

# True Worship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Reading from Psalm 84, page 493 on the church Bibles, which you can get the back if you would like a hard copy.

It's also in the bulletin and on the screens. So Psalm 84 and from verse 1. To the choir master according to the gitteth, a psalm of the songs of Korah.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young. At your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise, Selah.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you and whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The early rain also covers it with pools.

[ 0 : 59 ] They go from strength to strength. Each one 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.

Look on the face of your anointed. 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.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you.

This is God's word. Well, if you've got a Bible, we turn, please, with me to Psalm 84. And that reading is also printed, I think, on the order of service.

In his book, Counterfeit Gods, the American preacher, late Tim Keller, asks and answers the question, what is an idol?

[ 2 : 02 ] He says, an idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts. If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning. Then I'll know I have value.

Then I'll feel significant and secure. He goes on to say this, there are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something.

But perhaps the best one is worship. And that really is the subject matter of our psalm tonight.

Psalm 84 speaks to us of what it means to be a worshiper of the God of the Bible.

In true worship, our affections, our desires are placed, as it were, upon God. In genuine worship, we are weaned away from our idols and drawn away from them by the sight of something far better and far more wonderful, namely the triune God Himself.

True worship engages our whole personalities, our mind, our will, and emotions. True worship means treasuring God and desiring Him to be at the very center of our lives.

[ 3 : 20 ] So, let me ask you, and as I ask myself this evening, who or what are we really worshipping?

Who or what gives your life meaning and significance? Who or what are we really treasuring in our hearts? Who or what are we really investing our lives in?

Spurgeon called this psalm, Psalm 84, the peril of the psalms. So, let's look more closely at this famous peril and see what it has to say to us on this whole subject of worship.

You'll notice that the psalm has a superscription to the choir master, according to the gitteth, a psalm of the sons of Korah.

Well, the gitteth, well, some believe that to be, have been a, I think in the ESV it says, probably a musical or liturgical term. But nobody really knows.

[ 4 : 24 ] Some believe it to be a kind of string instrument, maybe something like a zither. Some suggest that it was an early form of the guitar. That's maybe going a little too far, I think.

But anyway, the title of the psalm, you'll notice there is a psalm of the sons of Korah. Eleven of the psalms are attributed to the sons of Korah. Who were the sons of Korah?

That's the big question. Well, we read of Korah back in the book of Numbers. He was one of a group of men who led a rebellion or an uprising against Moses and Aaron. Korah and his comrades were judged by God.

They were swallowed up by a great earthquake, and you can read about that in Numbers 16. His descendants, the sons of Korah, were spared. And in time they became doorkeepers and custodians for the tabernacle and then the temple.

In 1 Chronicles 9 verse 19, we read this, Shalom the son of Korah, son of Ebi Asaph, son of Korah, and his kinsmen of his father's house, the Korahites were in charge of the work of the service, keeper of the thresholds of the tent, as their fathers had been in charge of the camp of the Lord, keepers of the entrance.

[ 5 : 40 ] During the time of David, sons of Korah became great leaders in the music and the tabernacle. They played an important role in the thanksgiving services and events surrounding the Ark of the Covenant as it was brought to Jerusalem.

So, the sons of Korah were amongst those directly involved in temple worship and praise. Here was a group of people who knew something of what it meant to worship the living God. And so, what do the sons of Korah here have to teach us about worship?

You'll notice that the psalm really splits, I think, into three major stanzas, and each one of these contains a benediction or a blessing. Blessed, verse 4, are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise.

And then in verse 5, blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. And then in verse 12, O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Here is a kind of threefold blessing of God that rests upon a people of true worship. It's a psalm designed, I think, to move us away from our idols, to get us to set our hearts upon the Lord, a song that endeavors to pull our affections from ourselves and from the things of this world, and to rest them firmly upon the God of the Bible.

[ 7 : 11 ] So, what did we learn here about the blessings of true worship? Well, notice with me three things. And the first is this, in the first stanza, verses 1 through 4, true worship is hungry for God's presence.

True worship is hungry for God's presence. Notice how the psalm begins with a declaration, really an expression of desire. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. And Psalm 84 is a psalm that has at its heart and center this experience of longing and desire, that place of meeting with God in the Old Testament, the tabernacle, then the temple.

And it was here, above all places, that the living God was to be enjoyed by His people. And you'll notice it is the living God, not the visible sanctuary, that is the object of the psalmist's desire.

There is here a hunger for God and for God's presence. The picture almost is one of exile or separation. The psalmist is far from the courts of the Lord.

[ 8 : 28 ] He is cut off from the place of God's presence. He is longing to be back there. He's longing to delight once more in his God. He recognizes what's truly valuable is the worship of God, gathering with the people of God in the place that God has set apart for Himself.

How lovely are your courts. My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord. That's the language, isn't it? Hunger, thirst, desire.

He's yearning for worship. He's yearning for God and to meet with Him in the place where He has chosen to reveal Himself. And the psalmist reveals here his spiritual appetite for God.

He has a heart for God. He longs to delight in God's perfection and beauties. He has a thirst for God. He wants to know God. He wants to enjoy God. Nothing else will do.

There can be no substitute. And friends, that's what worship is about, isn't it? In a very real sense, worship is the driving force of all that we do.

[ 9 : 37 ] Augustine writes, Train yourself until you have a capacity for God. Long and long for what you will possess forever.

What do you yearn for or long for? What do we desire? What's at the center of our affections? The psalmist doesn't say, how lovely is my home or my comfort or my financial security.

How lovely is my career or my family or my peace. He says, how lovely are your courts, your dwelling place, O Lord. The story is told of Ebenezer Erskine, an 18th century Scottish minister. I think he was the founder of the First Secession Church. And in his day, he was a great preacher. He attracted huge crowds. And on one occasion, I think it was at a communion season, a woman heard him preach, and she was deeply moved.

And so she decided she would go and hear him again the very next Sunday. So off she went. She went to the service and she listened to Erskine. But she wasn't moved in the same way.

[10:47] Really, nothing happened to her. She wasn't stirred in any way. She was left feeling very flat and empty. And she went to Erskine afterwards and asked him why this was the case.

He said to her, last Sabbath, you went to hear Jesus Christ. Today, you came to hear Ebenezer Erskine. Who are we longing for?

Who are we listening for? Whose voice are we listening for? Do we have an appetite for God himself? Are we hungry for the Lord's presence? Is this what draws us to worship Sunday by Sunday?

Fellowship and intimacy with Jesus Christ. Do we long for that assurance of his pardon? To be clothed in his righteousness. Are we hungry for Jesus Christ?

Even the sparrow finds a home. And to swallow a nest for her self where she may lay her young. At your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

[11:50] Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. It's as if the psalmist remembers the little birds nesting in the temple courts and precincts.

And how they didn't have to leave the presence of God. And it stirs him up to a kind of holy envy. He wants to be one of those little birds nesting near the altars of God.

Those little creatures can be there all the time. They don't need to leave. How wonderful, he says, it would be to be like them. To live and abide in the very courts of the Lord. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise.

The sparrow and swallow can remain near the altars. The place of sacrifice, blood, atonement. And that place has always been central to biblical worship.

And the altar reminds us, of course, that we're all sinners. We think of Korah, the usurper and rebel judged by God for his sin.

[12:55] We can see here that his sons, his descendants, lived on to serve and worship Yahweh. Though they came from a line of rebels, yet they received forgiveness and grace.

And were brought to the place of praise and worship. And friends, that's true for all believers. We, too, are rebels. And there's a sense we're all sons and daughters of Korah.

And that's why the altar is important. The writer to the Hebrews says, We have an altar from which those at the tabernacle have no right to eat. Hebrews 13.10.

In other words, as Christians, we have an altar far superior to that of Israel's ancient temple. Our altar, in one sense, is the cross of Calvary. From that altar flows the blood of the eternal covenant. And from it flows forgiveness of sin and peace with God. There at the altar of the cross, we find all our guilty stains removed. And that is why the cross always lies at the very heart of Christian worship.

[13:57] Because it's at the cross, we who were once far away, are brought near. It's at the cross that rebels are forgiven and restored.

It's through the cross that we're enabled to come to know God as our Father. It's through the cross we're able to come to know Him in a personal and intimate way.

And it's that intimate knowledge of God as our Heavenly Father that surely brings worship alive. For true worship is hungry for God and hungry for God's presence.

Secondly, true worship is here strengthened by God's power in the second stanza, verses 5 through 9.

The language of these next verses is that of journey and pilgrimage. The path of faith is not always an easy one. It can be tiring.

[15:05] It can bring weariness and fatigue. And in such circumstances, what is required? Strength. And that, I think, is what the psalmist is speaking about here.

He's talking about strength. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs.

The early rain covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in Zion. Here are those making their way to Zion to determine to reach the temple, to make it to the courts of the Lord.

And their strength is in God. And they're blessed. Indeed, as they travel, they go from strength to strength. And you'll notice that the highway the psalmist mentions here is not so much a physical road or path, but rather it is a matter of the heart.

Indeed, it is a highway of the heart. This pilgrimage is a journey of the heart before it is anything else. Let me ask you tonight, in what direction are the highways of your heart running?

[16:22] Are they running towards God, or are they running away from Him? Where is your life going? Does your existence have any significance beyond the horizons of this earthly life?

Some years ago, now I received a letter from a friend in the United States. He told me in this letter of a lady who had phoned him from England, asking if he could go and speak to her brother, who was a successful eye surgeon.

I'll read what he wrote. He said this. She explained that he was recently discovered with an extensive malignancy in his liver and was on his way from London to Houston for treatment. I agreed to visit and took a New Testament and went to his temporary U.S. residence. As I knocked and entered the apartment, he was clearly distraught, demoralized by his terminal illness. He broke down and began to cry. I sat next to him, put my arm around him, and asked if I could pray. He'd spent the best years of his life working and saving, and at the very pinnacle of his career, when he was preparing to begin to enjoy the fruits of his labor, the shocking discovery of cancer had ruined all his plans.

[17:42] I found it so difficult to comfort him. His mind was absorbed in the thought of the deceitfulness of the world, which had played a prank of fate upon him.

Wise are those who beat the world at its own deceptive game. They give rather than grab. They lay down rather than take up. They do not believe its lies, and are not led astray by its allurements of mirage upon mirage.

Blessed are those who act before they are robbed of all they have. They invest what they can while they can, where no thief can reach, especially the greatest of all bandits, death itself.

This dear man was caught off guard because he had not prepared for the inevitable. Beside comforting him, feeling sad for him, and there was very little I could do other than earnestly plead with him in this trying hour of his life while there was still time to flee into the arms of God.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. It's a critical question. In what direction is the highway of your heart running tonight?

[19:08] Is it running into a cul-de-sac of self-regard, a dead end of selfish futility, or does it have a highway leading away from self towards God and in service of others?

Does it have in view that city with foundations whose architect and builder is God? Yes, of course, this journey of faith is not without its difficulties and risks.

You'll notice that the psalmist speaks here about the valley of Baca. We don't really know where or what the valley of Baca was. The contrast here suggests it may have been a place without water, dry, arid, inhospitable.

And because the word Baca sounds very similar to the Hebrew word for weeping, often commentators have understood this to be a valley of tears and a place of sorrow. And I don't actually think those two ideas are mutually exclusive.

The valley of Baca was a difficult place to travel through. And yet even here, God sustains His pilgrim people. He makes them springs to flow in the desert.

[20:24] He provides pools of refreshing water, even in this dry place. He gives strength in a place of weakness. Because God's pilgrim people will not be beaten down or overcome.

Remember, this is the way in the New Testament that Peter describes his fellow Christians in his first letter, sojourners, exiles, aliens, strangers, pilgrims in this world, citizens of another realm, another kingdom.

God will not fail His people. He will not let His pilgrim people down. He will give them the strength that they need. He will not let them falter.

He who began a good work will be faithful to complete it. For here is the thing, even the valley of tears can be a place of blessing and strength.

Even here, we discover that God strengthens His people. Remember Isaiah's words, have you not known? Have you not heard?

[ 21 : 31 ] The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary. Young men shall fall exhausted.

But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, and they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

They shall walk and not faint. Where does the strength come from to deal with all that life may throw at us in those difficult circumstances?

Maybe at our work, perhaps in our family, perhaps with our health, perhaps as we watch the news and we see the culture around us falling apart sometimes.

[ 22 : 32 ] Where does our strength come from to endure such times? It comes from Yahweh. It comes from the Lord. It doesn't come from us. It doesn't find its origin in us.

Our strength is in Him. Here is the living God who meets us in all our weariness and fatigue and who gently bears us up. The hymn writer says, Father like He tends and spares us.

Well our feeble frame He knows. Very often Christians are fearful of the future. Sometimes we're afraid we won't have the strength to endure trials and difficulties.

C.S. Lewis once corresponded with a woman whose problem was precisely that. He wrote to her these words, Remember, one is given strength to bear what happens, not the 101 different things that might happen.

How do we draw strength from our God? We gather strength by leaning on Him, by trusting Him.

Think of those beautiful words of Proverbs 3, Trust the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight.

[ 23 : 55 ] That's those who find their strength in Yahweh. They turn to the Lord in prayerful dependence. O Lord of hosts, verse 8, Hear my prayer.

Give ear, O God of Jacob. Behold our shield, O God. Look on the face of your anointed. Turns to the Lord in prayer.

Asks that He might be heard. He looks to the God of Jacob, the shield and defender of His people. And He asks that God might look upon the face of His anointed.

That is most likely a reference to the King. And it appears in some way that the psalmist sees His own destiny, indeed the destiny of His people, as being linked to the well-being of the King.

The Lord's anointed. As with the King, so with the people. And that is no less true of us. As with our King, so it will be for us.

[ 24 : 54 ] Suffering and hardship may well be our lot. We follow and worship the servant King. We worship a King who died and who rose again, and in whom we too will die and rise again.

Our future is inextricably linked to Jesus, the Lord's anointed, the Christ of God. As Christians, we are joined to Him, united to Him.

We are men and women in Christ. Paul says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Jesus Christ is our great shield and King through whom we have access to the God of Jacob. Remember, Jacob, that weak, undeserving man who wrestled with God and prevailed. And thus, the God of Jacob is the God of the weak, the God of weak and undeserving people who put their trust in Him.

True worship, hungry for God and for God's presence. True worship knows the strength that God alone can give.

[ 26 : 05 ] True worship is strengthened by God's power. And then thirdly here, in the third stanza, true worship is satisfied in God's service.

Now, we've noted already that amongst the duties and responsibilities of the sons of Korah was their role as doorkeepers of the tabernacle and temple, responsible opening the temple in the morning for the morning sacrifices, closing it after evening sacrifice, charged with protecting, monitoring the treasuries of the house of God, assuring that the tithe and offering money was properly accounted for.

They were servants in God's house. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

And again, we see here the psalmist repeating this desire to be in the courts of the Lord and to enjoy serving the Lord there. A day spent in the Lord's service better than a thousand spent elsewhere.

Better a doorkeeper in the house of God than to live amongst the wicked. Spurgeon writes, the lowest station in connection with the Lord's house is better than the highest position among the godless.

[ 27 : 37 ] God's worst is better than the devil's best. Serving the Lord is its own reward because it's a joy to serve such a king.

To serve God is to enjoy the highest pleasure. I've observed over the years that often the happiest members of any church are those most active in service.

Paul says to the church in Rome, do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Maybe that's a word for someone tonight.

What a privilege and pleasure it is to serve our God and to bless His people. Why on earth should we envy the wicked? Remember John Newton's words with him, solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know.

Our God holds nothing back from His servants. He lavishes His love and grace upon us. For the Lord God is a sun and a shield.

[ 28 : 49 ] Verse 11, the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you.

He is our sun and shield. He is our highest joy, our greatest treasure. One who is altogether lovely, the radiant Lord of glory, beautiful beyond compare.

Or as Moses say, who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? Yes, the psalmist here longs for the temple and the courts of the Lord.

And yes, of course, that towering structure is long gone. And in its place stands a person, the true meeting place between God and man, Jesus Christ, the one in whom we become living stones in His new spiritual temple, the church.

And friends, true worship is, of course, at the heart of the Christian life and at the heart of Christian living. It's all about knowing and enjoying God in Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 09 ] Herman Bavinck writes, God saves by causing Himself to be known and enjoyed in Christ. Do you know and are you enjoying a relationship with Jesus Christ?

in the gospel, in Christ, God offers us His very self. Calvin writes, our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ.

We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. Let us drink our fill from this fountain and from no other.

20 years ago now, the writer and post-modern novelist David Foster Wallace gave a famous speech to the graduating class at Kenyon College in, I think, in Ohio.

The speech was later published as a book with the intriguing title This is Water. And in the book he says this, everybody worships.

[ 31 : 23 ] The only choice we get is what to worship. The compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of God to worship is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. worship power and you will end up feeling weak. Worship your intellect being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid. A fraud always on the verge of being found out.

Friends, we are so often tempted, are we not, to drink from the broken cisterns of this world, to try and tap meaning and purpose and satisfaction in all manner of different places.

in our work, in our career, our health and appearance, our qualifications, our academic achievements, our family, our bank balance, sexual excitement, in our sense of self.

[ 32 : 33 ] And of course, it's not that these things are bad, but rather they simply cannot provide the lasting satisfaction we crave. Such things will not quench our thirst.

They will not and they cannot satisfy. There's an old hymn that we sometimes used to sing. I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but ah, the waters failed.

E'en as I stooped to drink, they fled, and mocked me as I wailed. Now none but Christ can satisfy. Now another name for me.

There's love and life and lasting joy, Lord Jesus found in thee. 1714, Matthew Henry, a well-known Bible commentator, was on his death bed.

He was 52. He hadn't finished this famous commentary on the Bible. In fact, others finished it from his notes. He had endured the loss of his first wife, three of his nine children.

[ 33 : 44 ] He could have complained about a tough life with many difficulties, many hardships. And this is what he said to a friend as he approached death. You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men.

This is mine. That a life spent in the service of God and communion with Him is the most comfortable and pleasant life that one can live in the present world.

following and worshiping the Lord is the most blessed life possible. It's a life of true worship.

It's hungry for God and His presence. It's strengthened by God's power and that finds satisfaction in God's service. You can discover that for yourself tonight.

throw aside the idols of self and through Jesus Christ come to know God as He really is.

[ 34 : 48 ] Come to know God as your Heavenly Father. Look to Him and let Him be your treasure, the treasure that fills your heart.

How does that old hymn put it? riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always, thou and thou only, first in my heart.

High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art. May He be our treasure this evening and may we be a people of true worship.

Let's pray together. Amen. Almighty God, we bless you and praise you for your kindness and goodness towards us.

We thank you that you are rich in mercy. You're a God who is abounding in love, steadfast love.

Lord, may we be a people of true worship, hungering always to know you and for your presence, experiencing the strength that you alone can bring to continue this earthly pilgrimage.

[ 36 : 11 ] And Lord, may you be the one who helps us to find satisfaction and peace in serving and in living for you.

we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.