

Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist

Sunday, July 5, 2020

Psalm 84 – The House is ready!

If you were to travel to Greece and visit the ancient city of Athens, one of the most recognizable buildings and tourist sites sitting on top of the highest point would be the ruins known as the Parthenon.

The ancient building that sit there is not the original. The original Parthenon was destroyed in 480 B.C. To give you a biblical perspective...Daniel was well into his captivity. In about 20 years Darius would take over Babylon from Xerxes and the Persian Empire would reign supreme.

The Parthenon was originally built as a temple to the Greek goddess Athena, the patron god of Athens. Followers would file to the temple to offer their sacrifices for harvest, protection, wisdom...whatever was needed at the time.

The Parthenon was actually a Christian church for a number of centuries before becoming a mosque for a few centuries more.

Contrary to what you might think. The building is in ruin, not because of millennia's of time passing and nature taking it's toll, like many ancient ruins. In the 6th century, the Turkish Ottomans occupied Athens. Their enemies, the Venetians, spied out the city to attack it. Athens fortified themselves, using the highest point to their advantage. Even though the military was warned of the dangers, they decided to store their stockpiles of gunpowder in the Parthenon. When the Venetians attacked the city, a stray mortar round ignited the gunpowder and the Parthenon exploded.

The ancient temples were renowned for their splendor. Throughout biblical and civic history, we have stories of these temples. The writings of Paul reference many that were found in Ephesus, Corinth, and others. The grandest of all temples was the Temple of Jerusalem where the Israelite God Yahweh resided.

It was believed that the gods lived in their temples. Athena lived in Athens, Artemis lived in Ephesus and Yahweh lived in the temple in Jerusalem! THIS is where the analogy between Israel's God and the pagan God's breaks down. One major difference was that there were no images for Yahweh in His temple. This is strictly prohibited in the Old Testament in Exodus 20. Yahweh didn't really live in

His temple. He did grant the gift of His presence, but that presence could be removed. When Solomon dedicated the Temple he stated, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of the heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! (I Kings 8:27). In the Old Testament there is no idolatry of PLACE allowed.

With that being said, we need to understand WHY then did good Jews pray facing Jerusalem (as Daniel did)? Why did Jesus call the temple “My Father’s house” (John 2:16)?

WHY? To go to the temple is to actively be seeking the presence of God!

Today we are looking at Psalm 84 – what is known as a Psalm of Ascent. Sung by those who are anxiously desiring to go to the temple.

Let’s read it today:

Psalm 84^[a]

For the director of music. According to *gittith*. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!**
- ² My soul yearns, 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 have her young—
a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.**
- ⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.**
- ⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.**
- ⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baka,**

**they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.
8 Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.
9 Look on our shield, O God;
look with favor on your anointed one.
10 Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
12 LORD Almighty,
blessed is the one who trusts in you.**

Around 105 days ago, we all became pilgrims, much like those who would sing Ps. 84. In March, the order came down from the Government for the emergency lockdown and into our houses we went. We survived by the grace of God with the resources we had. Online, tv, and radio services...but it just wasn't the same. Finally, several weeks ago, we saw the light at the end of the tunnel! And now...in a much-edited form...we are back together!

We come to this building and we acknowledge that it is just that ... a building. While it cannot contain our God, it is a place where He can be found. Our earthly sanctuary reflects the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus went after making the final sacrifice upon the cross for our sins (Heb. 9:11-12).

Although the Jerusalem Temple has been destroyed, and in light of the work of Jesus on the cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit, our bodies are now God's

temple, one day we will go to be with Jesus and be fully home, in His house forever. It is in this context then that we should read Psalm 84.

What are your motives for coming into the house of God?

We are sadly living in a day when going to “church” is a chore for many. If it is a priority, it is a begrudging priority. As I read my Christian/church themed blogs, I see many articles forecasting that online church is the new wave of the future. Over the last 100 days, we have been blessed to be able to continue worshipping together...but online worship is stop-gap solution. It can never replace the experience of “gathering.”

Somehow fellowship and public worship seem to have become optional in contemporary Christianity. There is so much emphasis on the “one” and the “rights of the individual” that it has leaked over into the idea of an individuals faith. Meeting with each other has often become “one” way of doing church. Sadly, some who call themselves believers, have decided that meeting together is completely unnecessary.

Our psalmist today completely blows that idea out of the water as being false with expressions of great joy as a crowd of worshippers gather in the sanctuary for the sole purpose of meeting with each other and praising God together.

If you dissect the teachings of scripture, you will see an ongoing theme from Abraham on that God’s people are a community and meant to act as such. The New Testament is very adamant about the fact that we are a “body.” Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 12:26:

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

One neglects community at their peril because worship and togetherness has always been the Biblical way. To try to “go it alone” on your Christian journey is to invite troubles, hardships, and deception.

Verses 4-7 says:

**⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.**

**⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.**

**⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
⁷ They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.**

There is joy and strength in community. Joy in worshipping with one another and the opportunity to provide a reservoir of strength...the ability to encourage each other on in our faith journeys through the tragedies and the triumphs.

SO WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BUILDING?

Psalm 22 tells us that “God inhabits the praise of His People!” At the beginning of today's sermon, I mentioned that we do not make places idols. We do not, nor should we, worship a place...but we do worship in a place. Baptists are people of imagery and symbol. The place that we have designated as the “House of the Lord” reminds us of this Psalm – the fact that believers should love to be where God is and so the dwelling place of God is a beloved place!

BETTER IS ONE DAY!

The Psalm ends with the understanding that one “real” day in the presence of God is better than 1000 days spent elsewhere.

Most of our lives do not revolve around worshipping together...it revolves around the business and cares of our day to day lives. Work, family, kids, daily responsibilities can often keep us away from the presence of God. The Psalmist acknowledges that the heart of the true worshipper longs to be back in that presence. The use of the numbers 1 and 1000 is what we call a hyperbole. A hyperbole is the use of exaggeration to create a strong impression or feeling in the reader. The psalmist is asking us to take stock of our lives and consider what is ultimately important. Is being in the presence of God a priority for you? Do you daily spend time with Jesus? Do you live in a constant attitude of prayer?

DOOR KEEPER IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

We have become use to waiting in lines. One of final thought of the Psalmist is that:

**I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.**

In order to enter the Jerusalem temple there were requirements that needed to be fulfilled and often there was a line that you had to wait in before you could offer your sacrifices and worship.

The psalmist so desired to be in the presence of God that he was fulfilled by waiting in the line. It was a good place to be...even if it was on the fringe of the presence of God! It was better to be in line waiting to enter the place of sacrifice as an act of devotion to God than to be among those who refuse to devote themselves to God.

CONCLUSION

Over the years of being a pastor I have received my fair share of complaints about the Sunday morning service. Service is too long, sermon is too long, too much music, not enough music, not the right kind of music. As much as I listen and evaluate...sometimes my heart breaks when I realize that for many 1 hour on Sunday is what is given to God. That is our habit, that is our preference...we don't need or want more. Being in God's presence becomes a scheduled, regimented activity and we don't want it to inconvenience our lives...or our Sunday afternoon lunch plans.

What I wouldn't give to stay and sing glory to our God today for hours at the top of our lungs. What I wouldn't give to mingle in the back and shake hands and give hugs. What I wouldn't give to know that we could go downstairs and sit and fellowship and eat as we were so use to. May we cherish those freedoms to worship, fellowship and be with each other in the presence of God when God sees fit to return them to us.

I was glad when they said "let us go into the house of the Lord!"

Let's pray.