

### Psalm 84 – Songs for the Road

Well friends, we've just heard Psalm 84 – but I don't think we really heard it... we even sang a song based on it – but I wonder if we really get it... you see I'm not sure it's really speaking to us... not in the way it would have spoken to the pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem!

I mean we all sat here very attentive, listening to these very spiritual words being read to us – listening for some insight or waiting for something to jump out at us – right??? Because when we listen to scripture we kind of zone out - right???

It's holy, it's God's word, it's the truth and so on – so we listen quietly, respectfully, intently – but in a way it's kind of like zoning out and it causes us to miss things that are obvious.

So – if we really want to hear Psalm 84, if we really want to get it, if we really want to have it speak to us – then I want to sing you some lyrics that I think summarize Psalm 84 very accurately – listen...

*“and I would walk 500 miles and I would walk 500 more, just to be the man who walks a thousand miles to fall down at your door...”*

And because this is just a regular song with a catchy chorus – and we just listen to it with no “scripture” expectations - it's easy to get the point that the singer is willing to go to great lengths, and endure much hardship, to get to the person that they love.

They'll do whatever it takes even if it means they are too tired to do anything but fall down when they reach their destination – at least they are with the one they love.

And friends – that is what Psalm 84 is all about – it's just as simple and straightforward as that.

This is a Psalm that was written to help God's people give expression to their longing and desire to go the Temple in Jerusalem and to be in the presence of God – and they would

sing it as they made the journey to the Holy City for celebrations and festivals and worship.

So Psalm 84 was a road trip song, a song for the road – one of those songs that helps make a long difficult journey a bit more bearable, and reminds you of where you are headed and why.

Maybe you have collection of road trip songs on CD, or on your iphone or your Car stereo that you listen to whenever you have to head out for a long trip on the road.

And every long road trip has a section of highway that is monotonous, or difficult or even dangerous – right?

And we don't travel through these sorts of places simply because we want to go out for a Sunday drive – no, we only travel on these roads because they are the only way we will get somewhere that we really need to go.

For example if you want to reach the Okanogan valley and its wonderful warm weather and all its delicious fruit trees – then you have to travel through the mountain passes...

Or if you want to drive out back east to Ottawa, to make a visit back home for the holidays – you need to travel through northern Ontario...

And these long and difficult journeys are made easier if we have music to listen to... songs that we can sing along with, songs that inspire us and remind us of why we are making this trip.

That's why my family used to listen to Christmas music – specifically The Veggie Tales Christmas special - on the long six hour drive to visit my parents at Christmas time back when we used to live in Ontario.

And I share all these examples friends because I want you to be able to really understand and connect with Psalm 84 as a

pilgrimage psalm - and with the experience that went along with it.

I want you to be able to relate to what it was like for those who longed to go to Jerusalem, to go and worship Yahweh and celebrate His holy festivals at His Temple.

I want you to get a sense of how they wanted to be there - among the crowds of people who had gathered together – all them singing and shouting praise to Yahweh...

How they looked forward to taking in all the beauty and splendor and magnificence of Solomon's temple; seeing the priests and the Levites dressed in their beautiful robes going about their duties, with the smell of sacrifice and incense heavy in the air...

But, more importantly and most significantly how this whole experience and visit to the Temple in Jerusalem embodied what it meant for them to belong to Yahweh as His covenant people and how it formed their identity.

If you're still having a hard time connecting with this, let me say this would be the equivalent of a hockey fan going to see the Stanley Cup finals at Maple Leaf Gardens or Montreal Forum. Are you starting to relate???

So it's this whole 'Jerusalem pilgrimage experience' that is the context for Psalm 84 – and if we can understand that and relate to it – at least a little bit - then we'll understand and relate to the words of this Psalm and receive what God wants to say to us from it this morning.

So – let's take a little trip through this Psalm shall we?

Now, when you take a trip and you have a destination in mind but you don't know how to get there, what do you do?

You go to Google Maps, or Map-quest and you type in your starting point: 7655 26<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW Calgary AB Canada... and then you enter in your final destination: the Temple Mt, Jerusalem, Israel... and click on "find directions" and then you

will receive a detailed list of travel directions on how to get to where you want to go.

And that's basically how Psalm 84 is structured as a poem.

Vs. 1 is the starting point *"How lovely is your dwelling place: Yahweh Almighty"* and the last verse, vs 12 is the destination *"Yahweh Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you"* and the verses in between are the travel instructions.

And you know how people are always saying "it's all about the journey, not the destination" well that's not true friends – from a biblical worldview, it's all about the destination!

And in this case the pilgrim starts out with great admiration for the beauty of the Temple, but the ends up having experienced the benefits of a covenant relationship with the one who dwells there.

So - although the destination is more important than the journey, God uses the journey to shape us and bring us to the

destination, so it's certainly worth looking at how Psalm 84 describes the journey which the pilgrim would experience.

We see how it starts with awe and wonder at the magnificence of the Temple building itself – don't forget that in ancient Israel this was the pinnacle of architectural achievement!

The most amazing building in the whole country!!!

The pilgrim is so impressed by the size and beauty of this building where God dwells, they are drawn to go and visit it.

And this is expressed in vs. 2 *"My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."*

But, the pilgrim knows it is more than just a magnificent building. In this building dwells the presence of a magnificent being – the living God, and so to be in this building is to be in God's presence – which is why they desire and long to visit it.

So the pilgrim expresses their great need to be in God's presence in vs. 3-4 by describing their unhappy state of being so far away from God's presence, complaining that even the birds have it better than they do since they can fly in and build their nests – right in the presence of God in the temple.

Oh to be someone who lives in the temple like that – praising God all the time, the pilgrim can't imagine anything better. So – no more complaining and talking about it, it's time to make the trip, it's time to go to Jerusalem!

So in vs. 5 the pilgrimage begins *"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage."*

But it's not an easy journey to Jerusalem - there are dry and arid places that test a traveler's endurance – the Valley of Baka for example.

But the hardship of the journey is definitely worth what they will receive from making this journey.

So vs. 6-7 describe this dynamic. It says *"As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion."*

So, what appears to be a challenge and an obstacle to the pilgrim is really a source of blessing - in that it makes them anticipate the destination of being in God's presence all the more - "no pain no gain." Can't have joy without the pain.

But the challenges of the journey also force them to seek God for help in making their pilgrimage as well – so vs. 8-9 are the prayer of the pilgrim asking for Yahweh's help to keep them safe on their journey – *"Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob. Look on our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one."*

This is why they refer to Yahweh as the God of Jacob, because it recalls the time when God kept Jacob safe as he fled from his brother Esau and traveled through the wilderness.

But vs. 8-9 also functions as a generic description of what the pilgrim will do when *“each appears before God in Zion.”* (vs7)

They have some sort of personal prayer request they want to bring to Yahweh, and they will do so – asking God to hear their prayer and grant it.

And they will also ask God to continue to bless the King of Israel – because as the King is blessed, Jerusalem is blessed, and those who travel to Jerusalem can continue to be blessed.

And then as the journey wraps up and is completed the pilgrim summarizes their experience in vs. 10-11.

*“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”*

They have received what they came for – they have been blessed by being in the presence of Yahweh, and they want to tell others that if they come expecting to receive from their Covenant God, they will not be disappointed!

That’s what it means that God gives good things to those whose walk is blameless – this isn’t a statement about earning God’s favor – but rather about making a pilgrimage for the right reasons.

If you travel to Jerusalem to be in the presence of God in the Temple – you will find Him there, and He will hear you and answer you just as He promised... just as King Solomon asked God, when he dedicated the temple, to *“Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.* (1 Kings 8:29-30)

And so with this in mind the pilgrim can conclude this journey with the last verse *“Yahweh Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you”*

Now of course, the question for us is – “How does this pilgrim psalm lead us to Jesus Christ, and speak into what it means to be a follower of Jesus today?”

Well friends what motivated the journey described in Psalm 84 was the admiration for earthly dwelling place of God Almighty.

So our journey to Jesus Christ from this Psalm starts with the confession that we find in the gospel of John 1:14 *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”*

It’s as simple and short as that – if we are looking for the place where God dwelt among us – we look no further than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and what the gospels tell us about Him.

For instance in John 14:9-10 Jesus himself says *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*

So this is amazing news – that the very fullness of God has come and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ!

And yet... if we are struck with awe and wonder and longing to find this Jesus and be in His presence so that we may be in the presence of God – then we have a little bit of a problem...

How do we find Jesus? After all the gospels tell us that He lived on earth over 2000 years ago and then He ascended into heaven... So how do we get to Jesus from where we are now?

Well the good news friends is that before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told his disciples to make one last pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so to speak...

He said *“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you have been clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:49)

So they returned to Jerusalem – and stayed at the Temple continuously praising God – until a few weeks later, on the feast of Pentecost – when pilgrims from around the world had made the long and difficult journey to Jerusalem, probably singing Psalm 84 as they made the journey – the Holy Spirit

was poured out like the autumn rains, upon the disciples to empower them to fulfill Jesus' last command in the gospel of Matthew.

Which was *"Go make disciples of all nations – baptizing them into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit"* (Mat 28:19)

And in Luke phrases this command from Jesus in these words *"repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in the Messiah's name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47)

And in Acts 1 Jesus' tells the disciples *"you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8)

So what's the good news about how we find Jesus? The good news is that we don't find him... instead by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the obedience of His followers – Jesus finds us! Pilgrimage has turned into mission!

And when Jesus finds us, and we are blessed to trust in Him for the forgiveness of our sins – what happens then?

Well listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Eph 2:19-22 *"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."*

Isn't that mind blowing!!! That our Covenant relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit builds us into a temple where God dwells and lives in through His Spirit!!!

So our little fellowship of Christians (not our facilities) at Valleyview is the Temple of God Almighty, where His presence and blessing is made available to all who would seek it... and moves us to seek out all who need it...



So each week as we gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus, and worship Him and offer praise and thanksgiving and bring our prayers and petitions to God and receive blessing as the Holy Spirit transforms us - each week as we make that pilgrimage to gather in worship, it is meant to send us back out to obey Jesus' commandment – turning pilgrimage into mission.

We go back out to our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools or wherever it is that we may travel – and we take the presence of God with us... so that people don't have to find God – but through us God finds them!

Remember Paul's words to the Corinthian Christians "*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you...*" (1 Cor 6:19)

So as followers of Jesus Christ - we do not go on a road trip for the purpose of pilgrimage, we go on a road trip for the purpose of mission – Christ's mission to be his witness all over this world.

But, while the starting point and the destination of a mission trip might be very different from a pilgrimage – the journey is still similar...

We need to move from talking about making disciples of all nations to going out and taking the first step of finding those who are seeking for God...

That journey will take us through places that seem arid and dry and difficult – both literally and metaphorically, and it will challenge our very will to continue on with the mission!

But that will only make the end destination, the fulfillment of the mission that much more rewarding!

And it also causes us to call out to Jesus - to empower us more and more with the Holy Spirit to have the strength to endure and persevere.

And while we all have our own specific mission contexts – we must all intercede in prayer, asking God to bless his anointed one - us, so that the mission will be successful.

Even in the good times, we don't do this in our own strength.

Then we will have a chance to experience the joy that comes from being obedient to Christ's command to be His witnesses and make disciples, and we will celebrate that success.

And if you've experienced it you know, that while one day on a pilgrimage may be better a thousand elsewhere – to use Jesus' words, *“there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

So friends - Psalm 84 is a pilgrimage song that leads us to the Temple in Jerusalem but that eventually leads us to Jesus who sends us out on a long road trip, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

So we need a song – a mission song - to make this long and difficult journey a bit easier... to sing along with so that we can be inspired and reminded of why we are making this trip.

So I'm not going to close in prayer – instead I'm just going to ask the band to come back up and lead us in a song – a song that can be our prayer – and our Psalm for our journey.

Amen.