



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Seeing God's Glory As We Worship

Psalm 84:1-12

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### *Introduction*

1. I like the story of the preacher who one Sunday noticed six-year-old Alex in the foyer staring at a large plaque. Approaching the boy, the preacher said quietly, "Good morning, Alex," who replied, "Good morning" and then asked, "What is this?" The preacher said, "Well, son, it's a memorial to some of our members who died in the service." For a time, they continued to stand together, looking at the plaque. Finally, little Alex's voice, barely audible and trembling with fear asked, "Which service, the 8:15 or the 10:45?"
2. How many have attended services that seemed more eternal than immortal? Wondered why there seemed to be no wonder, no joy, no passion — as if all had "died in the service"?
3. I have a sermon that surveys the Bible's focus on worship from the Pentateuch through Revelation. The last summary says that Revelation shows "that worship is our destiny: eternal, glorious beyond imagination, continuing in the very presence of God himself!!!" Once, after I preached it, a member, not being critical, said, "I didn't find that to be all that appealing." I think he imagined an eternal, somebody-died "church service."
4. I contend that our struggle to worship is directly connected to our fall from God's glory and insufficient efforts to get even a glimpse of it. Psalm 84 shows a different way.

### *Body*

- I. The Psalmist Loved to Worship.
  - A. A thoughtful reading of verses 1-12 will begin to reveal his attitude.
    1. The psalm divides naturally into three parts: see the repetitive "Selah" (4, 8) and especially the three beatitudes in vv. 4, 5, and 12.
    2. There is an declaration of longing (1-4), a building anticipation (5-9), and an expanded statement of praise to the Lord of hosts (10-12).
  - B. We see a pilgrimage to the temple that cannot wait to arrive and worship.<sup>1</sup>
    1. The first section is almost wholly devoted to the longing the psalmist feels.
      - a) The "dwelling place" is "lovely" (1).

<sup>1</sup>"The exuberant anticipation of coming to God's presence and the references to traveling (vv. 5-7) and to entering God's house (v. 10) suggest that the psalm was used in processions by pilgrims to Jerusalem" (James Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation Commentaries*, 274).

- b) His "soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord " (2).
- c) He notes that the "sparrow" and "swallow" get to live there (3).
- d) "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!" (4)
- 2. The middle section emphasizes the joy of the journey to get there.
  - a) They are pilgrims following "highways to Zion" (5),
  - b) Their journey is arduous, but they find refreshment on it.
    - (1) "The location of the 'Valley of Baca' is unknown; it seems to have been a dry place, but the faithful pilgrims 'make it a place of springs' (which probably means that they delight in this valley as much as if it were well-watered, being so happy to be on the way)" (*ESV Study Bible*).
    - (2) "These pilgrims 'go from strength to strength' (i.e., they keep on finding new levels of strength for the journey), until 'each one appears before God in Zion' (cf. Deut. 16:16)" (*ESV Study Bible*).
  - c) Eventually "each one appears before God in Zion" (7), stronger, not weaker.
- C. The final section is an joyful exclamation in the knowledge that God is there (10-12).

## II. What Motivated the Psalmist's Eagerness?

- A. Notice the recurrence of the name and place of the Lord.
  - 1. "Lord [God] of hosts" appears four times (1, 3, 8, 12).
  - 2. "Lord " or "God" appear another nine times (2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11).
  - 3. The place matters because it is the Lord 's dwelling place (1, 2, 3, 4, 10).
- B. But there's more: "The way the psalm speaks about God gives at least a partial clue why God's particular place is the object of such desire" (Mays, 274).
  - 1. He is "living," i.e., "lively, ... the giver of life" (2).
  - 2. He is the "sun," the source of life (11).
  - 3. He is and provides a "shield" (9, 11), or "sovereign protector" (v. 11; NET).<sup>2</sup>
  - 4. He "bestows favor and honor," withholding "no good thing . . . from those who walk uprightly" (11).
  - 5. Thus, he is "my King and my God" (3), "a double title that means something like 'the sovereign power of the universe and the center of my personal life, the one who makes all things cohere for the life I have to live'" (Mays, 274-275).
- C. It's in this focus and reason that we find the longing that transforms worship from tedium to endure to that to which we look forward as our destiny.

## III. Taking a Step Back: Psalm 84's Truths About Worship.

- A. Worship is a "celebration"<sup>3</sup> of God's character and actions.
  - 1. That doesn't mean that it must always be "upbeat," that we don't sometimes need to lament as we worship (see for example Psalms 7, 13).

<sup>2</sup> "Shield" in v. 9 refers to the king who not only "protect[s] the pilgrims, but . . . is called to represent Israel before God, to model faithfulness for the whole people, and thus to keep the whole people securely serving God" (*ESV Study Bible*). Mays, 274, adds, "The prayer that the king be accepted (vv. 8-9) is evidence that the royal figure was part of the procession and the ceremonies of its approach to the courts of the temple."

<sup>3</sup> Due to a limitation of the word's meanings, "celebrate" gives some pause. I use it here in the sense, "to perform with appropriate rites and ceremonies; solemnize; to celebrate a marriage" or "perform a religious ceremony, especially Mass or the Lord's Supper." "Commemorate" is one synonym. ([dictionary.com](http://dictionary.com). accessed Oct. 26, 2016.)

2. It does mean that worship should transport us out of our world with its temporal cares to God's throne room.
  3. "The dwelling place of God is beloved and sought out because the soul yearns for God" (Mays, 274).
- B. Worship is where we experience "a ritual of entry into *God's* ordering of reality and the conditions of human life" (Mays 275; my emphasis).
1. Done with the right focus and reason, worship does more than transport us into God's presence; it transforms us into people who long for the Lord, trust him absolutely, and grow to be like him.
  2. Worship is the essence of faith which is "movement ... toward God" (Mays, 275), acknowledging that "he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).
    - a) Restated, in worship we grow in our knowledge of God.
    - b) *If* what we do as worship focuses on God, not us.
- C. The appeal of true worship is "first of all religious, not aesthetic" (Mays, 274).
1. In a culture revolving around images and feelings, we are tempted to define meaningful, "real" worship based on how we perform the preferred ritual form.<sup>4</sup>
    - a) As a commitment of the whole person to glorifying God, worship should be an emotional experience, for emotions, created by God, are an integral part of us.
    - b) There is certainly something stirring to the soul to be part of, say, a song service that "raises the roof" in glorious praise to the Lord.
  2. What should give us pause are accounts of how passionate early Christian worshipers were without the appealing melodies, stirring harmonies, and soaring anthems that we so often associate with "real" worship.
    - a) The psalm, especially v. 2, pushes us back to the point: "My soul *longs*, yes, *faints* for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh *sing for joy* to the living God."
    - b) Put another way, it's not a "pep rally" where we "get fired up" (why?), but an experience where we are lifted up because of Who we see there.
    - c) Irony: in worship we grow in our knowledge of God — assuming that we bring a (growing) knowledge of God to our worship (see the themes of Pss. 83, 85).

### Conclusion

1. The following story has appeared in several anecdote and illustration collections: "Deeply immersed in meditation during a church service, Italian poet Dante Alighieri failed to kneel at the appropriate moment. His enemies hurried to the bishop and demanded that Dante be punished for his sacrilege. Dante defended himself by saying, 'If those who accuse me had had their eyes and minds on God, as I had, they too would have failed to notice events around them, and they most certainly would not have noticed what I was doing.'"<sup>5</sup>
2. Seeing the glory of God is necessary for growing in our knowledge of God.

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<sup>4</sup> A new worship "style," especially if it becomes what we always do, becomes a new ritual.

<sup>5</sup> From <https://bible.org/illustration/failed-kneel>. Accessed October 24, 2016.