



**Welcome to our service of worship on Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup> 2020, at Bethesda Chapel**

Our service today is led by **Tim, and David Lovell**, who was our evangelist until last summer when he moved to work in Leeds, will be sharing the message, which he recorded earlier this week.

Our service begins with **Tim welcoming us** all into God's presence, before we join in **reading a new song** (shown on the screen at Bethesda, and sung by Keith and Kristyn Getty)

What love could remember no wrongs we have done?  
Omniscient, all knowing, He counts not their sum,  
thrown into a sea without bottom or shore:  
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.  
*Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.*  
*Stronger than darkness, new every morn:*  
*our sins they are many, His mercy is more.*

What patience would wait as we constantly roam?  
What Father, so tender, is calling us home?  
He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor:  
our sins they are many, His mercy is more.  
*Praise the Lord....*

What riches of kindness he lavished on us?  
His blood was the payment, His life was the cost,  
We stood 'neath a debt we could never afford:  
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.  
*Praise the Lord....*

His Mercy Is More by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa  
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**Tim now leads us in a short prayer**, then we have an opportunity to celebrate any Birthdays this week.

**Tim shares a Video Interview with David Lovell: which will be shown on the screen at Bethesda, but here is the gist of it.**

It's been a year since David left, so after the initial hello's David shared what had been happening to him over that time. It's been a hard year, he appreciates the local lockdown in Blackburn, send his love and prayers and is sorry he cannot be with us in person.

The church family there have been looking after him, he was decorating his house pre-lockdown, and was invited out for meals quite a lot then! He felt isolated as first, but now he is a part of a bubble with Pastor Michael and his family, which he appreciates.

His role in Leeds was originally a 3 year role as assistant minister, but on his first day he was asked if the church could change this to a 4 year role, as associate pastor, complete with a pay rise so he said yes!

The role means he is an Elder of the church and has pastoral responsibilities including for the children's work on a Sunday. He is helping the church develop its outreach to the community around the church.

Highlights have been working as part of a good team, recently running an online Christianity Explored course, over Zoom, with 2 unbelievers taking part, one of whom gave their life to Jesus. He has found it good to meet Christians in other churches also reaching out to others.

The church itself seems to have been coping fairly well over the last months, and no-one has become sick with the virus. Its been a learning curve for everyone, working from month to month, putting some things on hold, and been quite stretching, making decisions quite quickly. 6 weeks ago they started doing small service, from a congregation of about 200 pre-lockdown they are limited to about 60 now because of social distancing, and people want to sing, so find it hard but are grateful that God has sustained the church family.

On a personal level, David has been busy with his house, he was doing the running club in Beeston, which meets just up the road so very convenient, he was going to local park to run, enjoying a number of good parks and beautiful countryside, reads a lot, meeting people, has a big back garden so has had to take up gardening! He is hoping the running club will be able to meet again soon.

Tim asked what we could pray for: church family, especially for those finding lockdown challenging, love and care for people in bigger church family, recently begun a church plant in local estate which means they have given away number of good long-serving members who are missed.

Personally; that David may be good at supporting the church family, no idea how long and what twists and turns may be ahead, and for his role, that he may experience blessing and stretching.

**Tim now leads our prayers for others, before he reads Psalm 84, our passage for today.**

- <sup>1</sup> How lovely is your dwelling-place,  
Lord Almighty!
- <sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.
- <sup>3</sup> 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.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.
- <sup>5</sup> Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
- <sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baka,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
- <sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.
- <sup>8</sup> Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty;  
listen to me, God of Jacob.
- <sup>9</sup> Look on our shield, O God;  
look with favour on your anointed one.
- <sup>10</sup> 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.
- <sup>11</sup> For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
the Lord bestows favour and honour;  
no good thing does he withhold  
from those whose way of life is blameless.
- <sup>12</sup> Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

We can now **watch (at Bethesda) and listen to David's message** based on this reading. This is as he has sent it to us:

For our talk this morning we will be looking at Psalm 84 which is a psalm written by someone who was in exile and far from God's place and yet longing for God. He was longing to be near God. His situation was that he was in exile but he wanted to make his pilgrimage to God and be in God's presence.

I think that is an experience we can identify with as well. Perhaps feeling sometimes we are in exile but wanting nearness to God. You might know that the New Testament sometimes calls us exiles in the present world in books like 1 Peter. Those who follow Jesus live as aliens in this world. And it must be the case we sense that during this time of Lockdown that we feel like exiles when we are not able to meet as we would normally like to meet together as we normally would. So this psalm might speak to us in our current situation.

Well we are going to see in our passage three expressions of longing for God that will help us in our own walks with the LORD. Three different ways the Psalmist wanted to be closer to God.

Here is our first expression of longing for God... and its...

### **1) Longing for the blessings of home (verses 1-4).**

This is from verses 1-4 so that's read that again...

**1** How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O 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,  
O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

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

Here the psalmists describe his longing to be near to God. It's clear that he thinks there is no better place to be than to be near to God. He says his heart longs and cry's out to be near to God. He was in exile, but being in exile was not where he wanted to be.

He says it is blessed to be near to God, he envies those who are close to God all the time who are forever.

He describes LORD in a number of different ways...he is his king and his God. He is the LORD Almighty, the LORD all powerful and he is the living God. His heart cry's out to be near this God.

There is a lovely picture you might have seen in verse 3 where he says even the sparrow and swallow have found a place near to God. Even though God has all power, even the smallest of animals can come to God's place and find a place of rest. The preacher Christopher Ash says the thought is that for all his infinite power and his greatness, the smallest creature can find a place close to God.

So here is a God where even those who are weak and vulnerable can be with.

It reminds me of what Jesus says in Matthew 10 where he says... <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care"

This is the God who is able to keep the planets going, but also care for smallest and weakest.

I am sure all of us know the experience of missing a loved one and longing to go and visit a loved one. For the Psalmist the person whom he loved the most and most wanted to see was God himself.

Well the question for us here is how do our longings compare to what the psalmists says? Do we share the same desire for God?

One of the things the psalms do is they can be for us a bit of a spiritual MOT. I am sure many of us know how each year we have to take our car for an MOT to see how it is doing and see if there is anything in our car that needs rectifying.

Well in a similar way the psalms are like a spiritual MOT for us, checking up on our spiritual health.

The question for us from this section is do I long to be near to God? Do I share the psalmists same longing to be near God?

Well let's go on to our second lesson about longing from the psalms. **The second thing we see is longing for the blessings on the way.** Longing for the blessings on the way. This is verse 5-7. So let's read verses 5-7 where it says this...

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.

<sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baca,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.

In this section he talks about those who have actually set out on the journey. Those who have decided to leave the place of exile and started on the journey home to God. And the surprise here is that is isn't just blessed to

reach that final destination, but we are also blessed on the journey there. As we go the blessing isn't just at the very end but we also experience blessing from God in the middle of the journey.

The word it uses to describe this journey to God is the word *pilgrimage*. You can see it in verse 5 where it says "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their heart on pilgrimage".

The Christian has often been described as a pilgrimage. Most famously by John Bunyan in his book *The Pilgrim's Progress* which is an allegory of the Christian life. All of us who know and love the LORD have our own spiritual pilgrimage with him where we walk with him through life and as he leads us to our final heavenly home with him forever.

Here he tells us a number of things that should encourage us in our own pilgrimages with the LORD. The blessings we have on the journey with the LORD.

First the blessing he mentions is the blessing of knowing God's strength to uphold and sustain us. So in verse 5 it talks about the blessing that comes when we rely on the strength of God. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you.". And then in verse 7 it says "They go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion". God gives us the strength to start the journey. And each day God will give us new strength for what is ahead of us. God sustains us all of the way.

Its quite similar to what 2 Corinthians 4:16... "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day".

I don't know about you but I have certainly the last 6 months of living with Lockdown quite a challenging time and we don't know how long it is going to on for. How good it to know in the lockdown that we can rely on God to give us strength every day to keep us going during the Lockdown for as long as it lasts.

But there is also a second blessing the psalm says we can experience on the way which is the blessing of being used by God to bring his life and refreshment in hard places.

In verse 6 it says "As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools". Now we don't know what the Valley of Bacca is but its obvious from the verse that is must have been a dry and lifeless place, a tough place. But it says as they go through that dry arid place they make it a place of springs and bring refreshing water.

It points to how in hard and difficult settings God can use us to bring his life and his refreshment to others. How God can use us to bring his grace and his blessing and love to others. God blesses so that we can be a blessing to others.

I think this could be a particular word to you at the moment in Blackburn. I am aware that in Blackburn you have experienced Local Lockdown and you also right there in the middle of the Galligreaves Estate. You must also know people in your own network of friends and colleagues perhaps in the church family who are going through hard times

In that context of the local lockdown and being on the estate and brushing shoulders with people who will be going through various tests and trials. How does God want to use you to bring his life and his transformation and his refreshment and his love to others?

Perhaps it could be praying for the estate and Blackburn at the moment

Perhaps it could be meeting up with an individual to encourage them over a coffee.

Perhaps it could be opening up the bible with someone one to one, and as you open up the bible with someone one to one God uses it to bring refreshment to others.

So as we are in our own pilgrimages with the LORD, as we walk with the LORD we can know his strength day by day and we can know him using us to bring his life and grace to others.

Let's go on to the last longing in the psalm. **And the last longing in the is the longing for Jesus. Longing for Jesus.** We get this mainly from verses 8-9 where it says...

**8** Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty;  
listen to me, O God of Jacob.

Selah

**9** Look upon our shield, O God;  
look with favour on your anointed one."

There is a bit of a surprise when you come to verse 8-9 where the Psalmist seems to stop his journey and send up a prayer. And its prayer for the Anointed one – which is the Messiah, or the King of Israel. Like King David. He asks God to look with favour on the king.

You might easily think, well that is a bit strange why does he stop on his journey to pray for the Messiah? It seems a bit of an interruption in the flow.

And it's because he knows that the fortunes of God's people depend for them on the fortunes of the king. If the king has God's favour then it will flow down on to them as leads them and protects them.

For us we know that the blessings we enjoy today are found in Jesus. Its because Jesus is the perfect king, and because of who he is and what he did for us that we can have all the blessings that God would want us to have. The blessing of knowing God and being close to God and having God's strength flow down to us from our union with Jesus.

Like Paul says in Ephesians 1 vs 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ”.

That because Jesus always obeyed God and lived a perfect life, and because he loved us such that he would go to the cross and lay down his life for us on the cross for us. Where he took the punishment for our sins and rose again to life. Because of who Jesus is and what he did we can know we can all the blessings. But most of all the blessing of having Jesus himself, that God gives his Son Jesus to us. Its not just all the stuff we get with Jesus, but that God us Jesus himself.

He goes on to say in the last a part of the psalm a few more reasons why it is good to be near to God.

In verse 10-12 it says....

[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 favour and honour;  
no good thing does he withhold  
from those whose walk is blameless.

[12](#) O LORD Almighty,  
blessed is the man who trusts in you.

He says there is no where better than to be close to God, for God is a sun and a shield. When it says the LORD is a sun, that means that God will give you his light and guide you. Even in hard times we can know God’s light with us.

The LORD is your shield, the LORD will protect you and watch over you as you walk with him through life.

And lastly, he says the LORD will give us everything which in his eyes is good for us to have.

So it finished with the words “LORD Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you”.

So we have here the longing for the blessings of home with God, Longing for the blessings on the way in our pilgrimage and longing for Jesus himself.

And for those who do know the LORD Jesus for themselves as their lord and saviour and who do trust in him. Then the day will come when our own spiritual pilgrimages will come to an end. Will know the blessing of being with God forever, of being in Zion, when faith will become sight and we’ll be able to say as it says in the verse 4 “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you”.

*Let's pray.*

“Now may the Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep restore your soul, lead you in right paths, walks beside you in the dark valley, and bring you safely home to home of the Lord forever more. Amen”  
(Prayer from *Grace be with you* by Dale Ralph Davis).

As we bring our time together towards a close, we **read or sing** another song, with some very old words and others added more recently, again sung by Kristyn Getty.

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;  
when the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.  
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;  
for my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.

*He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
for my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.*

Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;  
precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast.  
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;  
bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.  
*He will hold me fast....*

For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;  
justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.  
Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast  
'til our faith is turned to sight when He comes at last!  
*He will hold me fast...*

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**Tim shares a benediction** with us all.