

A God-Pleasing Attitude Toward Public Worship.

Text: Psalm 84

1) How The Psalmist Felt About Public Worship

Suggested Hymns:

2) Why He Felt That Way

501, 504, 507, 283, 511

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 84, *¹ How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! ² My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. ³ Even the 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. ⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You.*

⁵ Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. ⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools. ⁷ They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion. ⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob!

⁹ O God, behold our shield, And look upon the face of Your anointed. ¹⁰ For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly. ¹² O LORD of hosts, Blessed is the man who trusts in You! (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

It is surprising, but somewhat disappointing to see how many people of our day feel satisfied that they are just as good Christians without regular attendance at public worship, as those who regularly go to church.

In some cases such an attitude maybe due to sheer ignorance. Some of these people simply do not know God's Word, which says in Hebrews 10:25, ²⁵ *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some.* Or

again in Acts 2:42, ⁴² *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.* Or again in John 8:47, ⁴⁷ *He who is of God hears God's words.*

In other cases it is not a lack of knowledge (for some of these people know God's will), but it is a lack of God's Holy Spirit. They know the right thing (at least with their intellect), but they will not do it. These facts account, at least in a large measure, for the pitifully poor church attendance in our country.

The Christian will strive to keep the Ten Commandments, including the Third, **Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.** *What does this mean for us?* We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect His Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

Australian church attendance has significantly declined, with recent surveys showing about 21% of Australians attending religious services at least monthly, and 49% never attend. Church attendance has more than halved in recent decades.

Such conditions surely show the need for instruction and inspiration along this line. Therefore let us consider the Psalm just read to us, under the theme: *A God-Pleasing Attitude Toward Public Worship.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A God-Pleasing Attitude Toward Public Worship **How The Psalmist Felt About Public Worship**

The Psalmist recognised the amiableness or loveliness of God's tabernacle. Psalm 84 is attributed to the sons of Korah. The sons of Korah were a group of temple musicians. This Psalm emphasises the joy of being in God's house.

The Psalmist exclaims: "*How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!*" We must see in this expression the fact that the Tabernacle was dear and lovely to the Psalmist.

It is well for us to be convinced of the fact that if we are taking the right attitude toward our place of worship, it should likewise be a place of loveliness to us. There is a great difference in the physical beauty and appearance of various houses of worship. But if the proper spirit and attitude prevails, everyone of us

should be able to say also of our place of worship: ***“How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!”***

Because the Tabernacle was lovely to the Psalmist, he expressed an intense longing for its courts. Notice the different words which he uses in our text, ***“My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD.”*** Again he cries out, ***“My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”*** Certainly these words vividly proclaim the earnest and anxious longing of the heart and soul of the Psalmist for the place of public worship.

But as we read that verse again, we become aware of the fact that the Psalmist’s longing is not directed to something that is purely earthly and material, but his heart is longing for the living God Himself. Just as it is natural for a child to long for his father; so we should expect that a child of God would also long for the heavenly Father.

Therefore, as we review our own personal attitude toward public worship, we should ask ourselves in all honesty what it is that we seek in our place of public worship. What is it that fills our heart with joy and is the real answer to our longing? Can we truthfully say as did certain Greeks who approached Philip with the request, ***“Sir, we wish to see Jesus”?***¹

Perhaps sometimes people are disappointed in public worship because they have not come with this quest in mind. Instead, they have looked for sociability. They have come to be thrilled by fine speaking. Maybe their chief interest is in soul-stirring music. All of these things have a proper place, but we are bound sooner or later to be disappointed in going to church unless our chief longing is for the living God Himself.

The Psalmist valued the privilege of worshipping God in His Tabernacle as greater than anything which this world can offer. He says, ***For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.*** Just one day of worship is better to the Psalmist (even if that would be his last day on earth) than a thousand days of continued living (even if these would be spent in the pleasure of this world).

Furthermore, the Psalmist says, ***“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”*** In other words the Psalmist would rather be a beggar at the threshold of God’s Tabernacle than to live as a chief or honoured guest in the tents of wicked people. The Psalmist sees

the comparative worthlessness of the best which this world can offer when he places that alongside of the blessings that are to be his in the Tabernacle of God.

If we have the proper understanding of the privilege and the blessing of public worship in God's tabernacle today, we, too, should be able to say that one day of this, is better than a thousand days outside of God's tabernacle. We should be happy to be even a beggar in God's temple rather than to be chief among those who live in wickedness. Thus we have seen how the Psalmist felt about the privilege of public worship, and in him we can see reflected the attitude that should be ours.

2. A God-Pleasing Attitude Toward Public Worship

Why He Felt That Way

However, my friends, it is one thing to say how we should feel, and altogether another thing actually and really to feel that way. I could tell you a thousand times how you should feel, and in spite of all that, you might go home just as cold toward these appeals as anyone who has never heard them.

The spirit of man is not controlled or moved by mere commands of the Law. Behind the commands we must begin to see the real blessings, the great privileges, the high honours that are bestowed upon those who have learned to frequent and to love God's tabernacle.

When we see these blessings in sharp contrast to the miseries of living without God, then first our hearts will begin to warm; and then we will be on the way to a real solution to the church-attendance problems of our day.

Let us see therefore why the Psalmist felt as he did and pray that God's Holy Spirit would enlighten us, so that we, too, may have the same attitude. The Psalmist summarised all of the blessings that are to be had in the Tabernacle of the Lord when in the closing words of our Psalm he says, "***No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.***"

In other words, all blessings will come to us through a proper use of God's Word as it is offered to us in public worship. Let us classify some of these blessings as the Psalm lists them and see why the Psalmist felt as he did.

First, the Psalmist recognised in God a source of light for his own spiritual ignorance and darkness. He says, "***the LORD God is a sun.***" The reference to

light is, of course, to an inner enlightening of our understanding and of our spirit so that we can see our sin and guilt, but also see in faith Jesus Christ as our Sin-Bearer.

I am sure that all of the enmity and indifference and apathy over against God and public worship are in a large measure due to such spiritual ignorance. It is not because the minds of people have not been informed, but because their spirits have not been enlightened.

They may have knowledge which would earn academic degrees even in the theological world, but unless their inner understanding has been enlightened by God's Holy Spirit, they are still sitting in darkness. Let us not think that this condition is more or less exceptional.

Don't forget the fact that there are many standing in Christian pulpits and sitting high in the seats of theological learning today whose spirits have not been enlightened by the sun of God's righteousness. Neither can we deny the fact that there maybe some people who have had all the advantages of a Christian home as well as of many years of Christian instruction, and yet they still have not seen Christ in the beauty of His holiness.

Furthermore, we begin to recognise the blessing of this light when it is cast upon the vexing problems which confront us from time to time. Is it not true that some of these problems cause us real vexation of spirit? How often have you and I caught ourselves saying, "*If only I knew what to do!*" Because we are not sure of what we ought to do, we are filled with anxiety and misgiving.

Friends, what a blessing and what a privilege it is to be able to go to God's Word and the place where this Word is proclaimed and revealed and there to sit and bask in the sunlight of God's surpassing wisdom and knowledge!

People have been driven to distraction and despair and suicide without this light of God's Word. See what a blessing we may gain in the place where this Word is proclaimed!

Second, the Psalmist recognised in the Tabernacle of the Lord also a place of protection. He is reminded of this as he observes the sparrow that has found a house and the swallow which has built a nest for herself where she may lay her young even within the Tabernacle of God itself.

Our text says, *Even the 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.*

It seems that these small innocent creatures were permitted to build their nests in some part of the Tabernacle without being disturbed or evicted. To them the Tabernacle of God became both a shelter and a shield, and that is exactly what the Psalmist found in the Tabernacle of God. That is where he met God in spirit and recognised in God a Shelter for his faith and soul.

Do we recognise this specific blessing in the God whom we worship? If we truly know ourselves as well as the spiritual enmity of the world in which we live, we must long ago have come to the realisation that we are indeed living in a world surrounded by hellish enemies on every side.

We must have experienced the truth of that word of God which tells us, *“the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”*² When we consider the many temptations to sin, the many pitfalls for our Christian faith, we must indeed begin to recognise how much we need and depend upon the spiritual protection which God alone can give in His Word.

Then also as we look around us and see how many people who are falling victims to these temptations; how step by step they are straying from the path of God and, instead, are following the highways that lead to hell. Grieved by this sight, we cannot help asking, why? Well, we see that in all too many cases it is because such people have absented themselves from the protection that could and should have been theirs in the tabernacles of God.

Third, the Psalmist saw in this privilege of public worship also a source of spiritual refreshment. He refers to this in rather picturesque language when he says of those who worship that they are as those who *“pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools.”*

We see that the Psalmist looked upon his walk through life as a walk through the valley of Baca, because he recognised the true nature of this world; namely that spiritually it is a bleached, a parched, and a barren place.

But after he has enjoyed public worship in the Tabernacles of God, even these valleys of Baca can become wells of living water, because the rain of God’s

grace fills these pools. Therefore the Psalmist also says: “***The LORD will give grace.***”

He sees the undeserved kindness of God, the many favours and blessings which He has received. That is why the Psalmist preferred to be even a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. The refreshment received in the Tabernacle of the Lord makes the whole world look different to him.

As the Psalmist partook of the refreshments which God offered, he also gained strength, and that is why he says, “***They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion.***” Many a time he felt like fainting because of his heartaches and troubles.

Then, too, there were times when his conscience cried out against him because of his sins. When he thought of the just judgements of God which he had deserved through such sins, his heart and his strength failed him. But in the Tabernacle of the Lord, where he heard of God’s surpassing grace, even the grace of forgiveness in Christ, he again received strength for the tasks of his day.

Finally, the Psalmist saw in the privilege of public worship a source of honour. He says in our text, “***The LORD will give grace and glory.***” Now, it is true, we should not be arrogant. We should not be ambitious for honours for ourselves, especially not to exalt ourselves in them above our fellow men.

But, friends, there is one honour and glory which we all should seek, because we can share it with everyone else. That is the honour and glory of heaven. Yes, it is an honour for us to become heirs of this glory through Christ Jesus. That is why the Apostle said in 1 John 3:1, ***Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!***

Many people glory in the fact that they can trace their ancestry back to some outstanding person. Friends, by adoption all of us can trace our ancestry to that Father who is at the same time the King over all other kings, and Lord over all other lords. What an honour and glory to be counted a child of such a God!

All of these blessings are offered to us in the place of public worship, the place where God’s name is revealed and proclaimed, the place where God’s own honour dwells.

My friends, I am sure of this, that if the Christians of our day would only have their hearts enlightened, and if they recognised the great privilege and the even greater blessings that are theirs in the opportunity of public worship, there would be more longing and fainting and crying in their hearts not only for the courts of the Lord, but for the living God Himself.

Then they, and we all, could not only say it, but also mean it when we join with the Psalmist in the confession, *a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*” Then we would have a real solution to the problem of church attendance.

May God in His goodness and grace appear to us as our Sun and Shield and give us grace and glory so that we shall recognise the blessedness of the person who trusts in Him! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 12:21

² 1 Peter 5:8