

Psalm 84 -The Road to Zion

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[0 : 00] It's a joy to be here today. And if you could turn in your Bibles to Psalm 84. That's where we're going to be this morning. And I hope you can endure my American accent.

Although we did live in Exeter for seven years. And picked up a few phrases here and there. But what's on my heart to share with you this morning is what happens when we have the right focus of our destination.

In the countries that we live in, the society wants us to focus on what retirement and rest looks like. And that becomes the whole focus, the goal. When I get on... Save up all this money and then I can...

When I reach a particular age and each society has their own target, then I can just rest and relax and not do anything. As a believer, we are all on a journey, not to the rest home, but we are on a journey to be with the Lord.

[1 : 26] That's where our home is. And the Bible talks about that journey as a pilgrimage. And it's important for us as believers, those of you who are believers this morning, to understand that when your heart is set on that pilgrimage of where you're going, it affects how you go.

It affects how you live. The whole mindset is, okay, I want to lay up treasure in heaven and not merely put money in the bank for the time that I can't work.

Although there's a place for that, and that's important. The Bible supports that. But in Psalm 84, we have a psalm that talks about what a joy it is to gather with the people of God in the place where his throne is.

And for Israel, of course, Jerusalem, Zion was the place that their focus was. Three times a year, they were supposed to go to, at least the men, sometimes the families.

But they were supposed to go to Jerusalem and gather together before the Lord. And the one thing that, as you read Psalm 84, you catch the heart of this passion to just be with the brethren and be there before the Lord's throne in Jerusalem and rejoice.

[3 : 00] But yet, there's a journey to get there. Physically, it was a dangerous journey. Physically, it was an expensive journey. But it was worth it getting there.

It was worth it going through the trouble. And in the same way, it's worth it for us to go through the different sufferings that we will go through in this life on our way to our heavenly Zion, which is where the Lord is.

So we're just passing through. We're on a pilgrimage, as it were, in our life. And so in Psalm 84, our main focus is going to be on verses 5 through 7.

And so if you're taking notes here, I want to give you like a three-point thing you can write down, three anchor pins, as it were, and you can see what the focus is.

First of all, in verse 5, the foundation for strength is the Lord himself. And these are key points that are very important in the whole pilgrimage journey.

[4 : 10] The foundation for strength is the Lord himself, in verse 5. And then in verse 6, there's a fountain available in the valley of Baca.

Now that Hebrew word means weeping. And most Hebrew scholars believe that it is a reference to weeping. There are valleys of weeping that we go through in this life on our journey to be with the Lord.

And you and I both know, and you probably have been through at least a few valleys of weeping to the point, I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but you weep until there's no more power to weep.

You're completely wrung out, just like a dishcloth. You're just, there's no more moisture there. And those are times in our life as Christians.

The Lord understands those times. He doesn't block those times from happening, but he uses those times, and we'll talk about that. A fountain available in the valley of Baca, that's verse 6. [5 : 28] And then, verse 7 is the third point, the finish line of Zion. And you might put also in parentheses, finishing well.

And we'll talk about that. So what I'd like to do, I'm going to be reading through the New King James. I think many of you have the English Standard Version, but just follow along, it's very similar.

I'm going to read through Psalm 84, and then we'll start with a word of prayer. How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints, for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even a sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.

Even your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They will still be praising you.

[6 : 34] Blessed is the man whose strength is in you, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring.

The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God and Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer.

Give ear, O God of Jacob. O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of your anointed. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and a shield.

The Lord will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

[7 : 40] Father in heaven, we're gathered here this morning to really hear from you. You know all that's gone on, not just so far this morning, but this past week, this past month, this past year, our entire life.

And you also know what's ahead. And help us to catch the heart of what's being communicated here by the Holy Spirit as he inspired these men to jot these things down.

So speak to our hearts by the Holy Spirit this morning through your word in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in verse 5, we have the foundation of strength, the Lord himself.

And let's take a look at the first phrase of verse 5. Because it says here, blessed is the man whose strength is in you. Just by how this is written, you understand that it's a prayer to the Lord.

It is directed to him, not just about the Lord, but he's talking to the Lord. Blessed is the man whose strength is in you.

[8 : 56] Now, we like to, you know, glory and physical strength or mental ability or intelligence and all, but here the blessing has a foundation where it's in the Lord, in him.

In him is wisdom. He is wise beyond the genius in this life. But it says here, blessed is the man whose strength is in you.

We run through this life and there are times when we don't know if we can even handle the next day. Maybe it's a physical issue, maybe it's a mental, you're just at the end of your tether.

Maybe in your relationship, you're at the end of it, you know, in your marriage or with your children or with your job situation. God wants to give you strength to endure.

And sometimes he allows the challenge so that you can experience just how strong he can be.

[10 : 15] Because if God always protected us from any kind of trouble or challenge, how would we ever understand how much deeper his strength and his comfort can be?

He uses challenges in our life. He allows challenges in our life so that he can reveal the depth of who he is.

And so to go and just say, God, protect me from bad things and, you know, help me and make everything work out and fill my bank account with pounds and we've got all these prayers and God says, I have a higher goal for you than those things.

I want to prepare you for heaven. I'm trying to prepare your character for where you're headed to be with me. Because the goal is, I'm just passing through.

Our life is just a vapor. I'm not sure why God allowed me to live as many years as he has. And, you know, a lot of my friends are no longer here.

[11 : 20] And it's not like I'm 125, but sometimes, you know, you wake up and you feel like it. Of course, you know, in your dreams you're like 35 and you're doing all these great things and then you wake up and look in the mirror and you're going, that's rough, you know.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in you. So, let's put it in context here. These are Jewish men that are heading to Jerusalem and they just, their mind is filled with the joy of the gathering.

It's worth the journey. And yet, as we said in the introduction, it was an expensive journey because they had to do it three times a year. An expensive journey.

It was also an inconvenient journey. And it was a long journey for some of them. But it was often a dangerous journey because, you see, robbers and thieves would be along the road because they knew that these pilgrims going to Zion had to have resources to sustain them during the week that they were in Jerusalem.

And so, they were targets of theft. And so, to travel together was safe. To travel by yourself alone was super dangerous.

[12 : 42] dangerous. And so, even though the difficulties, the potential was there, they still went because it was worth it.

And you know, going through life, I can't control everything that happens in my life. I try to buffer myself. Even sometimes driving, I get so concerned about someone running into me or scraping or cutting me off and all.

And there are times that the Lord has just spoken to my heart and just says, stop self-protecting. I'm here with you. Just, just relax.

Don't be so tense. And if somebody cuts you off, pray for them. You don't know what's going on in their life. And how many times have you changed lanes and you didn't quite look like you were supposed to?

Anyway, enough said of that. What's the word blessed mean? Or blessed, if you're in King James. Blessed.

[13 : 50] It's a word that means a state of settled happiness within. Based upon the reality of the sure promises of God and not necessarily the present circumstances.

circumstances. And that last phrase is important, not necessarily the present circumstances. My wife and I live in the state of Colorado in the United States and they do have tornadoes out on the plains especially because we're at the base of the Rocky Mountains and there's all kinds of interesting weather.

and you know in those tornadoes or even watching a hurricane on the weather reports there's this little eye in the middle of a hurricane or a tornado that's a place of perfect peace.

I mean I can't imagine being on those those planes that go through tornadoes and go through hurricanes rather and they're hurricane and they get to the middle and it's like oh you know it's like oh this is awesome and then boom they hit the other one and there's things flying all around you know cows and tractors and all that and so but in the Lord that's where he wants us.

in him is the eye of the hurricane. It doesn't mean your circumstances have stopped but he calms the storm in your heart first because how can you hear him clearly when there's when there's a storm raging inside and there's so much noise so many voices blessed is the man blessed that state of settled happiness within and that's called the fruit of the spirit of joy.

[15 : 50] I have a joy based on who he is not on my circumstances. 93 times just in the Psalms we see the words bless blesses blessed or blessing and when it says here in verse 5 blessed is the man the word in Hebrew is Adam which means man mankind kind it's not the specific Hebrew word ish which is specific to a male so it's men and women blessed is the man or the woman whose strength is in you and that's a truth and so I hold to that truth because to lose that truth makes your pilgrimage very difficult.

let's go on to the second part of verse 5 now in the New King James it says whose heart is set on pilgrimage I believe the English Standard Version said in whose heart are the highways to Zion something similar to that and in the Hebrew you have two words in this second half of verse 5 and it's the word for heart and it's the word for highways and in the context of verses 5 through 7 the idea is your heart is set on pilgrimage to Zion your heart is set the road to Zion is in your heart I mean there's an old song way back an old Christian song by an old group called Petra and it says the road to Zion is in your heart I love that song you can find it on YouTube and so that's where this comes from in whose heart are the highways to Zion because when your heart the depth the core of

who you are is set on

I want to get there and I want to be with him and all I'm willing to go through whatever I have to go through to get there that's that brings you focus because there's so much around us that makes us lose focus we get worried about this concerned about that you know bunker busters and all the rest you know that go on and we're thinking you know o y vey what am I going to do here's the ding here it is Psalm 46 says God is our refuge and strength a very present help in times of trouble therefore I will not fear though the mountains be removed and that's such an important Psalm I was around when Y2K happened most of you were some of you maybe not and everybody was concerned that everything in the world would shut down when somewhere on the timeline it would go from 1999 to the year 2000 and all the old computers were going to just you know collapse and planes will fall out of the sky

I mean the scenario was so frightening and I remember Pastor Chuck Smith from Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa he would always quote Psalm 46 Psalm 46 God is a refuge and strength so what's this whole thing about pilgrimage we are called pilgrims and strangers in the book of Peter a pilgrim is defined as one who journeys in foreign lands one who travels to a shrine or holy place as a devotee as just kind of a simple definition of a pilgrim and really that's us because this world is not our home we are passing through so therefore a pilgrimage is a journey to a specific place which has a religious benefit that's kind of like the cleaned version of it and the definitions but man

I am going to where he is and let me ask you a question is there anyone here that's engaged you're engaged to be married anyone here anybody want to be engaged okay but here's the thing I have never officiated a wedding and I've done dozens where the bride has come walking down the aisle and the groom is here right by me I'm there and the best man and all I've never had a time where she comes up faces her future husband and says all they want is your house because I mean I would go let's stop this a minute let's hold on but how many Christians I have heard say all they want to do is get to heaven the whole point of getting to Zion is to be with the king is to be with Jesus it's all about him

[21 : 21] I go Jesus said I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also the whole purpose of getting to Zion is being with Jesus but if you're not in relationship with Jesus going through religious activities just to get to heaven is missing the whole point Hebrews chapter 12 verse 22 through 24 just so insightful here and the writer of Hebrews says but you have come believers now the believing Hebrew people but you have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem to an innumerable company of angels let's stop there a minute right right now our eyesight and our ability to see things is on a very limited scale we cannot see things that are really going on all around us the Bible tells us that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation right now there is an angelic world all around us that our eyes have been kept from seeing because think about it if all of a sudden the hologram was turned on and you could see all the coming and going of doing

God's bidding you'd never get anything done you'd just be gone I mean you'd get nothing done unfortunately if your eyes are going to be open to that world you're also going to see the demonic and not only would you not get anything done you'd be terrified and so God has in his love limited our ability to see here but when we get to the Lord the book of Revelation kind of like pulls back the curtain we are going to see the whole angelic realm that God has created and it's described here as an innumerable company of angels and that's just like that's going to be awesome that's I mean that's that's there not only so verse 23 of Hebrews 12 says to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven all the believers of all time since

Adam will be gathered together I'm not even sure how that happens because we're so linear in our logic you know how do you what kind of this is more than a stadium I mean this is like billions how can you see that all at once well you have to be changed to see it and your spiritual body that God is working on the workbench for those of us still here we're going to be able to comprehend and see and experience that reality and you know I don't think anybody's going to have name tags but when you look at Revelation chapter 7 John writes there are souls there from every nation people language and tongue so how did he know did they have like signs you know I'm from India or you know I'm from Pakistan or you know I am from you know Mozambique you know and how did he know

I don't know but he identifies individuals by their nation and their language and their dialect even within a nation I mean we've lived in the UK seven years and I know in the UK you have dialects you really do and the further north you get it gets super interesting I'm just saying we spent six weeks in the highlands in the Helens and you know it's I can get away because I'm I can be a rude American but when you're looking at somebody and you're staring at their lips because you're trying to find a syllable that makes sense and you know there you go so how does that work in heaven it will

I mean there is a spiritual gift called interpretation of tongues and I wonder if all of a sudden we'll just have that gift and we'll know fascinating because Abraham's not going to speak English you know it's it's that early early Hebrew he was the first Hebrew so what's that sound like and so I mean all these things just roll in your mind I'm sorry to be on a diversion but it fascinates me what else is it mentioned here to the God the judge of all to the spirits of just men made complete to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel in other words he's still going to have the scars others because he's our high priest forever we need a high priest forever and the scars in his hands as he showed the disciples on the resurrection morning and the spear in his side are victory scars proof that he conquered and that's what he's going to bear he's not getting another new body that's the spiritual body he is going to inhabit forever because we need a high priest forever and he's that for us right now this verse in verse five at least in the new king James whose heart is set on pilgrimage is a verse that my wife and

[28:14] I really gravitated to when we turned our church over in 2010 after 29 years of pastoring there in Arizona whose heart is set on pilgrimage and what was on our heart is we want our latter years to be more fruitful than our former years it doesn't matter how God has used us in the past but I want to let the rest of my pilgrimage glorify God however whatever it looks like and we had no idea all I knew is that I had pastored for a long time and I knew how to do that but then when you let go of that what's next don't try to figure it out just serve the Lord today just do what's in front of you do the most important thing right next to you and the Lord will piece things together in his own way and that's been 15 years ago and you know the things we're involved in right now I mean it was never on our prayer list you know how prayer list you write the things that oh

Lord work this out work this out and then he says well I've got a prayer list for you and I'm not telling you I want you to walk through it and just be with me and we're going to do this together Matthew 6 19 verses 20 19 to 21 says Jesus says do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven neither moth or rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be this is not a condemnation for laying up for later on in life when your strength is you're unable to work because of physical infirmity or things like that when you need to draw upon those resources he's talking about your heart goal your heart goal that motivates your daily life what's your heart goal what's the most important thing to you and Jesus is saying here the most important thing has to be the end of the journey not just here because we're all being prepared for heaven

John in 1 John 2 verses 15 to 17 do not love the world or the things in the world if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him because it displaces his love because the desire and passion for things out here ends up crowding out the love of the father for all that is in the world the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the father but is of the world and the world's passing away and the lust of it but he who does the will of God abides forever so it doesn't mean that I can't love pizza it doesn't mean that I can't love I mean take it in its context he's saying don't let your lust for power or for possessions or places that you want to live it's become such a focus it absolutely fills up the cup he's talking to believers it absolutely fills up the cup and God's love gets crushed out because then it's all about me because God's love is all about him and about others and he'll take care of me when I go through a takeaway and I want a fizzy drink I ask for no ice you know why because when they put ice in it they put ice all the way to the top and you get about that much and I'm thinking I'm paying for this man I don't want to pay for ice and so it's cold enough already I mean that's that's just my little issue and but because ice displaces the fizzy drink and so there are things in our life sometimes that are like worldly ice cubes can I say that that kind of block out the fullness of the spirit that I can have and how do

I know I just have to ask the Lord Lord I want you to show me are there things in my life that I'm so holding on to strong that it's displacing the fullness of your spirit because love is one of the main fruit of the spirit in our life okay enough for verse five let's go on to number two verse six it says here as they pass through the valley of Baca they make it a spring the rain also covers it with pools so as I mentioned in the introduction Baca is interpreted as weeping and there is really no place in Israel that's officially called the valley of Baca now some have said well it's where the weeping willows are because weeping willows and okay that's interesting but in looking at the whole picture of the pilgrimage there are places of danger along the pilgrimage and there are places of trouble and he even calls them places of weeping and I just want to tell you that there are places of weeping in our pilgrimage that God understands but I want you to highlight the word through the valley of Baca is not our destination it is what we have to go through and how do

[34 : 35] I go through that blessed is the man whose strength is in you you see you have to have the Lord's strength to go through or you end up you can end up really angry and bitter at God and everybody else it's interesting how many times tears are referred to throughout the scriptures actually Psalm 23 he says here in Psalm 23 verse 4 yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me your rod and your staff they comfort me as believers in Christ during our pilgrimage we are all going to have valleys of Baca and in that valley there's difficulty and anxiety a gnawing sense of hopelessness with no way out and that's that's a feeling that can happen that's real but so how do I get through it without getting sucked into it whose strength is in you

Lord you will pass through it and it says in the second part of verse 6 they make it a spring it's interesting they make it a spring the pilgrims that are going through the valley of Baca make it a spring what's that mean what's that all about there's no natural spring in that valley but the pilgrims make it a spring it's because they have an overriding hope that God is ultimately in charge and that's the refreshing it comes from within you might say living waters so to speak in our journey but always remember this God is working in the midst of weeping and that's something you got to put on the dashboard of your car or maybe you know certain places on your refrigerator you know God is working in the midst of weeping all throughout Psalms so many times tears are mentioned and let me just give you a few of them Psalm 6 verse 6 I am wearied with my groaning all night I make my bed swim I drench my couch with tears Psalm 39 12 hear my prayer oh Lord give ear to my cry do not be silent at my tears for I am a stranger with you a sojourner which means a pilgrim as all my fathers were Psalm 42 verse 3 my tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me where is your God I don't know if you've ever experienced a time of sorrow where you just aren't hungry at all you're so grieved and you're so saddened that you don't even want to eat and that's what is being described here in this psalm

Psalm 56 verse 8 I love this one you number my wanderings put my tears in your bottle are they not in your book God knows what goes on in the secret place behind closed doors that no one else knows and that's all noted it says are they not in your book it's not in vain he understands he's acquainted with griefs a man of sorrows our Lord Jesus put my tears in in your bottle and some of you have a large keg of tears because of what you've been through

Psalm 116 verses 7 and 8 return to your rest oh my soul for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you for you have delivered my soul from death my eyes from tears and my feet from falling and finally Psalm 126 verses 5 and 6 those who sow in tears shall reap in joy he who continually goes forth weeping bearing seed for sowing shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him!

[40 : 04] some of you parents have been praying for your wayward kids and you've been praying for a long time and you're not seeing any proof of any movement as a matter of fact it's getting worse and you think what what is the what's the use but you know what next time you have a cup of water like this and you happen to be talking to someone and not paying attention and the water comes to the top it's interesting how water crowns when it's at the top of a cup and when the water crowns that means if you do an eyedropper of a little bit more it spills over the top and for some of you that have been praying and interceding for your kids for so long I just want to tell you you never know when your last prayer is that eyedropper of water that causes it to spill over the top

I have done celebrations of life memorial services where I have watched the children finally repent when they hear the testimony of their mom or their dad by all these other people and realize how many prayers have gone up to heaven for them while they are in their rebellion is it worth it to you to

even at your funeral that God would use that to be the final eyedropper it's absolutely worth it because nobody prays for their kids like the parents and so don't give up don't give up interceding and don't be looking at the circumstances to see proof of if anything happening because the Lord hears it and he collects your tears in his bottle we're on a pilgrimage and then it says here the rain also covers it with pools and rain comes from the outside not from the pilgrims and there are times where I believe this is referring to God's special blessing

I mean we took a 16 hour trip on Friday coming from West Ireland to come down here and we were on trains that it didn't matter if the windows were open it was hot it was stuffy it was miserable and you couldn't get out of it and so doing this you know what you're doing is you're working up a sweat actually while you're cooling yourself off and so you know it's like how is that counterproductive it is but you have to have something and then all of a sudden the doors open and there's this fresh breeze that comes it comes from the outside and it's like refreshing the Lord during our pilgrimage by his grace does provide little moments of grace blessings they're not earned they're just his special here let me give you a shower let me give you a breeze and cool you off and comfort you it's a blessing not earned and I see that when I read this the rain also covers it with pools in my valley and sometimes the Lord just surprises me with his kindness in my trouble let's finish this the finish line of

Zion verse 7 it says here they go from strength to strength each one appears before God and Zion I'd like you to highlight or underline strength to strength because that means layer by layer step by step God gives you grace for the moment to get you through to the next moment we want it all now so that we can count on it for the future and he says I want you to walk with me you're following me I'm not following you and so we're going to go through this step by step strength to strength the comfort that we receive from the Lord in our trouble God has plans for that comfort to be passed on to someone else and so it's not all about you it's not all about me it's about how he wants to use me to touch the lives of somebody else so when you're thinking

I can't stand this God get me out of this you don't want to get out of it before you're ready because then you'll have to go through it again so Lord give me endurance and help me keep your perspective so that when in your time I finally get out of this I will have what's needed to minister to somebody else in their trouble the finish line each one appears before God and Zion we talk about finishing well finishing well in your life begins with finishing well today finishing well today doesn't mean you've had a perfect day it means you repent at the end of the day when you have sinned when you've gotten angry with someone because they they interrupted your momentum because that's what happens when you're driving you want to get from point

[45 : 55] A to point B and you've got a time issue and you need to get there and someone doesn't the light turns green looking at their phone and you're going come on come on come on you know and then all of sudden and then it turns like red and you just wasted and all of sudden this thing comes up I you're throwing a tantrum in your car so just repent because it's not how I want you to be you're on my timing I'm not on your timing so just chill out and then you own it you go okay God I'm I'm I'm sorry I mean I'm I'm trying to control my time instead of letting you take it finishing well at the end of the day!

means you own or when you cross the line when you were supposed to tell really the whole thing and you were telling only a half truth because you had a fear of man you didn't want to deal with it so you're just kind of playing with the truth at the end of the day finish well own it and then when tomorrow comes finish well and then when you do that at the end of your life you can finish well and even if you've had a terrible life and you're back slidden and now you're coming back and trying to get it together in your mind you're thinking I'm a second class Christian God I'm so sorry I'm kind of that one child that gets pushed aside because they always cause trouble that's not how God sees! the pilgrimage isn't over and I just want to close with this scripture this is Jesus heart and it's again in John 14 1-4 let not your heart be troubled you believe in God believe also in me in my father's house are many mansions if it were not so I would have told you I go to prepare a place for you and now he's shifting into a marriage proposal as it were because this language really describes how a Jewish engaged man would go and prepare for his coming bride I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also and where I go you know and the way you know and then of course the disciples asked you know I think it was Philip said we don't know where you're going I mean we're clueless and he says I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through

me true true words the road to Zion needs to be in our heart because it affects how we live every day and so if there are things going on in your life that are hindering you from that goal or displacement things like we've said in that illustration take some time to go before the Lord and say you know I'm feeling a little dry am I displacing you in some way because the Lord just wants to do the right thing in our lives he's just working in our character let's pray father God thank you this morning for our time in your word and there's so much we have to learn but you never ever give up on us never and so in the midst of our things Lord continue to persevere help us keep perspective help us to trust you that you will calm the storm in our heart while you're working on the outward storm and we can't wait to see you face to face in Jesus name Amen