

**“HOW LOVELY IS YOUR DWELLING PLACE”**

**Psalm 84:10**

**“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.”**

I needed to decide on today's text a couple of weeks ago because I was going away for a holiday. My mind was blank and I asked God for the scripture he wanted you to hear today – and within minutes these words were going over and over in my mind, “Better is one day in my courts than a thousand elsewhere”. I knew they were from scripture, an American worship band Kutless wrote a song based on these words and sung by many worship leaders in the UK – but I confess I was not sure where the verse was – and found it in Psalm 84.

So Psalm 84 went with me on holiday and some of the thoughts for today were formed hundreds of miles away!

**V1. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!**

The dwelling place for David the writer was the Ark of the Covenant and the building which contained the Ark of the Covenant. David's forebears had brought the Ark to the promised land. The temple had not yet been built, that would come later with the reign of David's son Solomon.

This was the most beautiful place for the Jew

The place where God dwelt in the holiest of Holies

The place where every Jew went for holy festivals, at least three times a year, where they met with God, or at least the high priest did on their behalf

**V2. My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord**

There is a strong powerful desire to be in God's house to the point of fainting, ceasing to function

David is in a bad place when he writes this Psalm. He is in exile. He is guilty of adultery and has a death on his hands, he is overwhelmed by his own sinfulness, he feels outcast and alone and unable to join with God's people in God's house. He longs to be there.

**my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God**

The living God - the only living God, not the God of clay or wood or stone or even gold, of the peoples living in the lands around Jerusalem, but the living God of Abraham and Jacob. The God of David, if David wrote this psalm he would not know that the living son of God would arise from his line, the line of David

The first 2 verses in The Message : **What a beautiful home, God-of-the-Angel-Armies! I've always longed to live in a place like this, always dreamed of a room in your house, where I could sing for joy to God-alive!**

The God of angel armies! What an amazing picture, the angel armies of God, angels ready to be despatched and carry out God's will on earth, to protect and guide us.

Chris Tomlin song – **Whom shall I fear?** –

I know who goes before me  
I know who stands behind  
The God of angel armies is always by my side  
The one who reigns forever  
He is a friend of mine  
The God of angel armies  
Is always by my side

**3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young— a place near your altar**

The sparrow and the swallow nest in the courtyard and around God's house, perhaps within sight of the altar. The sparrow represents the humble, the ordinary, the sparrow was abundant in the land and around the city. The word for sparrow denotes a chattering bird and the noise of the sparrows could be deafening. The swallow represents the active and restless, always on the wing, swooping and circling, coming to find peace in the court of the Lord, probably nesting under the eaves of the buildings. The writer David envies the birds who dwell in the light of the Lord, in the holiest place, the place where he would like to be. If birds built their nests around the temple, they were not disturbed and allowed to raise their young in peace.

Remember what was happening daily in the place where these birds were nesting. The temple building was surrounded by a large courtyard, which contained the altar for burnt offerings. So it is in this courtyard the bird makes her nest. David figured that since God controlled and made all things, if He allowed birds to nest in His house, then they were under His protection. They were in His sanctuary.

And these birds in Psalm 84:3 have found places to raise their young. And so the nests are near the place where all the animal sacrifices were made. Bulls, goats, sheep, even doves were sacrificed on this altar. And yet, in the midst of all this death and sacrifice, the little birds, with their chicks, were safe, protected and free from all harm.

Isn't that an amazing picture of God's protection over us? When all the world is falling apart, when we are surrounded by death, destruction, violence, sickness, famine,

plague and war, we are ultimately safe in God's care, he has a plan for our lives even if we cannot see what that is at the moment.

### **3 Lord Almighty, my King and my God**

Emphasis on MY King and MY God - grasping God with both hands. This phrase is very precious and deliberate. My King and God does not have the same power and urgency as My King and My God.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

**5/6 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs, the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength until each appears before God in Zion.**

The valley of Baca might have been a dry, arid, desert valley on the way up to Jerusalem. A place where pilgrims struggled with thirst and heat and God provided springs or wells of water. Wells were important and meant the difference between death and life to the pilgrims in that place and time.

But there is no record on any old maps or in documents that the valley of Baca actually existed.

The term means "valley of tears" and so David might be speaking spiritually here. We all go through spiritual valleys of tears, times when the way is hard and painful, when we thirst for relief and better times. God provides that spiritual water. If you are in a valley of Baca today, hear the ancient promises of God for your life -

**Isaiah 41: 17/18 The poor and needy search for water but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I the Lord of Israel will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into springs.**

And what did Isaiah go on to prophesy about? How would God pour the water of life into the poor and needy?

In the very next chapter of Isaiah -

**42: 1 Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations**

He is referring to Jesus Christ

**3/4 In faithfulness he will bring forth justice, he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth**

Jesus Christ

**6 He will make a new covenant with his people and be a light for the gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness**

The Lord Jesus Christ is his name.

**10: Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere**

We have been thinking about the courts of the Lord in the Old Testament sense, the Ark and the temple, the physical building which is the place of pilgrimage and worship. That is what David knew, that is what David longed for.

Better one day in your courts than a thousand on a holiday beach

Better one day in your courts than a thousand on the golf course or in the football stadium.

Better one day in your courts than on the most beautiful mountain or on the most luxurious cruise ship or exploring the barrier reef or whatever amazing place or activity your mind takes you to.

Better one day in your courts.

But we are not of David's time. We live on the other side of the cross, we are children of the resurrection, the people of the Way and the Truth and the Life. We know the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah.

Better is one day in the presence of Jesus than a thousand elsewhere

The song I referred to at the beginning, Better one day in your courts, says -

My heart and flesh cry out For You, the Living God.

Your Spirit's water for my soul

I've tasted, and I've seen

Come once again to me

I will draw near to You

I will draw near to You

Because of God's Holy Spirit, we do not find him only in his courts, his church buildings, but we find him wherever we are. If we are Christians and have a faith that is alive and constant then we will be aware of God's presence with us on the beach and up the

mountain and in the office and in our homes, wherever we are. We can draw near to him at any time, he never moves away from us.

And so we might say today “Better one day knowing Jesus than a thousand not knowing him.”

The thief on the cross beside Jesus only knew him for one day, or for a few hours in one day. But it was the best day of his life. That might not seem obvious considering he was experiencing a tortuous death but he found Jesus and was promised eternal life in heaven by the Saviour of the World himself. Better that one day than the thousands in his life that had gone before. He began the day in the Valley of Baca, the valley of tears and ended the day in paradise.

Psalm 84 tells us that as we journey through the Valley of Baca we go from strength to strength until each appears before God in Zion. A better translation might be that we go from resting place to resting place. There are times when we are at rest, at peace, life is treating us kindly, we enjoy blessing and are full of thankfulness.

But between resting places, between the oases of life, we encounter difficulty and trouble and weariness and stress and many more hard things for many reasons – it is then that we need to be so aware of the presence of Jesus in our lives, sitting with us in the dry valley, gathering our tears, sheltering us under the shadow of his outstretched wings as the sparrow or the swallow with her young.

Jesus knows that the spring of living water never runs dry.

*(EAST CALDER - If you are dry and thirsty today, then you might want to come to the prayer room at the back of the church after the service where two of the prayer ministry team will pray for you and speak words of life and blessing over you. The prayer room has become an oasis for many, a resting place in life's journey.)*

David knew that he could not go to the house of the Lord but he ends the psalm as he often does, acknowledging that God is with him wherever he goes, God is unchanging and faithful, great is thy faithfulness O God. All that we need God's hand provides and so he concludes –

**11/12 The Lord God is a sun and shield (in other words life giving power and protection)**

**The Lord bestows favour and honour**

**No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless**

**O Lord Almighty, God of the Angel-Armies, blessed is the man or woman who trusts in you.**

Amen