

## The Janitors' Psalm

Psalm 84:1-12

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Some of you, when you hear just the words “Psalm 84”, maybe the first few words of the Psalm itself, “How lovely are Thy dwelling places, O Lord...” immediately go into Brahms...it starts playing in your mind: “How lovely”...*Die Leiblich*, from the Brahms *Requiem*. It's the fourth or fifth movement in Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*, “A German Requiem.” It's a beautiful piece of music; one of the most beloved sacred choral pieces in all of the literature.

But you probably don't think of it as a janitor's song, and if you're looking at your bulletin, in the bulletin you may have noticed that I've titled it, “The Janitor's Song.” You don't associate this Psalm with janitors, so I'll explain that in just a little bit, but to do that I need to tell you a story.

Jim Boice's not immediate, but once-removed predecessor at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was a man named Donald Grey Barnhouse. Barnhouse was a famous evangelistic Bible preacher, especially in the middle twentieth century. He had an extensive Bible study ministry, especially in the northeastern United States, and preached on the radio. His *Bible Study Hour* was broadcast from the late 1940's all the way into the late 1960's. He's still on the radio today. He's been dead for forty years, but he's still preaching on the radio today, just like J. Vernon McGee. J. Vernon McGee is preaching more sermons today than he ever did when he was alive, and you can hear him on just about any Christian radio station when you turn it on.

Barnhouse had an impressive demeanor and a strong preaching voice, and Barnhouse was the man who was used by the Lord to bring Jim Kennedy to faith in Christ. Jim Kennedy woke up one morning to his radio blasting a Donald Grey Barnhouse sermon, and it was as if Barnhouse was speaking to him, and he was used in his conversion to Christ. If you've ever taken *Evangelism Explosion* you've perhaps heard Jim Kennedy give his testimony, and when he talks about the “radio preacher” that he woke up to that morning preaching, it was Donald Grey Barnhouse.

Well, Barnhouse had a story that he apparently told Jim Boice on many occasions, and in fact apparently used it on a number of occasions when he was

in seminary (and that must have been back in the fourteenth century sometime!).

When Barnhouse was in seminary, there was a fellow student of his who was very cynical. He could not be serious about anything spiritual. There was always a joke; there was always some skeptical remark. And they were at a student prayer meeting, and at the prayer meeting the person leading was suggesting that they - as a way to sort of jump-start their praise to God and their spiritual reflection in prayer - that they share a verse that the Lord had used in their lives to teach them something significant. And you can imagine the kinds of verses that people were sharing: Romans 8:28, or Romans 8:32, or John 3:16 — significant verses that contain important gospel truths.

Well, this cynical student, when it came his turn to give his verse, stood up and quoted in the King James from I Chronicles 26:18. Now, those of you who have your Bibles can turn there, but I'll tell you what it is. It goes like this in the King James:

“At Parbar westward, four at the causeway and two at Parbar.”

And then he sat back down with a smirk on his face, and he said to Barnhouse, who was sitting next to him, “Well, if you believe in the inspiration of Scripture, then you've got to believe that there's something that you can get out of that verse!”

See, in his own cynical, skeptical way he was suggesting that that verse was a proof against the inspiration and profitability of holy Scripture. Now, it's not much better in your New American Standard Version, or even in your NIV, if you're looking tonight. In the New American Standard Version, the verse goes,

“At the Parbar on the west there were four at the highway and two at the Parbar”

so that doesn't help you much. It gets a little better in the NIV,

“As for the court to the west, there were four at the road and two at the court itself.”

Now we'll see how that ties into this Psalm and how in fact this Psalm illumines how that passage indeed bears all the marks of biblical inspiration, and how every word of Scripture is profitable. But first, let's pray, and then we'll read God's word. Let's pray.

*Lord God, thank You for Your word. Every word is profitable. And Lord, we thank You especially for this Psalm. It is a beautiful Psalm. It's a Psalm that expresses the longing of the believer to be with the people of God in the worship of God, in the courts of God, and that would be our desire as well. And if it's not, O God, make it our desire; and if it is, make it even more our desire; but teach us*

*wonderful things from Your word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Psalm 84:

For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

How lovely are Thy dwelling places,  
O Lord of hosts!  
My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord;  
My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.  
The bird also has found a house,  
And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young,  
Even Thine altars, O Lord of hosts,  
My King and my God.  
How blessed are those who dwell in Thy house!  
They are ever praising Thee. [Selah.

How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee;  
In whose heart are the highways to Zion!  
Passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring,  
The early rain also covers it with blessings.  
They go from strength to strength,  
Every one of them appears before God in Zion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
Give ear, O God of Jacob! [Selah.  
Behold our shield, O God,  
And look upon the face of Thine anointed.  
For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand outside.  
I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God,  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.  
For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
The Lord gives grace and glory;  
No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.  
O Lord of hosts,  
How blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

So what does I Chronicles 26:18 have to do with this? Simply this: If you've already looked in your Bible, you know now what that verse is about. It's about the placement of the sons of Korah, the janitors, the doorkeepers in the house of the Lord. God was so concerned about his worship that He even told the janitors where they were supposed to stand and be in the approach to the temple of the Lord. And that very inclusion of instructions for these doorkeepers indicates that

these folks had to be strong and carry out certain menial tasks in the temple.

We've been talking about the Asaphites a lot, the sons of Asaph. They were the musicians. Their job was somewhat glamorous in the temple, but the sons of Korah — they had to do the menial work. But even the janitors have a Psalm to sing, and here it is — “the sons of Korah.” This is a Psalm of, or by, or for, or about the sons of Korah, the doorkeepers in the temple; and it opens up to us how precious a privilege they considered it to be to be able to be with the people of God in the worship of God in the house of God. Their labors may have been menial, their station may not have been exalted, but they loved being in the house of God and they lead us in singing about it in this Psalm.

There are three things in particular that I would like you to focus on in this Psalm. There's so much here that we couldn't possibly cover it tonight, but I want you to look at three blessings with me in this Psalm.

First, in verses 1-4, I want you to see the blessing that the sons of Korah indicate is found in dwelling in God's house. The blessing of dwelling in God's house....

Secondly, in verses 5-8, I want you to see this blessing of having God for our strength;

And then, thirdly, in verses 9-12, I want you to see this blessing that it is to trust in the Lord. Three blessings in this Psalm: Dwelling in God's house; Having God for our strength; Trusting in the Lord.

Now you remember that being *blessed*...Jesus uses that term in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the meek”; “Blessed are they that are persecuted....” The idea of being blessed is the idea of the one who has found the fullest joy, the deepest satisfaction, the truest purpose of life. The person who is blessed knows and lives life's true purpose. He knows that man is made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The person who is truly blessed, therefore, experiences the fullness of joy: not that he's happy in a superficial sense all the time; not that nothing bad ever comes into his experience; but that whether he is experiencing triumph or trial in this life, he is grounded in a deep joy because he knows God and he knows his purpose; he knows why he's here, and he finds deep satisfaction in God that cannot be taken away from him by any of his experiences, whether they are substitute joys and triumphs or whether they are trials that tempt him to question the love and goodness of God. This is a person who knows life's true purpose, has experienced its fullness joy, and has found his deepest satisfaction. And here the psalmist pronounces *blessedness* on three things, and I want you to see those.

## **I. Communion and worship with God's people.**

First of all, in verses 1-4, notice how he focuses your attention on the blessedness of dwelling in God's house, especially when God's people are gathered in worship. You see, the psalmist tells us that the first person who is blessed, the first blessedness of this Psalm, is found in communion and worship with God's people. Look at verses 1-4:

How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts!  
My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord;  
My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.  
The bird has found a house, 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.  
How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!  
They are ever praising You!

The psalmist is saying that the people who get to be in the house of God and worship and praise Him are blessed. The people who long for God, who long to worship God, to know God, to praise God, they are the ones who are truly blessed.

Now, that's so important in our day and age. More and more churches in the United States are realizing that fewer and fewer people are interested in worshipping God when they come to church, and so they are coming up with other things for them to do when they come to church because those people do not delight in worshipping God. And I want you to notice that God's pronouncement of blessedness is not upon them. His pronouncement of blessedness is upon the one who longs to be with the people of God, communing with the people of God in the worship of God.

And that's the lesson for us out of Psalm 84:1-4. We don't have a temple to go to anymore — we don't even right now have a permanent sanctuary to go to! — but we can worship, because God's house (we've been told now in the New Testament), God's house is not a beautiful building built by Solomon in Jerusalem. God's house is you. And wherever God's people gather, whether we gather in Miller Hall or whether we gather in a parking lot or whether we gather in a gymnasium, when God's people gather to worship the living God, you are God's house. And the psalmist is saying there is no place on God's green earth that he would rather be than in the temple of the Lord with the people of God, praising Him. And for the new covenant believer, what we say is that there is no place that we would rather be — not than in the temple in Jerusalem — but there's no place that we would rather be than with the people of God, worshipping God. We delight in it. We find our fullest satisfaction in it. It's our joy. We long to be with God, singing and praising Him. And the psalmist said that's true blessedness: the one who longs for God, to praise God, to be with God's people gathered in praising God. That's the person who understands life's true purpose, who has experienced the fullness of joy, has found deep satisfaction, has found

communion and worship with God's people.

## **II. Dependence and delight in the Lord.**

There's a second blessing, though, that he mentions. You see it in 5-8, and this is the blessedness of having the Lord as your strength and your desire.

“How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee,  
In whose heart are the highways to Zion!”

Notice here how he focuses on other men whose dependence and delight is in the Lord. The Lord is his strength. In other words, he understands that it's God who holds him up. It is God who supplies to him the ability to put one foot in front of another, to keep on going, to keep on serving. He is utterly dependent upon the Lord. The Lord must supply the strength to him if he is to live the life of faith, and that man who is dependent on the strength of the Lord is supplied the strength of the Lord. That man is blessed.

Now think of the contrast. So often we celebrate the person who is independent, self-sufficient, and autonomous. The “self-made man” was a great myth of nineteenth and twentieth century America: the man who doesn't depend on anybody; the man who's done it on his own. And the psalmist says in utter contrast, no, the man who is blessed is the man whose strength doesn't come from himself, it's supplied by the Lord. Blessed is that man whose strength is in You, O Lord. You supply the power of his life.

And furthermore, notice what else it says: “In whose heart are the highways to Zion!” The commentators wrestle with that. What's that referring to? Does it mean that in his heart he wants to go to Jerusalem to worship? Maybe. Or does it mean that in his heart there are highways that lead him to God? That's his ultimate goal. He wants to know God, he wants to fellowship with God, he wants to praise God, he wants to worship God, and in his heart there's this single-minded focus on communing with God. And the psalmist says that's the blessed man...that's the man. He knows that there's one thing that he wants, and that is to see the beauty of the Lord. There's one thing he wants: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, to give praise to God. His dependence and delight is in the Lord.

And again, that's so, so important for us today. One of the things that John Piper has so often reminded our generation is that we often look at God as the greatest means to our own ends. In other words, we view God as the One who can get us the things that we really want, instead of the One who Himself is the greatest end, and thus the One that we really want the most. And so often, because we view God as the best means to accomplishing our ends, we miss the greatest blessing of the gospel, which is union and communion with God Himself, delight in God Himself, reveling and glorifying and enjoying God Himself.

And the psalmists — these janitors at the temple — they understand what the believer delights in. The believer delights in the Lord, and therefore his highway — his heart is a highway to worship to God. That's the blessed man: one who depends on the Lord and who delights in the Lord. He goes from strength to strength, and he appears before God in Zion. That's his reward. He wants God, he wants to be with God, he wants to worship God, and God gives him that blessing.

### **III. Trust in the Lord's provision and protection.**

But there's a third blessing, and you see it in 9-12, and this is the blessing of trusting in the Lord. You see, life's true purpose, its fullest joy, its deepest satisfaction is found in communion and worship with God's people in dependence and delight in the Lord and in trusting in the Lord's provision and protection.

Notice how it goes in verse 9:

“Behold our shield, O God, and look upon the face of Your anointed.”

Verse 11:

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

You see, he's celebrating the Lord's provision: “No good thing does He withhold”; and the Lord's protection: “He is our shield.” He is our protector. He guards us against the assaults of our enemies. And he is blessed because he trusts in this Lord who provides and protects.

Don't you love the way he says in verse 10,

“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness”?

You see, he understands that this God is everything to him; and, therefore, God is everything to him. God has given him everything he needs. He has supplied his deepest needs and desires; and, therefore, God Himself is his great desire, the one thing that he needs. And so he would rather be serving as a janitor in the house of the Lord, posted at the threshold near Parbar, the west court, the west colonnade in the temple. He'd rather be there than in the midst of all the riches of the tents of wickedness, because they can't compare to what God has given him. And so he wants to be with God, because God is his provision and protection, and because God is his delight, and because he wants to commune and worship his God more than anything else.

Recently at the door outside of the temporary sanctuary, one of our older elders, elder emeritus now, was going out, and he said to me, "Ligon, I'm..." I think he said, "I'm 88 years old now, and I've been coming to this church since I was a little boy." And he said, "I want you to know that sometimes I can't get out on Sunday evenings. Sometimes people will bring me here, but I can't get out on Sunday evenings." He said, "I want to tell you, it breaks my heart that I can't be here every time the doors are open." And his eyes started welling up with tears, because he loved to be in the courts of the Lord with the people of God, worshiping God. And his eyes started tearing up, and my eyes started tearing up as this saint, this 88 year old saint, was telling me of his delight in being in the worship of God, in the house of God. Shouldn't that be our attitude, too?

I can tell you, there's no place I'd rather be on the face of this earth than with you, worshiping God, gathered to His praise Sunday morning, Sunday evening, gathering in the middle of the week to pray to Him, to seek His word. That saint delighted in being in the house of the Lord, and so did these janitors, the sons of Korah, whether they were stationed at the west colonnade or somewhere else, they loved to be in the house of the Lord.

When I went to Edinburgh, one of the godliest men that I had the opportunity to meet was a man named Bill Anderson. He was an elder at Buccleuch Greyfriars Free Church of Scotland, and Bill was what was called "the college officer" at the Free Church College. Now, Derek knows...that sounds like a very dignified title to us - British are great at giving titles to things like that: "the college officer". Basically, it was the job of janitor. Yeah. That's basically what...he emptied the trash. He would make tea for the professors, biscuits, and take them up to them at tea time. He'd clean up behind the students, he'd do the toilets. And he was a man of God. He loved to be in the house of the Lord, and he knew so much of the Lord.

One day there was a meeting of the Thomas Chalmers Housing Association, and there was an English Lady — a real English Lady — not a lady, meaning a nice female of genteel stock, but an English Lady, a wife of nobility, who was visiting the Free Church College. As they were going up the lift, she was asking Professor McMillan questions about the architecture of the Free Church College there on the mound, none of which he could answer; all of which Mr. Anderson could answer! By the time they got to the fourth floor, she turned to Professor McMillan and said, "Now, Professor McMillan, you teach church history." "Right." "What does Mr. Anderson teach?" And he said, "I don't know, but he ought to be teaching church history!" A humble man...a humble man, and a man who knew the Lord, and who loved to be in the house of God, just like these sons of Korah.

May God grant us hearts like them to be together in the worship of God. Let's pray.

*Our Lord, we do thank You for Your word, and we thank You for the hearts of these attendants, these doorkeepers of the temple, that they called Your worship lovely, that they called the gathering of Your people blessed, that they longed to commune with You, to worship you; that they delighted in You and depended on You; that they trusted in all of Your rich providence and protection. O Lord, give us hearts like them. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Would you stand for God's blessing.

*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus, the Messiah. Amen.*

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