know it's early and some of us are still waking up, but I want us to do a little mental exercise together. I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to think about your answer. Don't say it out loud, just come up with an answer and hold it in your mind.

Here's the question, "If you could snap your fingers and have just one thing, what would it be?"

While you think about that, I just want to tell you all how much I appreciated being able to process my sabbatical with you last week. It was so nice to do a little debrief with my church family and share some of what I learned during my time away. I hope the Lord used something he taught me to maybe speak something to you, too.

But, there's something I didn't share last week that was actually my #1 takeaway from sabbatical. The Lord revealed to me early on and just kept reinforcing it over the course of the 12 weeks and it's this: **My desire for Heaven is masked as my desires on earth.** Meaning, the things I desire the most in life...if I step back and analyze them, go beneath the surface just a little bit, I find that what I'm truly longing for is Heaven.

So, I desire rest for my body and soul, but what I'm really longing for is the endless strength and joy that we'll experience in Heaven.

I desire deep connections with others where my pride and insecurities don't get in the way, but what I'm really longing for is the day when there's no more sin and no more shame that gets in the way of our relationships.

I have an insatiable appetite for adventure and travel and new experiences, but what I'm really desiring is an eternity absent of the sometimes painful reality of this world.

All of these longings in my heart point to my deeper longing for Heaven.

I was trying to think of an image that would capture this and I kept coming back to my favorite childhood cartoon, Scooby Doo. In each episode, they would chase down the villain pretending to be something or someone else and when they finally caught them, they would say, "Let's see who you really are," and unmask them.

So, I put together this little meme to help us visualize what I'm saying...(show picture). It's not a great comparison because Heaven is the villain, but you get the idea! When I unmask my desires, I find the real desire hiding behind the disguise is Heaven.

But I'm guessing I'm not alone. Think about that desire that came to mind for you. Peel back the surface just a little bit...does it point to a deeper longing in your heart? A longing that can't be completely satisfied in this world?

Maybe you can relate to one of my desires and see how it reveals your own desire for Heaven? Maybe your desire for healing, for yourself or someone you love, is actually a desire for a day when there's no more sickness, no more cancer, no death. Your desire for financial security is actually a desire for the kind of peace that money can't buy. Your desire to serve and make a difference in the lives of others is actually a desire for the day when evil and injustice is eradicated from this world and we fully see the image of God in ourselves and others.

And there's nothing wrong with these desires. In fact, most of them are good and right, but they're not ultimate. They were only meant to point us to what is ultimate. And when we view them in that light, we're able to look past our desire and see what we actually long for, which I believe is to be in the very presence of God. And, in His presence, to experience the fullness of rest and peace and joy and fulfillment and meaning and purpose and connection that we were made to enjoy.

That's our truest longing. All of our desires are meant to draw us into the presence of the Father who redeems, restores, and renews all things. And I think the author of our text today knew this. If you have a Bible, or Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Psalm 84. We heard Janene read part of it today, but I want to go a little bit deeper into it.

The focus of Psalm 84 is on the temple and the author's deep longing to go there to worship. But while the focus of this Psalm is on a place, what the author is truly longing for is God's presence. The temple in Jerusalem was the symbolic dwelling place of God. It was where His presence resided. And so, to be at the temple was to be in the presence of God. And we see how deep this desire is in the opening verses. Listen to the words he uses. There's a desperation to them...(READ Ps. 84:1-4)

The Psalmist longs to be in the temple. He both faints AND cries out to be in God's presence. He's envious of even the birds who build their nests there because they are so close to the presence of God. In his commentary on this passage, St. Augustine wrote, "We run not with the feet but with the desire." The Psalmists desire to be in the presence of God almost swoops him up and carries him there.

And it makes me wonder, where are my desires carrying me? Where are your desires taking you? Do they draw you closer into the presence of God, or do they push you away from Him? If you had the desires of your heart, would you find yourself closer to the Father, or would you just have more of the things in this world that is passing away?

Where are your desires carrying you? Is it the direction you want to go? The Psalmist knows that being in the presence of God is better than anything we can experience in this world. He writes in verse 10...(READ Ps. 84:10)

He says, I would rather serve as a greeter at church than live the most lavish life apart from God. And, if you're like, "Me too!" Just a reminder that **Serve Finder (picture)** is after our worship gatherings today and we'd LOVE to have you join our First Impressions Team or help you find your place to serve!

This is just another way of him saying the same thing. He desires God's presence more than anything else. If being in the presence of God means serving in the lowliest position, it's worth it, because it's better than spending a thousand days anywhere else, even if those days are spent living the life of luxury.

And we see in this Psalm that there is a cost to pursuing the presence of God in our life. It's not always easy. In verse 5, he says...(READ vss. 5-7)

A heart set on pilgrimage knows that the journey's not always going to be easy. There's going to be challenges along the way. That was true for a pilgrim's journey to the temple. Jerusalem sits on top of a mountain. No matter which direction you're coming from, there's no easy way to get there. It's going to be a difficult. But it's their desire to be in the presence of the Lord that inspires them to make the journey.

And I think the same is true spiritually. Walking in the presence of the Lord is not always easy. It's not filled with health and wealth and sunshine and rainbows all the time. What I love about Scripture is that it's honest about that and it gives us hope as we walk through those difficult times in life that nobody desires.

In verse 6, the author says, **"As they pass through the Valley of Baka" (vs. 6a)** That word, "Baka," means weeping, adversity. It's closely related to the Hebrew word for the Balsam Tree, which only grows in dry and arid places. The Psalmist says that as pilgrims walk through these difficult places, their weeping make it a place of springs. These are the times of life that nobody wants to walk through, and yet it seems like all of us do in one way or another.

But what I've found to be true in my life and in the lives of so many others is that, **When our desire is for the Lord, He transforms the dry places we walk through into refreshing streams of life.** When we go through difficult, pressing times with a deep desire for pursuing the presence of God, we find in verse 7 that we go from strength to strength. Our hope in a good and loving Heavenly Father renews our strength for the journey ahead. And he transforms our weariness and weakness into springs of life that burst through the dry ground.

I was talking about this with someone just last Sunday. He was telling me about the journey he's been on this summer battling cancer. But as he talked about how difficult it's been, he

started pointing out all the ways it's brought new life to him and his family. How the Lord has used his journey through hard times to draw others to Himself. And it's because he set his sight on the presence of God and desired Him above all else. His strength is in the Lord and God is transforming the dry place he's walking through into a refreshing stream of life for him and others.

There is a blessing that comes to those who desire the Lord above all else, and it's not in health or wealth or an easy road ahead. In fact, the blessing is often found in the struggle, but we can walk through it, trusting in the goodness of God to lead us through. He writes in **verse 11..(READ)**

The sun is our source of light and life. Shield is our protection. As we walk in the presence of God, His is our source of light and life and protection. He lavishes his love and affection on those who walk with Him and he does not withhold a single good thing from us. And what is the good that He doesn't withhold? It's Himself. His presence. If we desire the presence of God and seek Him above all else, He promises throughout Scripture that He will not withhold it from us.

And as those who live after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we get to experience this promise in a way that the author of this Psalm could only dream. In verse 9, he says **...(READ vs. 9).**

He's talking about the King of Israel. The king was God's chosen protector of the nation and so, as the pilgrim walked into Jerusalem on their way to the temple, they would pray a blessing over the king. If he prospered, then Jerusalem would prosper, and access to God's presence at the temple would not be lost.

But for us, the King this Psalm points to is Jesus. He is God's true anointed One. He is our shield and protector who gives us access to the presence of God, not just at the temple, but everywhere we go.

When you put your faith in Jesus, God looks with favor upon you because He sees the image of His Son in You. No matter where your desires have led you, when you place your faith in Christ, God's anointed One, He bestows His favor on you and you get to experience the blessing of being in God's presence forever. More than that, you get to enjoy the blessing of God's presence IN YOU through the Holy Spirit.

I'll close with this. This really hit home for me when I visited Jerusalem a couple of years ago. Part of our tour was to visit the Western Wall **...(picture).** It was part of the retaining wall that the temple sat on and is the only part of the temple that still remains after the Romans destroyed it in 70 A.D. And so, the Western Wall is the most sacred site in Judaism.

It's not just a physical link to their heritage, but they see it as the closest they can get to the presence of God that once dwelled there in the temple. And so, pilgrims from all over the

world come here to be in the presence of God. They believe He resides at the Western Wall more than anywhere else on Earth. That belief is so strong that, when they walk away from the wall after praying, they walk backwards, still facing the wall because they don't want to turn their back on the presence of God.

I was so intrigued by this site that I actually went back with a couple of people later that night. There were still hundreds of people gathered there to pray and worship, but it was a little bit easier for me to make my way up to the wall and not feel bad for spending some time there.

When I was done, I decided to practice the custom of walking away from it backwards as to not turn away from the presence of God. But after about 10 yards or so, I felt the Lord gently whisper to my soul, "Shawn, you can't turn your back on My presence. Because my presence is not in that wall, it's in YOU."

When we put our faith in Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, God's presence in us, and we become His Temple. We become the place where He delights to dwell. The presence that the Psalmist longed for so desperately is living in us. Giving us strength upon strength as we pass through our own Valleys of Baka. Bringing new life to those dry places within us. Life in His presence is greater than anything we can find in this world.

And even though our walk is not always blameless and our desires are not always pure, our Heavenly Father delights in us as His dearly loved children. And His Holy Spirit in us, Paul says, is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. Guaranteeing that, one day, all of our desires will be fulfilled and we will dwell in the eternal house of the Lord forever.

And so, what is your desire? My guess is that, if you look under the surface just a little bit, you'll find that what you ultimately desire is Heaven. Is to be in the presence of God. And the blessing of a life that follows Jesus is that we don't have to wait until "one day." We can walk in that presence now.

The Psalmist closes with these words in **verse 12...(READ).**

Blessed is the one who finds that all of their desires are ultimately for, and fulfilled, in Him.

Is that you today? Have you trusted Jesus? He bore the weight of our sin and shame. He took on our guilt for all those times our desires led us astray. And when you put your faith in Him, you get to walk in the presence of the Lord and find that He's the One you desired all along.