

Home is Where the Heart is

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're just going to, for a few minutes today before the baptism, we're going to think about this Psalm because we like to open and unpack God's word together for a little while.

And over the last number of weeks, we've been looking at different Psalms and nearly all of them use the word at different places in them, blessed.

And it's a really good word and it's a really important word. If you go on Instagram and do hashtag blessed, I'm told this reliably since I'm not on Instagram, but you can get 133 million hits for that particular hashtag.

And I think in most cases when we see that word, and it's a word that's not just a Bible word, it's used a lot, it's usually hashtag blessed because of something maybe that a material possession that someone has got or good times or happy events or new relationships or holidays that they've had or whatever it might be.

And they say it then hashtag blessed. And that's fine, that's good because it's a nice thing to recognize. But interestingly in the Bible, it's got a slightly different connotation and a different idea.

[1 : 1 3] It does mean true happiness and it gives us a key, we believe, for true happiness. And interestingly, it's used 122 times in the New Testament and it never refers to material things, it never refers to wealth or riches or anything that we can get materially.

It always refers to relationships and almost entirely, but not exclusively about relationship with God. So when we think about being blessed, hashtag blessed, and today we think about that, don't we, with the baptisms and family and friends who are important to the families of those being baptized and the blessing of that and the goodness of that of parents and siblings and partners and families and friends.

It ultimately is pointing us one step further, even that, even from that, and that is pointing to the relationship we strive after, we have found as Christians in coming to trust in Jesus Christ.

We are having a relationship of strength and trust with God, so Jesus is strong and kind and we sing that because we've come to know that as Christians.

That's our Christian experience and that's why we can say hashtag blessed that we have found happiness in our lives.

[2 : 3 6] And that's a challenge always for us to remember that. Now the Old Testament covenant people of God, of which the sons of Korah who wrote this Psalm were part, they did know that they experienced it in shadows in many ways before Jesus had come.

But often, interestingly, and maybe this is a challenge to us with a deeper insight than we have, and certainly this Psalm would reflect that.

Because this and many of the Psalms just are a kind of expressive heartbeat for those who had a relationship with God in their lives and a loving relationship. It's full of worship, not just this one, but all of the Psalms are full of worship and even doubts and emotions and questions and faith.

And they really help express for us what it's like to pursue true happiness in a relationship with God. And it's something that I know the parents here today, especially as we think of the baptism, seek to live out with their children also.

Now maybe if you're not a Christian today or you're an inquirer or maybe you've just tuned in online for the first time for whatever reason, the encouragement we always give is to consider the exclusive and unique claims of God on your life as you pursue the meaning of true happiness, which I think we all do.

[4 : 02] I don't know if there's a greater quest than any of us. Maybe we don't verbalize it, but I'm sure in all of our lives that's what we're looking for, is it true happiness?

And Jesus says it's the root issue that we all need to deal with because we have a... By nature we have a spiritually diseased DNA, which leads to spiritual death if we don't find healing in Jesus Christ and then true happiness as a result.

And there's two really strong images in this Psalm that I think help all of us to associate with that, with understanding what God means when He talks about true happiness.

And you can maybe associate with it as a Christian if you're searching for God and for the meaning even of life, or even if you've quite self-consciously rejected God.

I'm sure you can still associate with the images of this Psalm. And the first one is home, home. That's the first image that comes across in the Psalm, really in the first four verses where it speaks about the temple of God in the Old Testament as home, how lovely is your dwelling place.

[5 : 16] Oh, Lord of hosts, my soul faints, we're for the courts of the Lord. Even a sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself. Oh, Lord of hosts, blessed are those who dwell in your house.

So this is the image of the first four verses of the Psalm. It's all about home because we all know we've got a homing instinct, really, don't we?

You can all associate with that today. We can all associate with a place where we're loved or where we long to be loved, a place where we're safe, where we can be ourselves without any ears and graces or we can relax, where we can put our slippers on, where we're warm and comfortable and we're satisfied.

You know that feeling of coming home and that they're from work or from out in the rain or from a cold day, lovely, but cold day today you can go home and just relax and be at home.

And I'm sure Hamish and Anna and Tense and Emma, when they were just expecting their children, they made a bedroom at home to prepare a place for Lily and for Wilhelmus.

[6 : 29] They did that because that's really what we do, isn't it, so often? And home is so important. And that's why in our lives we recoil when we hear things about destruction in the home or violence in the home or abuse or robbery.

If you've ever been robbed in your house, you know you kind of materially feel like you've been raped. Someone has abused the privacy of your life and home. And if you know that, it's not a pleasant feeling or homelessness which we recoil from in our society where we're also wealthy and warm in our homes.

We find it strange that we live alongside homelessness in our city or we see the appeals for children in Yemen who have been made homeless by the ongoing civil.

What a terrible, destructive thing. And that, I believe, taps into our spiritual beings, this reality of home. And in this Psalm, we have the poetry of the janitors.

If I can say that, in verse 10 we're told, I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

- [7 : 47] The sons of Korah were those who were set aside by God in the Old Testament to look after the temple. Janitors is a bit harsh. There were more than that.
- They were also warriors and they were also guards. But they did have this special place in the physical building, the temple that God had in the Old Testament.
- And that's where God, before the New Testament, that's where He dwelt with His people. He dwelt in that place, the holy of holies, where if they wanted to be in God's presence, they went to the temple.
- And this poem speaks about that. There were not only janitors and guards and those who were fighters.
- They were also musicians and they were poets. And under divine inspiration, they give us a picture of what God wants us to know for ourselves today as part of God's Word.
- [8 : 46] So I remind myself and I remind us as Christians here today that we have found in Christ, we have found our true spiritual home.
- What the psalmist speaks of and the sons of Korah speak of kind of in shadow as it were, we find we have come to know in fullness because of Jesus Christ and who He is.
- Because in the New Testament, the temple is not a building, the temple is Jesus Christ.
- And you know, when we actually heard it this morning on the video that we share with Tim Keller on Seven Days of Prayer, when Jesus spoke about the temple being raised to the ground and rebuilt in three days, He wasn't talking about the temple in Jerusalem, He was talking about His body and the resurrection.
- And as Christians, when we come to the temple, it's not a building, it's not even a church. It's the person and the presence of Jesus Christ.
- [9 : 50] And when we come to Him, not only do we see God, but also God comes into our lives and hearts in the person of the Holy Spirit so that we become as Christians, as it were, with this image, the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- So we are changed from inside out and not wanting to be in relationship with God or be part of the temple, we are changed to loving God and wanting to be in relationship with Him.
- The best picture I can think of that is from the New Testament, is a parable, and it's the parable of the prodigal Son, which many of us know. And that's a story about salvation and about truth.
- And it really says that one of the sons, one of two sons of their father was fed up being at home. He didn't like being at home.
- And he basically almost said, I want my dad dead so that I can get the inheritance and really be free and live. So he asked his dad for his inheritance and his dad gave him it.
- [10 : 52] And he had all this money and he left home. He got away from it. And lived exactly how he wanted. He didn't have the strictures of home or the responsibilities. He just could do what he liked and he had parties and he had women and he had drink and he had friends that partied with him until all the money ran out.
- And we know the story that we ended up in a pigsty, very brutal for a Jewish person at that time to use that, for God, Jesus to use that illustration, pigs being unclean animals.
- But not only that, he would have eaten the food that were given to the pigs because he was so hungry, he came to his senses and said, how many of my father's servants have food enough to eat?
- I'm going to go back and repent of what I've done and ask him if he'll take me even as a servant. And of course, what's the story? Story isn't of the dad standing there with crossed arms saying, well, I told you so.

He said, dad's lifting up his tunic and running and then putting out his arms and saying, my son, you are dead and now you're alive, you are lost and now you're found.

[11 : 59] And he takes him home. And that's the picture, it's the same picture that we're given there of coming home. And that's what this Samist is saying, all along home is where the heart is.

In relationship with God, we find a completely different attitude. You see the changes of attitude when the son realized his father loved him and cared for him and it was the best place to be.

And the Sam expresses that in the language it uses, it talks about how lovely it is. It talks about joy and singing, about getting stronger all the time in verse 7, talks about crying out in prayer and worship.

In verse 8, it's being incompatible to anything in verse 10, talks about God is light and protection in verse 11. That's the whole wording of the Sam, that there's joy and happiness and a homecoming.

And our priorities we find that that's where we want to be, home is where our heart is. And it uses that lovely illustration of the sparrow finds a home there.

[13 : 07] The sparrow was regarded in the Bible as a really kind of worthless little bird. It was what poor people would end up using as a sacrifice and it was like Tenapeni.

And yet we've got that great picture that we can maybe feel sometimes absolutely worthless in this world that doesn't seem a care. But that we are valuable and we can find a home.

And we find the only home of true happiness in relationship with Jesus. So the challenge is I think for us not to take that for granted. We can all do that, can't we?

Maybe we're here today and we can take for granted the homes that we've come from this morning or the family that we have or the parents that are maybe a hundred miles away or brothers and sisters.

We can take our family sometimes, it's easy to do that, isn't it? And yet it's important for us as Christians not to take our spiritual relationship with God for granted.

[14 : 05] Can we still connect with that same kind of language in our lives? Can we enthuse those around about us? And can we tell them what a privilege it is as parents to be baptising our children?

And we know that our children as they're baptised will be brought up in a covenant home and we'll want them to move from just living in a Christian home to having Jesus in their hearts for themselves.

And that's our longing and our prayer, the blessing of being covenant children, which we'll mention at the end. And maybe consider if you're not a Christian, maybe you realise you may be a bit like the prodigal that you're on the run from God a bit.

Maybe you're looking for blessing, true happiness in material things or even just in human relationships on the run from God. And from His claims, His authority, His parental oversight as it were, and the explanation He gives you of your need, your sin, your guilt, your alienation from Him.

But yet, if you're honest, potentially do you know that you're dissatisfied and that you don't have any answers other than to avoid it or, you know, survive the baptismal service if you're here in that situation or close your ears?

[15 : 36] I would really encourage you just to consider the claims of Jesus Christ. Because there's another interesting little picture about the bird here. There's not only a place for sparrows, but also a place for swallows.

A place for swallows find a nest for herself. And if you've ever seen swallows, they're always darting about. They're never really at rest. They're always on the move until they're nesting.

And maybe that's how you feel, kind of always on the go, never really finding answers or satisfaction. And I think there's a picture there of finding a home in relationship with Jesus.

So I'm nearly done with it. That's the first thing is home. That's the first picture we've got that. And much more briefly and secondly, we also have an illustration of a journey, verses 5 to 7.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are in the highway to Zion. They go through the valley of Baker. They make it place of strings. The early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength until each one appears before God in Zion.

[16 : 43] Now that's a really strong theme in the Old Testament. And the people of God in the Old Testament were always seemed to be... the story revolves around them being on a journey, whether it's from Egypt to the Promised Land or whether out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land or whether it's in the Promised Land when they would go up to Jerusalem for the festivals and they would journey from wherever they lived and celebrate and worship.

Or whether it was later on when they were exiled in Babylon and a remnant of them journeyed back to the Holy Land, the land of promise after the rebellion.

It was always a journey. It was really important in that story. So there's almost a kind of paradox here. We've got a home, but we've also got a journey.

It's a dual picture and it's almost a paradox because the Christian life, we've come home. We find true happiness in relationship with Jesus.

But we're also on a journey, we're called to follow Jesus and to serve God. We're on His road until He takes us home to glory. And we need His strength, as this Psalm says.

[17 : 52] We need to move from strength to strength. It's tough. It's a battle we struggle in our hearts with lots of things. It's steep.

Sometimes we end up low down. Sometimes we end up high up. And there's a lovely play in words. There are a kind of lovely image here. It talks about, if they go through the valley of Baker or Baca, and that word just means would mean balsam trees.

So balsam trees, which they would cut and they would take the sap from, so they were weeping. So it's really a picture of being in the valley of weeping, a sad place. And yet it says, even though we go through that valley of weeping, we make it a place of springs, a place that something positive comes from it, life and fruitfulness.

And that has been our experience as Christians, that we've gone through times of deep, deep sadness and loss and battle. But as we've committed it to God, we've found His strength and His courage and His help.

There's a great picture for us as we're getting older. In 2 Corinthians 4, 16, which speaks into that, therefore we don't lose heart on this journey. Though outwardly we're wasting away, yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day.

[19 : 12] So there's a fantastic inner renewal happening in our lives as we follow and serve Jesus. And that's counterintuitive that in that place of valley, that place of tears, that we can actually go from strength to strength.

Because we know He is a purpose, He will take us through that and we have hope for the future. It's positive, it's not unrealistic, it's not naive, it's not fluffy and fairy story, it's recognizing the tears that we often go through here.

But it's reminding us that as we are not self-sufficient, as our strength and trust is in God, we can see fruitfulness and blessing.

So that dual image of home and not yet home is something, and that journey is something that I hope the parents today and all of us as parents, and all of us as a congregation because remember we vow later on, we vow to pray for and to lead our children together as a church family.

We have these great words in Deuteronomy 6, 5 to 7, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. We know we can only do that through Jesus and through coming to Him in faith.

[20 : 27] These commandments I give you today are to be like on your hearts, impress them on your children, talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

It's just that great picture of having, recognizing Jesus as the one that we trust on our journey, knowing Christ as Savior, that we grow with Him, we mature with Him, we stumble at our highs and lows, but as we rely on His strength and His beauty and as we pray to Him, we find His grace in our lives.

He's the only true King that there is. He's the only true King that we serve. And that is an amazing reality for us. In verse 9 we're told, Behold our shield, O God, look on the face of your anointed.

And that was the anointed one was always the King, and the Old Testament people followed the King as a representative of their God. And of course we find that that's been replaced by King Jesus, the King of the Jews who died in the cross to be our Redeemer and our Savior, to pay the price for our sins.

And that's what we teach our children, the King of kings who journeyed to a solitary cross outside Jerusalem on our behalf for our salvation.

[21 : 49] And when we trust in Him, we see God face to face at that level. And that's an amazing truth. We come home, and we come home to be with Him.

And that is incomparably good. Verse 10 says that, For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. That's not talking about primarily coming to church as if this is the house of God. The house of God is His people. The house of God is His community, is His family with Him as Lord and God.

And it's incomparably, it says, For a day in your courts is better. It's actually the same word that's used in the very beginning of the Bible when God made creation and He said, It's really good.

It's great. Before sin came in to spoil and destroy it, truly good enables us to be truly happy. And the question for all of us again is, In whom do we trust for true happiness?

[22 : 56] Who can heal our broken hearts, our sinful hearts? Who can? Again in the context of the world in which we're living today with so much insecurity about health, about life, about the environment, there is this guaranteed hope that comes through knowing and understanding and trusting in God who is our eternal hope and our home.

Let's pray briefly together. Father, we pray that you would bless us as we move in shortly to time of baptism. And we ask that we would see in that the visible symbols of the gospel, the good news of Jesus and that that would be significant and important for us.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.