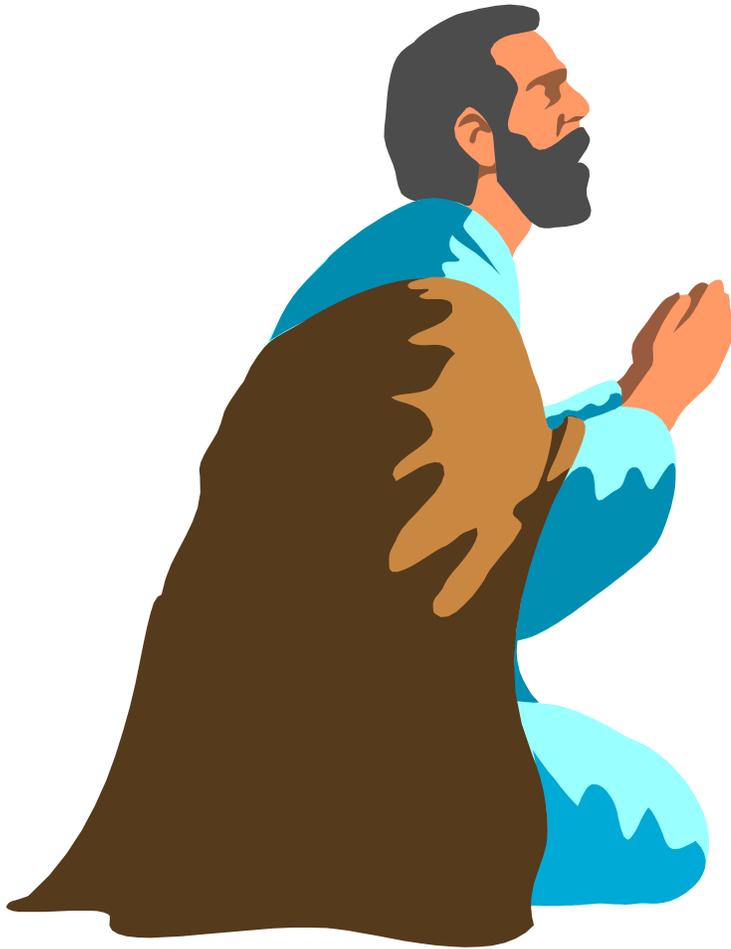


PSALM 84

THE LOVESICK PSALMIST



*A short series of studies by
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Psalm 84: The Lovesick Psalmist - Chapter 1

"The Lovesick Psalmist"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to our reading for this morning's message, Psalm 84. Thank you for your prayers while we've been away on holiday, we had a very blessed time of rest physically, emotionally and spiritually. Both the messages that I'll preach to you today, I was guided to them - not quite on the beach but almost there! - I hope, and believe, by the Holy Spirit of God. I want us to spend a wee bit of time on this Psalm in particular. As you know, I'm sure, in the few years that I've been with you here as Pastor, that I'm very fond of the Psalms and taking our time going over them. This is one of the most beautiful Psalms in the whole of the book, and in fact it is titled 'The Pearl of Psalms' by many scholars.

We'll read all of the Psalm today, but we're only going to deal with the first four verses because that's where David stops, and that's why you find that little word 'Selah', for a rest and a time of reflection. Then, God willing, next week we'll take on the next few verses. Beginning at verse 1 we'll read the whole Psalm this morning: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee".

I have entitled this message, and perhaps even the series of messages: 'The Lovesick Psalmist', and if you want to lengthen that a little bit, 'The Lovesick Psalmist for the House of God'. The little title at the top of your Psalm is in the original scriptures, and it tells us a great deal about the reason why this Psalm was written. Now it doesn't always tell us everything about it, it doesn't always tells the author or indeed the occasion of the Psalm, but if you look at it for a moment you will read that it says: 'To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah'. If we were to take time, and we don't have the time today but you can do this at your own leisure, and go to Leviticus chapter 16, and even go to the book of Jude in our New Testament, you will find mentioned there the people of Korah, indeed, the man Korah and his descendants. They are chiefly known for what is called the rebellion of Korah, and you find that rebellion in Leviticus chapter 16. Really what happened was this man Korah, and a lot of other men - two of whom are Dathan and Abiram - are jealous of the spiritual authority and priesthood that both Aaron and Moses held. Because of that they led a rebellion, they wanted to take over, they wanted to be in charge spiritually - 'Why should Moses and Aaron have that privilege? Why can't we have it?'. They actually actively began to operate in a priestly capacity, and the Bible tells us - we don't have time to go into it all - that God judged Korah, and God judged the rebellion and the rebels of Korah, so much so that the ground cleft and opened up and swallowed them alive into hell!

It warms my heart today to know that such a beautiful Psalm, what I have told you already is called 'The Pearl of Psalms', is written for the sons of Korah. Although we are still in the Old Testament dispensation as we're looking in the Psalms today, isn't it wonderful to see even there the footprint of grace? To see, even there, the beginning of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ toward all men, no matter what dispensation they are in? He saves them by grace and not by law. We studied recently in Ezekiel 18 that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father - if the son sees the sins of his father, if the son turns away from the sins of his father, he shall not bear them; but each man, each individual bears his own sins, and we see here what a beautiful song is given to the sons of this rebel Korah.

I say to you today, right at the beginning of our meeting, that there is grace for the taker. There is grace no matter what your father has done, no matter what your ancestors have done and been guilty of, no matter even what you have done - praise the name of the Lord Jesus, there is grace for you if you will come and take it. What a song is given to the sons of Korah! Then we see that the actual tune if you like, or the way that this Psalm is to be played, is said to be 'upon Gittith'. Now 'Gittith' literally means, we are led to believe, 'sweeter than the joy of the winepress'. This song, not so much the tune but the song itself, and the subject of the song, is said to be sweeter than the joy of the winepress. If you know anything about biblical imagery you will know that the winepress, the vine and the fruit of the vine, is said to be the greatest thing that this world can produce. It's the most affluent picture of wealth and luxury, satisfaction and joy. But this Psalm is to be played in a special way because the subject of the Psalm is sweeter even than the joy that the winepress gives.

That would lead us to ask the question why this Psalm is written, and even who wrote the Psalm. We don't really know who wrote this Psalm, and we don't know the specific occasion why it was written, but certainly I hope that you will agree with me as you read through this Psalm you will say with Spurgeon that 'it exhales Davidic perfume'. You can see David written all over this Psalm, you can savour the smells of the mountain heather as the young shepherd boy was out there in his youth, and now as the great king and warrior is out there in the tents of the king and the great shepherd there fighting for Israel. You can tell that David possibly wrote this Psalm.

I don't know what the occasion was of him writing it, but I imagine that he is reminiscing. Let me give you a bit of background: within Israel, and within the Jewish history, and indeed within the Jewish religion as we find it in the Old Testament, pilgrimages to the tabernacle were very common. It was a great festivity, it was a great time of celebration and rejoicing, and you would find that families would get together - the wider family circle would come together. They would pack their bags, they would gather picnics and foods, and they would travel towards the tabernacle of God for family worship. As they would travel along I'm sure that they would stop along the way, a little bit like pit stops, and just as you get pilgrimages today even to Mecca with the Islamic faith, you find that along the way of pilgrimages there'll be little inns, little stops and watering holes and places to refresh yourself. I'm sure that as they stopped at each of these little posts that more people joined their band, and they went along - a great company of people - to the house of God to worship God. As they went they would encamp in the sunny glades, they would go into the shaded vales. I can hear them, almost, singing in unison the songs of God and even the Psalms that they knew, and the Scriptures that they had. I can see them toiling together, pulling their horses, pulling all their luggage over every hill - working together through the swamps and through the valleys.

It was a great occasion, it was an occasion that the little children would remember right from their youth. It was an occasion that would give cherished and happy memories that would never ever be forgotten. It was a time of the year that everybody looked forward to, yet as we read this Psalm together today we see that he's mourning, we see that he's dejected and downhearted. Do you know why? Because for some reason, we don't know why, he is missing out on this great festivity. He's been debarred from it for an unknown reason to us,

but he can't get there. His heart is longing after it, his heart is mourning the fact that he can't be with the people of God, that he can't go up to the house of God, and he can't enjoy the presence of God.

I don't know about you, but I feel within myself that one thing that marks my human nature is that the things that are most valuable to me, I only start missing them when I lose them. Isn't that right? We tend to take the most valuable things in our life for granted, but then when we lose them - we get a toothache, oh, we cherish and romanticise the time that we didn't have a toothache, when we didn't have the cold! We take so much for granted: it might be our health, it could be our wealth, and it could also be the worship of God. Those listening to my voice on tape today, who are shut in in their home or maybe in hospital, know exactly what I'm talking about. You maybe take it for granted coming here every Lord's Day to worship the Lord, but there are those who can't, and there are those who could and would give absolutely anything to be with us here today joining together in the great hymns and prayers to their God.

Well, this Psalmist was in the same position for whatever reason it was, he was homesick for the house of God, he was homesick for the place of worship that he had so many happy childhood memories of, he was homesick primarily and fundamentally for the presence of the living God. Now I want us to apply this Psalm, first of all, to David and understand what he's getting at in the first four verses of this Psalm, then I want us to apply it to ourselves - first to the Psalmist, and then to the saint of God. First let's look at the Psalmist, in verse 1 he describes this house of God, this worship, as his delight. He says: 'How amiable', or how lovely or beloved and dear, 'are thy tabernacles', or better translated, 'thy dwellings, O LORD of hosts'.

It's refreshing to me that David is not as cocksure as we sometimes are when it comes to theological truth and the word of God. We've it all worked out, don't we? At least we think we have it all worked out! We've everything pigeonholed and categorised and labelled and dispensationalised - you name it, we've done it! But this man of God knew what the house of God was like so much, and what the presence of God was like in the house of God, that he couldn't describe it! It was immeasurable, no language or no words - and you know some of the words that the Psalmist can use in this book - he couldn't find the words to express the wonder of it all!

Now let me stop there for a moment, because if you don't have the thirst that the Psalmist has for the house of God and for the people of God and the worship of God, I want to ask you right away, and ask my own heart: have you lost the wonder of it all? Have you? He couldn't describe it! We might be forgiven for thinking: 'Well, this must have been a tremendous structure. It must have had all the gems that you can imagine, all the gold and silver, and precious stones and vessels that you could conceive of must have made up this great structure, whatever it may be'. What was the structure? Well, if you think about it for a minute it couldn't have been the temple of Solomon, it couldn't have been Herod's temple, because David was before both of them. In fact, it couldn't be any temple! What it had to be was David reminiscing to his history, Jewish history, and looking back to what we know in the Old Testament to be the tabernacle. It was a tent, really, for pilgrims who wandered through the wilderness going from Egypt to the promised Canaan land. It was nothing attractive to look at, in fact if you had been uneducated with regards to the spiritual truth behind it all, you would have been forgiven for thinking it was a farmyard! It was just an old tent with badger skins over it, and there were farmyard animals wandering about in the courtyard. Yet David says that this place is so beautiful that I can't even describe it, its so lovely and beloved that I can't bring words to express it.

Now of course, we have to go further and say: 'How could David think that that was lovely?'. David thought the tabernacle was lovely, because David knew that the presence of God dwelt in it! That's why it was lovely to him, and we would do well to note that the saints of old didn't need great structures and cathedrals to say that the house of God was lovely, because the house of God was lovely because God was there! They could sing as well as us:

'We love the place, oh God,
Wherein Thine honour dwells.
The joy of Thine abode
All earthly joys excels'.

It was the fact that there, in that unlovely - even, I would go as far to say, ugly - structure, they were able to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. 'How lovely are thy tabernacles' - you'll note the little 's' at the end of that word, it's in the plural. It would be better translated 'thy dwellings', and what he is saying here is - if he's talking about the tabernacle - he's speaking of all the subdivisions of the tabernacle. You know that there were many rooms: there was the outer court, there was the inner court, there was the Holy Place, and there was the Holiest of All Places - the Holy of Holies. What David is saying here is that all of the cords, all of the curtains, all of the courts - no matter whether they're inner or outer - all of them are lovely to him! 'How lovely are thy dwelling places' - it wasn't the outside that was lovely, it couldn't have been the outside because it wasn't lovely to look at, it was the inside. He says they are amiable, they are lovely.

Now, if you've done the French language, you'll know that the verb, I think it's 'amore' if my memory serves me right, is the verb 'to love' - and 'amiable' comes from that in our English, it means to love, it means beloved - but in the Hebrew language here, the word that in English is 'amiable' is different than that, it means beloved, it means dear and cherished. So it's not just lovely to look upon, but lovely in my heart, beloved and dear to me. There was no beauty in this tabernacle that a man or a woman, or a boy or a girl should desire it. As this great festivity of Israelites came over the hill towards the tabernacle they didn't get blinded by the sparkling gold from the spires and the domes that came from it. They may have even missed it and thought that it was some Bedouins, some nomads going about their business. There was no beauty in it they should desire it, the beauty was inside.

I believe what David was thinking of were the golden vessels inside that tabernacle that held for a Jew, and even more for us in this dispensation, such spiritual truth and preciousness. I imagine that David is thinking that it is beloved to him because he can see the priests wandering around in all their sacred robes, going through their sacred service for God, offering up incense and sacrifice to God. I imagine it's lovely to him because he can see at certain times the High Priest coming in and doing the ministry that only he could do. I imagine he sees the sacrifice slain and offered to God. I imagine he's thinking about how that object lesson teaches the people of the seriousness of their sin, of the strictness of the justice of God towards sin, and of the great necessity of an efficacious sacrifice for their sin to atone and to cover it all. I imagine his senses are stimulated as he hears the Levites singing their songs, as maybe even the sons of Korah are lifting up the Psalms, as they're putting trumpets to their lips and blowing the sound for the glory of God!

Is it any wonder that he finds delight in this place? His delight leads to desire, because in verse 2, if you look at it, he says: 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God'. His delight led to desire, and we would be right to say that in all cases of life infinite delighting will lead to infinite desiring. He says: 'My soul longeth', he had a deep insatiable longing to be with the people of God in the house of God. The word, literally in the Hebrew, for 'longing' is 'growing pale'. He was growing pale! He goes further: 'even fainteth', literally the word is 'to be consumed with lovesickness'. The Latins used to say that they were dying of love, this is the sentiment that David is communicating here: 'I'm dying to be with these people, I love that place and those people so much', and he was inflamed with such a passion, such a desire and thirst, that he would have this object to gratify himself in the worship of God that he says: 'I'm wasting away!'.

I don't know whether you have teenage children, but maybe they go off their food, and they begin to behave all strange - I think maybe Cheryl and Stephen were like this, I don't know! - but you say to them: 'Is there something wrong, are you lovesick?'. That's the way David felt, lovesick for the house of God and for the

people of God! I would say that it's not too strong a word to say that he was tormented to be away from the people of God. So much so that he says soul, heart, and flesh - what's that? Soul, heart, and flesh? It's the whole man. 'All of me, Lord, is crying out for the living God. I'm growing pale, I'm consuming within me, I'm becoming lovesick for the living God - I'm crying out for Him'. The word for 'crying out' is a word that would be used of an army, a captain in the army, saying 'Charge!' as they go into battle. It's the word that would be used at the end of a triumph parade when the army comes back from battle in victory, and they shout 'Victory!'. 'My voice cries out to You, Lord, like that for the living God'.

You and I both know, and I believe that David knew, and of course Solomon knew for God told him at the consecration of his temple, that God dwelleth not in temples made by the hands of men. David lets us know what his desire was after, it wasn't for the tabernacle, it was Who was in the tabernacle! It was for the presence of God, that's why he says: 'I cry for the living God!'. Turn to Psalm 63 and we find the same sentiment in verse 1: 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is'. His flesh was creeping and crying after God. I don't know whether you've gone for any length of time without water, but your flesh begins to crave it doesn't it? David was beginning to crave, physically. You remember the disciples, this came to me as I thought about this, in the garden of Gethsemane and the Lord leaves them - Peter, James and John - and He says: 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation. Watch and pray'. What did He say - why? - 'Because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak'. You know all about that, don't you? You want to pray but you can't, you're too tired. You want to do great exploits for God, but you can't, your body doesn't seem to answer to the cry that is within the spirit. Well, look at this man: his flesh was answering to the cry that was in the spirit, his very flesh was crying out to God - the whole man! As Thomas Brooks, the great puritan, said: 'If you've ever seen a wee child crying for its milk, this is the way David was'. It's not just his voice cries, but the hands cry out, the legs cry out, the feet cries out, the whole babe cries out for its milk.

What a desire he had for the delight of his heart, but we find him here in this Psalm dejected. In verse 3, the reason being - and I tend to, with conjecture I must say, picture David sitting in the camp, missing and pining after the people of God and the house of God, and he sees a little sparrow fly and land in front of him. He says: 'The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God'. Now I believe that David gets dejected, he gets a little bit depressed, if that's not too strong a word - and we know in Psalm 102 and verse 7 that he says in another place: 'I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top' - I feel alone! As he feels alone and cut off from the people of God and the house of God, he sees this little sparrow, and I believe that what is in his heart is envy - a sanctified, holy jealousy. He sees this sparrow, and he knows that in a split second that sparrow can get up, span its wings, and fly away, and can be himself with the people of God in a moment - but David can't do that.

In Psalm 55 we see David says: 'O that I could take the wings of a dove and dwell in the wilderness', but he's doing the opposite here, he's in the wilderness wishing he could take the wings of a sparrow and dwell with the people of God. 'Lord, how can a sparrow get to be with Your people but I'm stuck out here and cut off from them?'. He talks about the swallow, how they can build a nest, they can build a place even for their young - and I believe what he's saying here is that even in the houses and the tents of the tabernacle, and even later on in the temple, there were the eaves of the priest's houses round about the tabernacle, and swallows would make their nest underneath them. They were able to make a nest, not just for themselves but for their little young chicks, among the people of God and even on the very temple of God. Around the houses round about they have nests there, but I'm cut off from the people of God!

There's an ancient law that is written that says that if there was nests built there, no matter how sacred the building being built around it, those nests couldn't be taken away and they couldn't be destroyed. He was jealous of the sparrow, envious of the swallow, who could rest on the altars of God. Now listen, I don't

believe any swallow would have been allowed to nest on the altar of God, but what he is speaking of metaphorically is that just as these birds can fly right now and even nest around the tabernacle of God, I would long to go like a swallow and to nest in the altars of my God. What a desire! What a delight he had in the altars of God, but what a dejection that he couldn't get there. I think as he looked at those sparrows and at those swallows he was saying to the Lord: 'Why should those swallows be nearer the altars of God than I am?'. Do you know what I think God said to him? 'David, fear not, ye are of more value than many sparrows'. Do you know why? Because in verse 4 he says: 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee'. Still praising Thee!

You can still praise God if you're in the house of God or outside house of God. People who realise the delight that there is in the presence of God, people who have a desire after the presence of God, people who are dejected when they're out of the presence of God, can be able to praise God, worship God, and know God no matter where they are - even in the wilderness like David. Now listen: David stops, and he says 'Selah'. That wee Hebrew word simply means 'reflect', there may even have been a bit of a musical interlude, but there certainly was a pause, and it was created so that the people would just think about what David had just said. That's what I want you to do in closing minutes of our meeting. I want you to think about what David has just said - that is what this Psalm meant to the Psalmist, but I want to ask you: what does it mean to the saint? What does it mean to the saint in our earthly worship? How do we worship as the people of God? Do we love it? Do we desire it? Or do we take it for granted? Do we despise it? Does its familiarity breed contempt with us? Do we see it as a chore, or even - God forbid - as a bore? Can we say, like another Psalmist, 'I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up into the house of the Lord' - I was glad?

Those who can't get here would love to be here, but I wonder for some of you here today: is there no beauty in this that you should desire it? Maybe you're not saved, and you're here and you're thinking: 'Well, I don't know why these people come here once on a Sunday, twice on a Sunday, some of them even come three or four times a week for various things! I don't understand it!' - there's no beauty in it that you should desire it, because you're seeing the outward, you're just seeing the people gathering and singing hymns, and some man preaching too long. You see it all, and you think: 'What's in it?' - oh, that you could see like David, that the presence of God was in it. Maybe, to our detriment, it is not noised abroad as it used to be that the Lord is in this house - maybe there is the sense of God that there used to be. Well, let me say this, whether you're unsaved or whether you're saved, whether you see it or whether you don't, I'll tell you what it's all down to: it comes down to a matter of the heart. That's what it is: the whole nature, like David, ought to desire God; your flesh ought to cry to the spirit; you ought to be crying and weeping and pleading for the privilege of being here.

I saw a cartoon in a minister's magazine recently, and it was two little sparrows on a telegraph line and they were looking down on a big ornate, beautiful cathedral. Peter said to Paul: 'Yes, it's a lovely nest, but they only use it once a week'. We don't dwell in temples made with hands, do we? We don't go to a tabernacle or an ornate temple, we are the temple of the living God - and we have the greatest temple of all, yet we ought to desire to be in it and to be with the people of God. Isn't it wonderful to think: David didn't need to be forced to it, he didn't need an orchestra to get him there, he didn't need the best preacher in the world either! He didn't need a visit from the oversight, for it was in his heart, he wanted to be there. As old Spurgeon said: 'He needed no clatter of bells from the belfry to ring him in, because he carried his bell in his own bosom. He had a holy appetite, which is a better call to worship than a full chime'. His heart was in it, and you know that's what's missing today! That's what's missing here: heart in it!

Are you cold? Let me finish this, and I'm going five minutes extra because I don't want any of you going home and watching Brazil and Germany [in the World Cup Final]. His heart was in it, and if your heart's not in it do you know what you need to do? Do what he did, look what he says in verse 3: 'O for thine altars, even thine altars, O LORD'. He sought the altar of God! Now listen, we today as the church of God have

more lovely tabernacles than David did - I'll tell you why: we have a Great High Priest! Isn't it wonderful? We have a finished efficacious sacrifice by One who is a High Priest in His glories of His Person, and in the fullness of His grace who is second to none, who has been crucified, who has been offered to God, who has been accepted by God and risen from the dead, and we are told to be priests robed in garments of salvation lifting up prayers and holy sacrifices and offerings to God, and blowing the trumpet of salvation. Ought we not to be more ecstatic than David?

There were two altars here that I believe David was talking about, one was a brazen altar and one was a golden altar, and both were made of shittim wood and were covered in gold and brass. But the shittim wood typologically speaks of the humanity of Christ, the holy humanity, the perfect manhood of Him who was made incarnate so that He might go to Calvary and bleed and die and be our sacrifice - does it not rejoice your heart? Should it not fire your heart to realise that it is upon His incarnation that we stand, that we ought to have rejoicing and delighting, that we ought to desire to be here, and it ought to deject us if we can't get to it? It was covered in brass and gold speaking of His deity in different aspects. We are the tabernacle of God, but what ought to delight our hearts is what John 1 and verse 14 says: 'The Word was made flesh', watch it, 'and tabernacled amongst us'.

Is He lovely to you today? Is His sacrifice lovely? Is your heart cold? I'll tell you where you need to get to today, listen: we all need to get to Calvary. David wanted to get, in the spirit, to Calvary for that's where the security was. We need to see the satisfaction of Christ at Calvary, satisfying the holy wrath of God and all His righteousness and indignation for sin. We need to see His intercession, one altar was for sacrifice, one altar was for intercession - we need to see it! We need to stand on it! We need to rejoice in it! We need to be enthused in it! We need to feel secure from it! Could there be one here in the gathering today, and they're afar off, they're not coming boldly to the cross, not coming boldly with the Gospel because they fear their sinfulness? My friend, your sin, root and branch, was burnt outside the camp - it's gone in Christ, and you can be free - and, blessed Redeemer, that we can come in Him, into the very Holiest Place of All.

You know I think, in prophetic spirit, that that was what David was rejoicing in. No wonder the hymnwriter could say:

'Sweet the moments rich in blessing
Which before the cross I spend.
Life, and health, and peace possessing
From the sinner's dying Friend.

Here I'll sit forever viewing
Mercy streams in streams of blood.
Precious drops my soul bedewing,
Plead and claim my peace with God'.

That's the place of peace, that's the place of blessing. How beloved is God's tabernacle to us? Isn't it? I wonder are you not saved today? The only place, my friend, that you will find refuge from the wrath of God is in the Saviour's bloody side. If you'll not have Christ, you'll not have heaven.

Let us pray: Father, we thank Thee for David's desire and delight to be where the altar of God was. Lord, that's our delight as the church of the living God today, to be at Calvary, and to be there much, and to be there long. We say with Count Zinzendorf in the song of the Moravian revival:

'I thirst, Thou wounded Lamb of God
To wash me in Thy cleansing blood,
To dwell within Thy wounds - then pain
Is sweet, and life or death is gain.

How blessed are they who still abide,
Close sheltered in Thy bleeding side,
Who life and strength from thence derive,
And by Thee move and in Thee live.

Take my poor heart and let it be
Forever closed to all but Thee.
Seal Thou my breast and let me bear
The pledge of love forever there'.

Lord, our one prayer is this: fire our hearts with Calvary's love, for Jesus sake. Amen.

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Psalm 84: The Lovesick Psalmist - Chapter 2

"Through The Valley"

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by Pastor David Legge

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Psalm 84...I don't know how many of you have read 'Pilgrim's Progress' by John Bunyan, or at least are familiar with it, but you will know that there in that great book - and I have a copy of it with me here this morning - he has a character in it called 'Christian'. He writes an allegory, a dream that he had when he was in Bedford prison, shut up because he was a nonconformist and he was preaching the Gospel yet he didn't belong to the Church of England - and that's what happened to you in those days if you preached the Gospel and didn't belong to the established church. But there in that prison cell he had a dream, and out of that dream he wrote the wonderful Christian, indeed literary, classic 'Pilgrim's Progress'. The whole story, the whole book, details the journey of this man, Christian, from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. All it is is simply an allegory, a picture story, of what it is to be a sinner in sin, bound for hell and destruction; and to move as a sinner from the City of Destruction to the cross, to have your burden rolled away at the foot of the cross into the tomb where Christ died and was buried and put our sin away forever, eternally under the sod; and then to have your journey begin toward heaven, toward the Celestial City, until one day you reach that place and are forever at peace with the Lord in that eternal state.

On the front of this edition it simply has the title: 'From this world to that which is to come'. That is the Pilgrim's progress, that all who are saved are going on: we began in the world, yet through the calling effectually of grace in our lives we have been called out of the world as a people unto God and we're all journeying toward heaven - a pilgrimage toward the Celestial City. If you're familiar with the book you'll know what a varied experience John Bunyan's Christian had as he went toward that city. We could nearly say that his problems only really began once he trusted faith, once his burden fell off at Calvary, for he met so many varied characters, he went through so many different experiences - many of them extremely trying and perplexing.

I couldn't help thinking, as I was studying this Psalm, studying this particular section for you today, that the journey and the pilgrimage of the Jew that we have noted in this Psalm is going on here - the Jews are going down to Jerusalem, or down to the tabernacle, or down to whatever edifice they were worshipping God in, but they're all journeying in this pilgrimage toward their final destination. As they go toward that destination they find many varied experiences. Of course, I think the parallel is obvious between the Jew here in this Psalm going to the house of God, and the believer in Christ going toward the eternal city of God, going toward heaven - and that's the parallel that I want you to see today.

Last week in verses 1 to 4 we looked at the longing of the Psalmist to be with the people of God. We don't really know the background, we're not even sure of the author but we think it's David, it seems to be a Davidic Psalm. He has a deep desire, he has a delight - verse 1 tells us - in the house of God, because the presence of God is there. The house of God wasn't naturally beautiful on the outside, but it was the fact of what was inside the house of God that delighted his heart. Those holy things, the holy ornaments and instruments and furniture, the holy service that was going on among the priests, the holy sacrifice that was being shed because of men's sinfulness, yet that blood that was being shed would cover - temporarily, at least, for him - his sin, and allow him to come into the very presence of Almighty God. He delighted in the house of God! He desired to be in the house of God!

We saw that for some reason David was debarred from worshipping, he couldn't get there, he was probably in the tents of triumph and battle on the battlefield for his nation. But he longed to be in the tabernacle, he longed to be with the people of God, serving God, worshipping God, but he couldn't be there - but oh, the delight and the desire that we see: his flesh, his heart, cried out - verse 2 - for the living God. We saw how that word meant 'he grew pale', he was being consumed inwardly by a loving desire, a lovesickness, to be in the house of God, with the people of God, where the presence of God was. His whole man, his whole nature cried out to be with God and to be with God's people.

That is the longing, but we enter into verses 5 to 8 today, because you now have the journeying. And, at least in David's mind, he begins that journey to travel in his heart and mind towards the house of God, to be in the very presence of God. Now, my friends, I'm trusting most of us here today are saved by the grace of God, and we have began that Pilgrim's journey and progress on to heaven. I want us to meditate this morning at how this Psalm parallels the journey that many of us go through as we travel toward heaven. I'm sure some of you are familiar with that little chorus: 'It's not an easy road as we're travelling to heaven'. It wasn't an easy road for these Jews as they were travelling to the house of God, because - as we read in verse 6 - in order for them to get there, from their homes to their destination, they had to travel through the Valley of Baca. The Hebrew word 'Baca' simply means 'weeping', and there was a Valley of Weeping. Some translators think it can also mean a dry, arid, wilderness valley - a desert where there was no water. For them to get through to the place they were going to, Jerusalem or to the place to worship God, they had to pass through a dry valley of weeping.

We find this valley referred to in Judges chapter 2 and verses 1 and 5, only it's called the Valley of Bochim there. We read the story about how the children of Israel have now left Egypt and are about to enter into the promised land, but they have disobeyed some of the commands of God. God told them to destroy all the false idols of the people and drive the people out, to kill them all, to not make any covenants or agreements or political settlements with any of them, but they disobeyed God. In the Valley of Bochim, we find in Judges 2, there is an angel of God stands before the people of God, and He tells them that He will not drive out the nations any more, He will not drive and make the way clear of the Canaanites for the people of Israel, but they will be a thorn in their side for ever and their gods will judge them. We read in Judges 2 the people of Israel broke out into uncontrollable weeping and sobbing and lamentation. So this valley is called the Valley of Bochim, or the Valley of Baca.

I think in Jewish literature and language it has become a sort of byword for the experiences that all of us can go through in life that we could class as a Valley of Weeping. I think we can see right away the parallels, that as these Jews were travelling toward their worship they had to go through hardships. Oh yes, they delighted in the place they were going to, oh they desired to be there, but it was not an easy road that they were travelling along - and just like you and me as we are saved, we're sanctified, we're satisfied and enjoying the Lord, maybe even serving the Lord; and we're looking forward to a day when it will be absent from the body, but present with the Lord, but it's not easy. Maybe at this particular juncture in your spiritual journey toward heaven you find yourself passing, squeezing, constricting through a valley of tears and a valley of arid dryness and famine. It's not an easy road as we're travelling to heaven.

We pictured last week these Jews packing their bags, leaving their home, gathering together in their family clans, getting on the road, following the caravans. In the distance you could see them, like a swarm of flies, travelling toward their destination to worship God. You can hear their melodious happy singing, you can hear them helping one another and putting their shoulder to the wheel, pushing their carts and wagons over the little hills, trying to pull them through the sloughs of despond and the mud pits. But there is a valley that they enter into, when before they could stop at a well, at an oasis in the desert, but this valley has nothing in it - no water, no refreshment, no place where they can stop and chat and drink and find their strength coming

back into their bones. It is a place of weeping, torment and tribulation - but they must pass through it, they have to go through it because it is part of the pilgrimage!

We find a valley exactly like that in the Pilgrim's Progress. I want to read it to you. Pilgrim comes to one valley where he meets the devil, who is called in the book 'Apollyon'. Then, when he gets out of that valley where he has fought the devil tooth and nail with the very armour of God on him, he enters into another valley. He would like a mountaintop at the end of that I think, but he enters into a second valley. He says, I read: "Now at the end of this Valley was another, called, The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death, and Christian must needs go through it, because the way to the Celestial City lay through the midst of it: Now this Valley is a very solitary place. The prophet Jeremiah thus describes it: A wilderness, a land of deserts, and of pits; a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, a land that no man (but a Christian) passeth through, and where no man dwelt. Now here Christian was worse put to it than in his fight with the devil himself; as by the sequel you can see. And I saw in my dream, That when Christian was got to the borders of the Shadow of Death, there met with him two men, children of them that brought up an evil report of the good land, and they made haste for Christian to go back and not go there. Christian said: 'Where are you going?'. They said: 'Back! Back! And we would have you do so too, if either Life or Peace is prized by you'. Christian says: 'Why! What's the matter?'. 'Matter?', they said, 'We were going that Way as you are going, and went as far as we dared; and indeed we were almost past coming back; for had we gone little further, we had not been here to bring the news to thee'. Christian says: 'But what have you met with?'. 'Why we were almost in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, but that by good hap we looked before us, and saw the danger before we came into it'. Christian says: 'But what have you seen?'. Listen now: "'Seen? Why the Valley itself, which is as dark as pitch: We also saw there the Hobgoblins, Satyrs, and Dragons of the Pit: We heard also in the Valley a continual howling and yelling, as of a people under unutterable misery, who there sat bound in affliction and irons; and over that Valley hangs a discouraging clouds of Confusion: Death also doth always spread his wings over it. In a word, it is every whit dreadful, being utterly without Order'. Christian said: 'I perceive not yet, by what you have said, but that this is my Way to the desired Haven'. 'Be it thy Way', they said, 'we will not choose it for ours'. So they parted, and Christian went on his Way, but still with his Sword drawn in his hand, for fear lest he should be assaulted".

Now, my friends today, it is called upon every Christian, I believe, at some time in their life's experience, to go through the Valley of Tears, to go through what men have called 'liquid pain', the distillation of heaven, the diamonds of heaven - where God has to record your tears by putting them in a bottle, it is part of the pilgrimage of God's children. Joseph, in his divine pilgrimage of God's providence, as he went through so many valleys, it is recorded of him in the book of Genesis that eight times he wept. We read of David, through all of his regal kingship and reigning in majesty, but yet through all of his heartache and trial seven times we read the great king wept. We read Jeremiah, he's the prophet of tears, the whole book of Lamentations is his writing of how he wished that his whole head were a river of waters that he could just continually weep for the breach of his people Israel. We read of David's men on one occasion that they wept sorely, to the extent that they had no more power or strength to weep. In Psalm 6 David says that he wept so much that his bed was swimming in his own tears. Remember Peter, after he betrayed the Lord, and the Lord Jesus gave him that glaring look, the guilt entered into his soul and it says that Peter went out and wept bitterly. None other person than our Lord Jesus Christ is recorded many times as weeping: standing over Jerusalem, unrepentant Jerusalem, unregenerate Jerusalem: 'Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens, but ye would not'. Standing by Lazarus' tomb weeping over sin, and what sin has done to men and women, He stands and it says: 'Jesus wept'. Then we see Him in Gethsemane, it says He is nigh even unto death, sweating as it were great drops of blood, and He is weeping for sin and for what sin will do to Him on the cross! Even our Saviour had to go through the Valley of Baca.

Friends, what I want to bring to you today from this Psalm is a message of good news. The message is simply this: the road of tears can be a blessed road, the road of tears can be a blessed road. Now the Psalmist

gives us the ways in which that road of tears that we must go through will be made blessed. There are four things, and I want you to record them in your mind if not on a piece of paper, because if you don't need them now for what you're going through, you're going to need them in a day very shortly to come.

The first thing that David tells us to do is: this road will be blessed when your energy is in God, this journey will be blessed when your strength and your energy for it are in God. Look at verse 5, the first part: 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee'. If you're going to get through your Christian pilgrimage, and specifically squeeze through the Valley of Baca, and tears, and dryness, and famine, you're going to have to find your energy in God. You're not going to get through it unless God gives you that 'divine stickability'. You will need God's strength to believe that He's not going to let you go. You will need God's strength to obey Him, even though you seem to see that everything is contrary to what you would want, and what you think God would want for you. You need strength to obey and do what He tells you, even though the clouds seem to be dark above you. In fact, you need strength to suffer, that's the bottom line, isn't it? If any of us are to go through Valley of Tears, we will need the very strength of God to be our portion and to be our energy to get us through it.

Remember Paul in Ephesians 6? We were studying it not so long ago, he was telling us to put on the armour of God. The helmet of salvation, the breastplate of the righteousness of God, the belt of truth, our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the evil one, the sword of the Spirit, and all prayer, and we're to go in the battle. But before he enters into all the exposition of what those things are, and the fact that we should take them up by faith, he says to us: 'Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'. If we're to go into the Christian battle, thank God that He's given us our armour, He's given us everything that we need, but if we stand in our own strength we'll fail! If we try to travel through the Valley of Baca in our own strength, that'll be the end!

We need strength for this pilgrimage, just like these Jews needed the strength for their pilgrimage to worship. There's no half-hearted people on this journey, because they couldn't have stuck it! They had to put everything into it, there was an intensity and an enthusiasm in their journey to go and worship God. You saw it last week, his delighting and his desire to be with the people of God. You know in your own worshipful life before God that in prayer, in worship, in praise, even in the study of the word of God, it's not pleasant or profitable unless you put your whole heart into it. Oh, it's a dirge and it's boring, and I say to you today I find some preaching boring, I find some praying puts me to sleep - because you can sense when a man or a woman is putting their heart into their worship. It's the same as we travel along to heaven: if we're to get through the Valley of Tears, you've got to have your whole heart in this journey, for only when you put your whole heart in it will you get all of the strength of God.

Can you imagine these pilgrims setting out, packing their bags, getting their family together, and they leave their hearts at home? Not a bit of it! They would be a caravan of corpses, and dead men and women would be unfit to move with the living saints of God to go and worship the Living God. As David says in verse 2, that his whole flesh, and heart, and body, and soul, and voice cry out for - it's the Living God! The New Testament mirror of what we're finding here, this spiritual truth, is simply this: set your affections on things that are above. Do you want strength to get through your trial? Well, where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be also! Where's your heart today? Is it in your job, is it in your family, is it in your home? What is it in? If you're to get through the journey and pilgrimage to heaven, your heart needs to be in heaven, and then your whole self will journey toward where your heart is.

When your energy is in God this road of tears will become a blessed road, but secondly: when God's directions are in you this road will become a blessed road. The second part of verse 5: 'in whose heart are the ways of them'. 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee', but also the man, 'in whose heart are the ways of them' - or literally 'the steeps', 'the steps' are on this man's heart. What's David trying to say? He's simply

saying that the ways that lead to the house of God, the direction, if you like, is written upon the heart of a man whose strength is in God. The actual steeps - now I don't know whether this was the tabernacle, I think it probably was, on some kind of a causeway in the desert. He may be thinking of a temple, and maybe the steps up to the temple - either way there was a bit of a steep to climb. What David is saying: the climbing of those steeps to get into the presence of God and the house of God, and to be with God, are written upon the man's heart. In other words, he's determined to get there. The direction is on his heart, it leads him there, it drives him there, and that is what will get us through the Valley of Baca: that we have a desire to get through it, the very steeps are written on our heart, we're determined to climb it.

There is a highway of holiness that is being made in all our hearts, the Lord is preparing the way for Himself, He is making the valleys flat and straight, He is bringing the hills low, He's flattening it all out so that He may flood holiness into our hearts. My friend, as we go toward heaven, and if we're passing through trial as we speak, and God's ways are in our hearts, and our heart is in His ways, we are what we should be and we are in the place where we should be - and one day, the word of God tells us that we will be where He is. Do you want to get through? Is your energy in God? Is that where your strength is coming from? Is God's directions in your heart? I can't help think that when He was talking about the sparrows and the swallows, do you know that sparrows and swallows and many of the birds in nature have an in-built natural navigation system? It's just there from nature, and God has put there so that they know where to go in summer and they know where to go in winter, and David is saying that it's the same with the child of God. When he's born from above and he's a child of heaven, he lives for heaven, he lives toward heaven, and when he's going through the Valley of Baca the actual steeps and the mountains he's climbing and the valleys he's going down to, the direction's written on his heart to get him there!

When your energy is in God, when God's directions are in you, thirdly: when God turns your weeping valley into a well. Oh, I love this verse, verse 6: 'Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools'. Literally it could be translated: 'Passing through the Valley of Weeping, they make God the Fountain'. As they pass through the Valley of Weeping, all the water they have is tears, there's no fountains, there's no pools, there's no oasis, but by faith they make God their Fountain - they drink of God! There was no misery too great, there was no ground too barren that couldn't become a well of comfort to them because they were feeding upon the Living Bread, they were drinking at the Fountain Head. The most gloomy situation became the most bright, the most hopeful, because through their wilderness they made it, by faith, a valley of springs. You remember that was said of the children of Israel as they went through the wilderness, as they followed Moses, they did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them and the Rock was Christ! Now listen: if you are on the Christian pilgrimage and you find yourself going through the Valley of Baca, if you get your strength from God, and if you put God's ways in your heart, I am telling you that He will turn your Valley of Weeping into a Well of Springs. If you have the goal of heaven in your heart, He will get you there! He will cause you to be able to endure any amount of sorrow and pain - why? Because these children of Israel, by faith, were able to extract water from rocks and sands because they fed upon God and drank from He who is the eternal Fountain.

This thrills my heart, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17, and you know what he went through: 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory'. Paul could go through what he went through, and you know it, and he could even call it light affliction - his Valley of Baca - why? Because he had his eye on the goal, on the destination, and the delight that would be there when he arrived. It makes all the discomforts of the road insignificant! This is even more beautiful, because in verse 6 it says that the Valley of Baca will be made a well, but the rain also fills the pools - do you know what that means? The wells are the water from beneath, the pools are from beneath, the natural resources - but when our natural resources from below fail us, God will intervene in supernatural providence and He will send down the rain from heaven! Isn't it wonderful?

My friend, when God directs you down a road it's not a dead end! When God leads you down a road, He will provide for you, He will give you the supplies that you need - and if that is the road heading toward heaven you can be sure that the very things that seem to be impediments in your way, mountains that you cannot move, God will move and He will level them to a plane! As He said to Isaiah, He will make the very mountains before you stepping stones for you to get to your destination! Though your outward man perish, as Paul says, your inward man can be renewed day by day. You know, this was a desert road, and there were inns along it, there were watering holes and wells along it - do you know why? There is only one reason why, because it was the road of pilgrimage to the house of God, and if it hadn't been the road of pilgrimage there wouldn't have been any wells or inns on it. If you're on that road, even though you're going through that Valley, God has His wells, God has His rain, God has His refreshment - and you know, many of you, that there is typology within the word of God. Wells can often speak of the word of God, and rain often speaks of the Spirit of God, and as we go through these valleys in our lives, as the tears are tripping us and our hearts are breaking, what more do we need and what else can get us through than the word of God and Spirit of God?

Finally, when your energy is in God, when God's directions are in you, when God turns your weeping valley into a well, the road will be blessed when you eventually arrive at your desired destination. Verse 7: 'They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God'. Now normally a Valley like this would be a place for us to waste away, a place for us to diminish, but David says that the child of God, as he goes through it and as he comes out of it, gets happier, their song gets brighter and sweeter, their heart gets fuller with joy and happiness! It gets better, why? Because they know that they're getting nearer their destination! The Hebrew literally means that they go 'from company to company', they grow as they go toward heaven. What a wonderful phrase: 'Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God'. Now listen: it's only every one of them with the characteristics that are in this Psalm. Don't you give to me some kind of hotchpotch of eternal security, that you just say that you're saved and you're going to go to heaven no matter what your life is like - your strength needs to be in God, God's ways need to be in your heart. As you go through that Valley, God says that He will get all of His children there and they'll be forever with the Lord, none of them will perish, none of them will be absolutely starved of food and die, none of them will die of thirst! No matter through the deepest, damndest valley that they may pass through, none of them will get eaten along the way by wild beasts, none of them will be assaulted by bandits and robbed, none of them will get afraid and turn back on the way - they'll all be there! Isn't that what it says? Every one of them will appear before God!

This is powerful, for if you're truly saved this morning you will be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation to be revealed at the last time, and if your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life I assure you upon the word of God that the Lamb will do everything to get you there. On that day He will stand, and He will want to say as He said on the earth: 'Those whom Thou hast given me, I have kept and none is lost - they are all here before God!'. Can I ask you: will you be there? Are you on this pilgrimage? Are you on this journey? Will you, one day, reach the final destination of heaven?

Let me finish with verse 8: 'O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob'. Lord, if I can't be there today, will You at least hear my prayer? He addresses God as the God of hosts, in other words the God of the great company of hosts that is gathering around the house of God, worshipping God. But this is wonderful: He's also the God of Jacob, the individual, the wrestler, the one that is cut off from God, the rebellious one. David is saying: 'I know that You're the God of the great company that's worshipping You in Jerusalem, but You're also the God of the wrestler, the God of the individual, the God of the lonely'. Isn't it wonderful, as we are travelling to heaven, that if we can't be there now the Lord hears our prayers while we're here, isn't it? We can say:

I've wrestled on toward heaven 'gainst storm and wind and tide,
Now like a weary traveller that leaneth on his guide
Amid the shades of evening, while sinks life's lingering sand,
I hail the glory dawning in Emmanuel's land'.

I read a story this week of an elderly woman who was dying. Her husband was holding her hand and, as he was comforting her and telling her how much he loved her, their eyes met. A tear flowed down her wrinkled cheek, and gently her husband wiped it away and with a quiver in his voice he said: 'Thank God, Mary, that's the last!'. Are you going through the Valley of Tears? There will come a day that you'll shed the last one.

'Not now, but in the coming years,
It may be in a better land,
We'll read the meaning of our tears,
And there, sometime, we'll understand.

God knows the way, He holds the key,
He guides us with unerring hand.
Sometime with tearless eyes we'll see,
Yes, there, there we'll understand'.

Father, we know that the road of the transgressor is hard, and You want to turn that into wells of salvation for someone here today. We know also, too well, that the road of Baca, the valley right through the midst of tears, is at times unbearable - but Lord, You have promised to turn it all for our good, that we may drink of Thee and be satisfied. We thank Thee that one day we will stand and appear before God, and then it'll be worth it all when we see Jesus. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2002

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Psalm 84: The Lovesick Psalmist - Chapter 3

"Heaven Here And Hereafter"

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Let's read our Psalm [84] again this morning, we'll take time to read through the whole of it: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee".

We want to deal this morning with the last few verses - verses 9, 10, 11 and 12 of our Psalm. I hope that you've noted as we've gone through the Psalm that we have taken the various pauses where David, the Psalmist, took them - where you find that little word 'Selah', is a musical interlude, or just a simple meditational pause, where we are instructed to stop for a moment and to really ponder and think about the truths that the Psalmist has been praying and singing. We've done that, and we do it again this week - verses 9 to 12 - I've entitled it: 'Heaven Here and Hereafter' - Heaven Here and Hereafter.

Of course, this Psalm is speaking of a pilgrimage of Jewish people to Jerusalem - whether it was to the old tabernacle or the new temple we're not too sure, but it seems to be reminiscent of the old tabernacle that was no beautiful thing to look at on the outward appearance, but the depths of the riches of the knowledge of wisdom and glory that were found in the emblems and furniture and typology of that tabernacle seemed to be so dear to the heart of David, and indeed to the heart of God. We've read about the great desire that this man had to be with the people of God, worshipping God, but what seems to come out of this Psalm to us is the Psalmist's desire to be at all times in the presence of God.

We paralleled last week how these Jew's pilgrimage to their 'mecca', to Jerusalem, to the tabernacle, to the temple, is so parallel and so much like our pilgrimage through this sinful wilderness going towards our heavenly home, where one day we will be in the presence of Christ and God for all eternity. But in the light of that, if we were asked today: where is heaven? Many would retort back the answer that you often hear: 'Heaven is wherever God is', or 'Heaven is wherever Christ is'. Of course, that is true, heaven is where the presence of God is, but we ask a secondary question to that one: well then, where is heaven because we learn from a very early age that God is everywhere, He's omnipresent, there is not a place that God isn't? We heard this morning, around the Table, Psalm 139 quoted, that even if we ascend into the heavens, God is there; if we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there God's hand will be on us; and even if we make our bed in the depths of hell, God is there. You cannot escape the presence of God!

So we have a contrast: if God is in the depths of hell, does that mean that the depths of hell is heaven? Well, of course it doesn't, because what David is speaking of here is a special presence of God. When we say that heaven is wherever God's presence is, we usually mean a special presence of God, where God's home is. But if we were to come a little bit closer and more personal to individual Christians, we would have to say that the simplest child understands that God lives within its heart. Isn't that right? God's presence indwells us. So theoretically heaven is a place which we cannot find on a map of the universe, we do not know how to get there. We know it exists, it's real, it's not subjective, it's a living destination - yet heaven can be in the depths of the human heart, because heaven essentially is where the personal presence of God is. We believe He's in our heart.

So heaven can be a place on earth, if heaven is in our hearts. You might say that this is a lot of subjective nonsense, and you've no basis within the word of God to say such things, but I want you to know where I'm finding this by turning to Ephesians chapter 1 for a moment - right into the New Testament revelation of heaven and the church, and the various mysteries that were guarded to the Old Testament saints but were revealed to the New Testament saints and specifically here to Paul the apostle. Ephesians chapter 1 verses 13 and 14, Paul's prayer in verse 12 is that the saints in the church at Ephesus would be made to the praise of the glory of Christ, the praise of God and the glory of Christ: '...who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise'. So you see the progression here, Paul is praying that, now these Christians in Ephesus are saved, that they would become men and women to the glory and praise of God who saved them, the gospel of Christ that they heard and they believed, they have been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. Now watch this in verse 14, that Holy Spirit of promise by which they were sealed: 'is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory'.

The gift of the Holy Spirit that we have as believers, or if you like - in the simple childish way of saying it - God dwelling in our heart by the Holy Spirit, is the earnest of our inheritance of things to come in heaven. Now I've often heard this preached on, and people say that this is just like a guarantee. If you imagine you're going into a jewellers to buy an engagement ring or something like that, and you go into the jewellers but you don't have enough money. People say: 'Well, you can leave your watch', maybe you have a very precious watch and you take it off - and you leave it on the counter and you tell the jeweller: 'Now I'm going to leave that with you as a guarantee that I will come back and pay you the rest of the bill that is due for that engagement ring'. That is what a guarantee is, isn't it? Or it might be a written guarantee, but that is not what Paul is speaking of here, because an earnest, specifically, has to be an advance of the same, an advance in measure of the same. So you couldn't go into the jewellers and take your watch off, you would have to pay him a certain amount of the money first of all, and then come and pay the rest of the money - you would have to give him an advance of the same. That is specifically what an earnest is.

So, when Paul is saying here that we, when we are saved and receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts, are given an advance of the same - he's not just saying that we are given a guarantee that one day we'll go to glory, but Paul is saying we're actually paid in advance a bit of heaven poured into our hearts to give us a taste of it! Do you see the difference? Paul is not talking about, and I'm not being disrespectful, about a load of dusty pages that we less than frequently read, that tell us that we are going to a place that Christ has prepared for us. Praise God for the word of God, but there's more than that, Paul says! There is not just a guarantee in the word of God, but there is an earnest, there is an advance payment of heaven that is to be poured into the soul of the child of God. We are to experience a little bit of heaven in our heart on earth!

Now, where are we when it comes to that? Franz Baker, a Dutch Christian, said these words: 'If we haven't personally learned what it is to pray, we will meet an unknown God after death'. John Owen, who was said by some to be the greatest theologian since Paul the apostle - I don't know about that, but certainly I know

that he was a great puritan and a great theologian with the word of God - do you know what he said? In a little book, and I would urge you to read it, called 'The Glory of Christ' he says these words, now listen very carefully: 'No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not in some measure behold it by faith in this world'. Have you got that? 'No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not in some measure behold it by faith in this world'. He goes on: 'Faith is a necessary preparation for sight. The soul unprepared by grace and faith is not capable of seeing the glory of Christ in heaven' - you don't have eyes to see it if you don't have faith to see it down here!

'Many will say with confidence that they desire to be with Christ and to behold His glory, but when asked they can give no reason for this desire except that it would be better than going to hell. If a man claims to love and desire that which he never even saw, he is deceiving himself!'. What is the great man saying? He's simply saying: 'If you can't in any way taste heaven by seeing the glory of Christ by faith in your heart, the likelihood is that you'll never stand in heaven and see it with sight'. What he is saying is simply what the word of God is saying, and I believe what this Psalm is prophesying into a New Testament context, that the preparation for heaven is determined by our pilgrimage on earth. How we will spend heaven will be determined by how we have spent our time here on earth, and the inference is that we can taste of the sweetness of heaven in advance, here and now, before we ever get there!

An old Scot was asked on one occasion, as he lay on his deathbed: 'Are you going to heaven?'. His reply tells so much - so simple, but he simply said: 'I am living there!'. One of the great puritans, it was said of him that heaven was in him before he was in heaven. That's what we're talking about today in this Psalm, that if we don't get heaven in our hearts before we die we shall never get there afterwards! If you don't have a taste of the glory of Christ in your heart and this great life that you're living, eternal life, the likelihood is you'll never be in heaven. Now my question to every believer here - I know that you don't walk around every day as if you're living in heaven - but my question to you is: are there times when you can actually sense heaven in your heart?

I want to tell you how that's possible from the words of this Psalmist. Three points, the first is simply this: you will live in heaven on earth if you adhere to verse 9. Look to it: 'Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed'. If you live in the place of shelter here on earth, in your heart, you will actually physically and spiritually live in the place called heaven. Now this was a prayer that was prayed by the Jewish nation for David, their King - but I believe that what we see here through the Holy Spirit's inspiration and prophetic ministry, we see a little bit of a gleam of the Gospel through the Old Testament clouds in the Psalms. We see not just King David, but we see here a prayer, I believe, prophetically concerning David's Greater Son. Now if you look at it in the light of that, you could pray this prayer and say: 'Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of Thine Anointed' - God's anointed. It was David in the context, but who was David prophesying and pointing towards? Who have all the anointed of God been prophesying towards? It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ! If you want to live in the experience of heaven in your heart, heaven on earth, the only place that you will live it is under the shelter of God's Son.

If God looks upon the Lord Jesus Christ, let me tell you upon the authority of the word of God: you will come to no harm! Isn't that our prayer? 'Lord, look upon the face of Thine Anointed' - and if God beholds the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be enabled to go into the very presence of God and behold the face of God with joy! Sure, isn't that what the Gospel is? That we, how many times do you read it in Paul's epistles, we are now in Christ, we are accepted in the Beloved. It's as if we're in a shield, as David literally says: 'O Lord our shield, look upon thine anointed', and when we come into the presence of God by faith and through the blood, He looks down and He sees Christ, for if He saw us we'd be destroyed! If He saw us we'd never get near to Him, but He sees Christ and He accepts us in Christ into His holy presence.

We looked not so long ago, I think it was last summer, this time last year, at Psalm 91 verse 1, and it simply says: 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty'. Where is the secret place of the most High? Is it not the very right hand of the throne of God? And who stands at the right hand of the throne of God only our Great High Priest, our great Saviour and Redeemer who is able to shelter us beneath His wings because He died for us? And when the Father looks at the Son He sees perfect righteousness. I don't know whether you're here today and you're satisfied with mere formalities of religion, or little Christian idiosyncrasies, or dots and crosses - I don't know. But let me tell you this: if what turns you on is the discussion of doctrines, and little petty squabbles of men, and foolish ramblings, vain wives tales, I want tell you that that is not God's desire. God's desire is that we, like Him, should be occupied by Christ Himself. For it is the knowledge of Christ, looking upon His face, that gives us strength and gives us joy.

God wants us to know today that Christ is all that we have and can have. In all of the times that we go through, in all of our circumstances, not once can you say: 'Lord, look at me! Look at what I'm doing! Look at how good I am! Look at what I've achieved!' - but every time, as we walk in our pilgrimage, we've got to say: 'Lord, look upon Him, look upon the face of Thine Anointed'. I tell you, that's what I have to do when I fail, when I sin, when I go through trial and my head falls - I can't say: 'Now Lord, look at me, look at how well I'm doing'. I've got to plead Christ! You see, that's the secret of salvation, it's the secret of sanctification, it's the secret of survival when going through suffering and trial and sickness and sorrow and death - it's simply pleading with God what Christ is! Is that not it?

'Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling'.

'Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me'.

'Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head'.

Not because God's looking at my head, but He's looking at the face of Christ. Oh, it's wonderful: God is ever pleased with His beloved Son since the day He opened the heavens and said: 'This is My beloved Son in whom is all My delight'. He has ever been occupied from that day with His crucifixion and the satisfaction of the blood of Christ. Oh, He could say in looking at Calvary: 'I'm well pleased with that, I'm satisfied with that', and He said it by putting a full stop to the whole event by raising Him from the dead. The Lord of heaven is continually occupied with the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the perfect life, the perfect intercession and mediatorial high priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ - He is ever occupied with that, and that is what He wants us to be occupied with! Why? Here it is now: because that is what we will be occupied with in heaven.

What are you occupied with now in your heart? Is it a preparation for heaven? Do you have true faith? What does true faith rest on? What does our position and place reserved in heaven rest on? It can only rest on God's estimate of Christ: that He was satisfied with Him, that He loves Him, and anyone in Him He loves also. It's not upon our inward thoughts or feelings, or what we feel about how worthy we are, or unworthy, how guilty or sinful - it's upon Christ, and I tell you: if upon Christ the solid rock you stand, you'll not get down in sinking sand! Now listen, that's what heaven's going to be: just Christ. Emmanuel's land, the light of heaven is going to be the face of Jesus; the joy of heaven is going to be the presence of Jesus; the melody of heaven will be the lovely name of Jesus; the harmony of heaven will be the praise of Jesus; the theme of

heaven will be the finished sacrifice and work of Jesus; the employment of heaven will be His service for all eternity; the fullness of heaven will be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself full stop! I'll tell you, if you live underneath His shelter, if you ask God to look upon His face, and you in turn look upon it also, you will be living heaven on earth.

The second thing: it's a place of no comparison. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:9: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'. We find in this Psalm that there is a place of no comparison, and a person of no comparison. He says: 'For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand', and the inference is - we could nearly put in there 'somewhere else'. 'A day in the courts of God is better than a thousand days spent anywhere else, even in the most favourable palaces with the best of food, finery and wine'. The greatest things that earth's pleasures can give a man, one day in the presence of God, in the house of God, is not to be compared with all the delights that men in this world can offer. Is that the way we think? That serving God, one day in God's house, would be better than everything and anything that the world can offer? You wouldn't think so today, because we can hardly get anybody to do anything even in this church. We have turned everything on its head: 'One day spent somewhere else would be better than an hour or a minute spent in the service of God'.

David had something in his heart, he had a homesickness for the people of God and the presence of God and the house of God; so much so that he experienced in his very heart that it was better - even though he was the King, perhaps, of all kings that ever lived humanly speaking - he said that all the things that he was offered in royalty, in sensuality, in festivity, you name it financially, everything was nothing compared to one day serving God with His people in the house of God. One day to feel the joy and the love of His presence! One day just rejoicing in the glories and the beauties of the Son of God! One day taking His word and surveying all His wondrous promises, lifting them by faith and applying them to his life! One day experiencing, in prayer, the power of the Holy Ghost upon you!

David is saying that this is something that this world cannot understand - worldlings can't enter into this, but I fear that children of God today can't even enter into this! I would rather be here than anywhere else! If that's what a day in the courts of the Lord was like, what will a day in heaven be like? Better than that: what will an eternity in heaven be like? This is a place of no comparison, but David said it's a place that can be in your heart here and now.

There's also a person of no comparison, because he said: 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness'. I'd rather be in the lowest station serving the Lord than in the highest position among the godless in the tents of wickedness. Do you know what he's saying? 'I'd rather have God's worst than have the devil's best'. That's not what people are saying today, that's not what Christians are saying: 'I'd rather have the world's best than God's worst'. My friends, as one writer said: 'God's doorstep is a happier rest than downy couches within the pavilions of royal sinners, though we might lie there for a lifetime of luxury'. To wait at the house of God, and to peep through the curtains of God, and to see all the glories of the beautiful golden vessels, to see the priests lifting their incense to God, to see the sacrifice slain and offered that teaches us of the awfulness of sin and the justice of God and the necessity of an atonement by blood - to look at that, to see the glories of our Great High Priest, our Redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ, to sing His praises, to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God morning and evening in the church of Jesus Christ is better than anything that the world can offer!

Why are the churches empty then? Why is your seat empty at the Breaking of Bread and at the prayer meeting? Because heaven's not in your heart, and if it is it's buried under a load of debris and backsliding - but what a blessing to be singing, and remember who's singing this. It's the sons of Korah who we're told were actually porters at the doorposts of the temple - that was their duty! You remember, I told you two weeks ago, how they were rebels, how they wanted to be chief in the tents of wickedness. They led a

rebellion, they didn't want Aaron's leadership or Moses' prophethood, they wanted to be their own men and they raised up, if you like, another denomination to worship God and another way to worship God. Yet God, in grace, is restoring them to the place of lowliness, to the worst place in house of God - and they said: 'That's better than any of our forefathers could offer'.

Is that not what the devil chose in the very beginning? He said: 'I would rather be chief of my kingdom than to serve God in the tents and the house of holiness'. Matthew Henry said that this could be translated: 'I'd rather be fixed to a post in the house of my God than to live in liberty'. I think he's thinking of Exodus 21, I don't know whether you know the story, we haven't got time to look at it, but in the seventh year all the slaves would be released, the year of emancipation. But say a slave had got on well with his master and made a home for himself in that particular farm or whatever it was, and he wanted to stay - maybe he had a family and his children and wife were there. Well, he was allowed, out of love for his master and devotion for him, to ask to stay on. If he was to stay on he was to be taken and his ear was to be put against a post, and an awl was to be hammered through it. Matthew Henry is saying that this is what the meaning is here: to spend service, it better to be in slavery of God than in the freedom of sins, to be in the bondage of duty than the liberty of iniquity - because there's nothing like, get this, the presence of God! Do you know it? Do you know heaven in your heart?

Thirdly: it is a place where God is for His people. Verse 11a: 'For the LORD God is a sun and shield'. I wish I had time to deal with this: the Lord is a sun and a shield. You know if you're travelling in a pilgrimage you need the sun and you need a shield. You need the sun so that the cold will not smite you, and you need a shield so that the foe will not slay you. Israel found, as they went through the wilderness, that God became their sun and shield. He was a sun by a pillar of fire, He was a sun by a cloud of smoke guiding them along their way. He was a shield to them as He defeated their enemies through the wilderness and right into Canaan. But it was the sign of God's presence; and friend today, as we travel on toward heaven, against storm and wind and tide, God is still the light, God is still the shelter, He still gives sun in our happy days, He still gives us a shield in our dangerous days. He is a sun above us, He is a shield around us, He shows us the way, He is a shield to ward off our enemies and the perils along our pilgrimage. He is our light, and you know that the source of all life in this whole planet is light. Whether it's the wind across the waves, whether it's the light that comes that makes the waves go to and fro, whether it's the little plant that grows up, whether it's your actual body - light is the source of all life, and it's still God who is the source of your life and mine.

But I'm thinking more, as we come into the presence of God through the altars of God, you remember that David wanted to delight and take his refuge and shelter in the altars of God and the shed blood of the lamb. My thoughts go to 1 John chapter 1 verse 7: 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light', what happens? All our sins are uncovered and we are made naked before Him, and all the dirt and dross is seen - but if we walk into the light of the sun, the sun of God's presence, He will uncover our sin, but praise God He has provided a shield, for 'the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin'.

Our God is for His people as a sun and as a shield, our God gives to His people grace and glory when it's needed. Look at verse 11, the middle: 'He will give grace and glory'. Whenever you need it, He'll give it to you in the full in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ - and that's all you need. That's all that's in salvation: grace and glory. Grace to save you now, and it's like a little bud, a little seed of glory - for one day will be glorified, we will be without sin, but that grace in your heart is like a seed and you've got it now! Heaven's in your heart, grace is here, and glory is in the hereafter. Isn't it wonderful to say today: 'Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory'. And as You guide me with Your council, to testify: 'Thy grace is sufficient for me, for Thy strength is made perfect in weakness'. This is a place where God is for His people, where God gives to His people, and where God withholds from His people - no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. There's some things that seem apparently good to you and me and we don't get them because they're not good in essence and God withholds them. But how we can see

in the book of Romans that if God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Does it not rejoice your heart as you wrestle on toward heaven that all things - mark it - all things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's? If you're ready to receive anything - that means you're walking uprightly - He'll not withhold one good thing from you. Walk uprightly now, you must walk uprightly because it is the pure in heart that shall see God! Without holiness no man shall see God, and no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.

What's your condition this morning? Do you feel unfit for heaven? Oh, praise God, the Lord will give grace: grace to forgive, grace to remember your sins no more. Do you feel unworthy, even though you're forgiven, of standing before God in heaven? He will give glory when your time comes to stand, He will give you new garments! Do you have many needs as you sit in this great company today? No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.

What is the key to having heaven in your heart? Verse 12: 'O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee'. A life of real faith in God, that's it! Not of sight, but of faith, of faith in worship, of faith in God's Son, faith in God's house, faith in the ways of God, and faith that will take you to heaven and actually give you heaven in your heart now! You see, eternal life doesn't begin when you die, it begins when you have faith. A little faith will bring your soul to heaven but, my friend, great faith will bring heaven to your soul. Have you got it there? Matthew Henry said that we in this lifetime could be in the suburbs of heaven here and now. Do you have heaven in your heart? Do you know what my prayer is today, and I hope it's yours: that I'll walk so close with Christ on this earth, that when I die and go into eternity it will be no great change. Have you got heaven in your heart?

Father, we come to Thee today, and we covet a touch of heaven in our hearts, we covet a real sense of that earnest of the purchased possession. Lord, we long to sense that we are continually under the shelter of the face of Jesus Christ. You see Him, Lord. Lord, we long to know that You are with us, that You are for us, that You are withholding bad from us. Lord, we thank Thee for all these things, but Lord, help them to be in our heart, and help our hearts to be in heaven - for where our hearts are, there are treasure will be. Lord, for any in this gathering who have never beheld the glory of Christ in their hearts, they will never behold it by sight in heaven. May You shake them, may You awaken them to their need of Christ as their Saviour and Lord. May You warm all our hearts today as we travel towards our home, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2002

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Psalm 84: The Lovesick Psalmist - Chapter 4

"Make A Nest For Your Young"

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I want you to turn in your Bibles with me to the 84th Psalm that we were studying in the last three weeks. When seeking the Lord over what to bring to you today I felt led to come back to this Psalm, because there's a little phrase within it that I sought to deal with in the three studies over the last couple of weeks but have been unable to do it through lack of time and also it didn't really fit in, in a sense, with the theme that I was taking. I want to home in on it today and bring a few other Scriptures, some from the Old and some from the New Testament, to outline for you what I've called 'Making A Nest For Our Young' - making a nest for our young.

There's only one verse that I want to read from Psalm 84, it's verse 3: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God". Then, if you would turn with me to 2 Kings, the book of 2 Kings chapter 4. Keep your finger in Psalm 84, 2 Kings chapter 4, and if you've got a number of bookmarkers please do mark all these references because we will be taking time looking at all of them. Second Kings chapter 4, beginning to read at verse 29.

If you don't know the background of the story, let me just say that Elisha the prophet was walking the same road everyday as he went about his ministry. There was a woman that lived along the road, and she took pity on this man, in fact she perceived that he was a godly man even to look on him - oh, that men and women would see God in us, and see that we are godly men and women! She saw that there was something different about this man, and therefore she decided to invite him into her home. She set up in a little room various things: a bed, table, a footstool, and a candlestick; so that he might go into that room on his travels, be before God and pray, and even rest if need be. Because of her goodness to the prophet Elisha, Elisha turned to this woman one day and said to her: 'What can I do for you? Can I make you known before the King?'. She said: 'No, I'm quite happy among my own people'. Gehazi, the helper of the prophet Elisha, said to Elisha: 'This woman has no children, and her husband's very old, and I'm sure that she would love a child'. So Elisha went to God for this woman for a child, and then Elisha went to the woman and told her that about this season next year she would bear a child.

She did bear a child, she loved that child - as you would imagine - as her only child. One day that child was out in the field with its father, and it just cried out as it was helping its father: 'Oh, my head! My head!', and he fell to the ground. His father got his servants to rush the child home, and then the woman, the Shunammite woman, got some of her servants to go on horseback and fetch the man of God, Elisha, and bring him back to help her at the death of her only son.

We enter into the story at verse 29: "Then [Elisha] said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,

and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out".

Mark that passage and then turn with me, finally, to 2 Timothy - 2 Timothy chapter 1. Paul is writing to his child in the faith, Timothy, and in verse 3 he says of chapter 1: "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also". One more verse, chapter 3 and verse 15, verse 14: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus".

Timothy, who we've just been reading about, we know a little bit about him from the Acts of the Apostles and from Paul's various epistles throughout the New Testament. He's called Timothy, and on occasions Timotheus, we know that he came from the city of Lystra, we know that his father was a Greek, and his mother and his grandmother were both Jewesses. We believe - scholars at least suppose - that Timothy was converted, probably on the first missionary journey of Paul the apostle to Lystra. We believe that because the whole of the New Testament teaches that we must be born again, and there had to be a point within Timothy's life when he realised his sin, he realised that Christ was the only sin-bearer and sacrifice for sin, and he came in repentance and simple faith to salvation through the Saviour.

Then we find, on Paul's second missionary journey to Lystra, Timothy was then called to be a companion with Paul. That's why we read so much of him in the Acts of the Apostles, and through the epistles, as being Paul's great companion in his missionary journeys. So obviously there was a conversion experience in Timothy's life, and there needs to be that conversion experience in all of our lives, and it is a momentary experience. It is in a split second, when the scales come from off our eyes, we see ourselves as God sees us; we see God's Son with our sin on Him, and we are filled with remorse and guilt for our sin, we are filled with adoration and love for the Saviour that is bearing our sin. We fall humbly before the cross and receive that salvation that He offers us only there. I hope you believe that today, I hope you've entered into the good of that salvation at some specific time in your life - you don't have to remember the date, you don't have to remember the time, it's good if you do; but there is a time, there is a place, there is the conversion experience, the new birth from above. If you want to get to heaven, if you want to be saved from all your sins and be right with God, you've got to have that experience.

But although conversion is a momentary experience, there is a great deal of preparation that goes before us, before we are converted. We would have to say that the Holy Spirit is tracking our path, He's making a way for us, He brings us through many circumstances that hone us and make us ready for that moment when God speaks with that effectual voice into our hearts. No preparation could be greater in the case of this man Timothy than the upbringing and the childhood that he experienced in his home. We read from chapter 3 of the book of 2 Timothy and verse 15, that from a child he knew the holy scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which was in Jesus Christ. In Psalm 84 and in verse 3 we would have to say that, in the spirit of the Psalmist, that Timothy's parent's forefathers made a nest for him in the house of God, made a home for him in the things of God, 'even in Thine altars, O Lord of hosts'.

The Psalmist speaks with great envy as he is cut off from the people of God for some unknown reason. We learnt how he is away from the tabernacle of God, the temple where the people of God are worshipping and enjoying the presence of God, and he's homesick for that presence. His heart is yearning out; and he sees the little sparrow, he sees the swallow, and he envies them because in one split second they could fly away and be with the people of God, and the swallow could even make her nest in the eaves of the houses of the priests - but she doesn't just make the nest for herself, she lays her young in it also. I want to speak to you today on making a nest for your young, thinking of Timothy, thinking of the Shunammite's son, thinking of the swallow's little children.

I want you to think of three separate things today. First of all: children need to be brought up in the church. Secondly: children need to be brought into the church. Thirdly: children need to be brought out in the church. Let's look at the first one: children need to be brought up in the church. What I'm simply talking about is bringing your children to church. You know that David in Psalm 84 is talking about the tabernacle, and he thinks of the swallows taking the children and nesting in the very altars of God in the tabernacle, she lays her young there. We know that this great company of families was going up to Jerusalem to worship God, and we know that we've seen within this an allegory of the pilgrimage of the child of God as he goes through this wilderness scene of time and eventually on to heaven.

But we cannot ignore the lesson that is here for us that we need as parents, and we need as church leaders, to bring our children under the sound of God's word. The reason why David envied the sparrows bringing their children there was because David had his heart there himself. You see, I believe that if your heart is with the people of God, and with the presence of God, and where the presence of God is - like he said: 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God'. His heart was there, so he wanted his children to be there and their hearts to be in the place of worship also.

If we don't have a heart for our children to be under the sound of God's word, we need to ask ourselves: is it because we don't have a heart for it ourselves? We need to bring our children to church today more than ever, and the excuses of not bringing them are manifold: the services are too long and they've got school the next morning; it's too boring; it's over their heads. I was astounded recently, talking to my next-door neighbour - and I have to be careful because the next-door neighbour's teacher belongs to the Assembly here! - but I was astounded at the standard of the knowledge and learning that children in primary level are taking in today and, it seems, are able to take in. As I looked at it, there were things that I learnt at secondary level in school, but they're learning them now even before Primary 7. I think that we underestimate our children, I really do. I think we underestimate what they can grasp. A Roman Catholic educator said on one occasion: 'Give me a child till he's seven years of age, and I don't care what you do after'. The German national socialist regime also said: 'Give me a child up to 6 years of age to educate, and he will be mine for life'. Psychologists tell me that 85% of your personality as an adult and as a human being will be formed, and moulded, and bonded together before your sixth birthday.

Now we've got to take this into our hearts, we've got to take this seriously, that our children and boys and girls right around this whole district are being moulded and formed specifically in the first six years of their life - it will determine, perhaps, the kind of person that they one day will be. If you like, it is the most crucial period of their lives - but what do we do? We are in danger that in the most crucial period of these children's lives we do not saturate them and mould them with the word of God and the gospel of God. I don't believe too much in statistics, but they often tell a story. Statistics that have been taken among Christians and Christian families tell me that most people trust the Saviour when they're a child. Now, just to prove this, put your hand up if you trusted the Lord Jesus when you were a child, right up. Everybody look around you, I think that must be the majority of the folk here in the Assembly!

Most people do, there are many reasons for that and we don't have the time to go into them, but there are many great men of God that were converted very early in their lives. Polycarp the martyr was converted at 9 years of age; Matthew Henry the commentator was 11; Jonathan Edwards the great revivalist preacher and theologian was 7 years of age; Isaac Watts, that wrote many of our great hymns, he was 9; Henry Drummond the preacher was 9 also; Corrie Ten Boom, that suffered in the concentration camps, from Holland was 5 years of age at her conversion; William Booth, the father of the Salvation Army, was 15 years of age; Harry Ironside the great commentator and prophetic preacher was 13; Count Zinzendorf, the father of Protestant missions, was only 4 years of age when he came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are told continually that we live in a more affluent educated age now than the world has ever done, and I want to suggest to you this morning that children are more qualified both mentally and spiritually to grasp the truths that are found in the word of God. I haven't got time to exhaust that statement, but let me just say that it was the Lord Himself that told us that it was childlike faith that was needed to grasp the tenants of the gospel of grace. I can picture our Lord sitting amongst the crowd, His elbows on His knees and His hands outstretched, and a great grin on His face, saying: 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, forbid them not'. They could grasp - the great Pharisees and theological doctors couldn't understand the gospel, but they could!

In simple faith they were able to put their hand into the hand of the Messiah, that hand that would later be nail-pierced for them. But even on a pure moral basis the child has not been as much hardened to sin, the child has not come under the greater influences and contradictions and questions and complications that life throws at us. We need to realise that we have been given into our charge in the Assembly, in the district, and in our homes, gifts from God who in the first years of their life can be moulded for God and influenced for God. I suggest that one of the best ways that you can do that is to bring them to church. Church won't save them, your influence won't save them, and even if you pour all the best gospel knowledge into them that you know, that will not save them - it will take God to save them. But what I am pleading with us today to do is: do all that we can, for the devil is certainly doing all that he can!

Yet I fear that we live in a Christian generation today that seems to know more than God. Do you ever get that? I heard a story recently about a Muslim and a Jew and a Christian, and they were all clergymen of their particular religions. The Muslim was asked for wisdom, and he turned to the Koran. The Jew was asked for wisdom, and he turned to the Torah. The Christian was asked for wisdom, and he said: 'Well, I think...'. That is the Christian ethos, I think, that is beginning to saturate society - that's what I think. The word of God is no longer our canon and our rule. Whether it is in physical discipline - even take, for instance, the issue of catechising. Now, I do not believe in hammering things into the children that is hard to learn, that is against their grain. We have to remember that they are little sinners too, but I'll tell you this: we have lost a great deal of wealth within the church of Jesus Christ, even as nonconformists and as evangelicals, by dropping catechising boys and girls with the word of God.

I'm reminded of a story of D. L. Moody when he was taking a mission in Scotland. He had to go into a school to take an assembly, and he decided that that day he would speak on the subject of prayer. He stood up, a great congregation of hundreds of boys and girls, and he said to them: 'Boys and girls, I want to ask you a question: what is prayer?'. Every hand, almost, in the whole congregation went up - he was astounded! He asked one little boy in the first row in that great assembly hall: 'Well, what is prayer, what is your answer son?'. And he said this: 'Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies' - and his mouth dropped! He said: 'Son, thank God you were born in Scotland!'. Can we say that today in Northern Ireland? We have such a heritage of the gospel, and even in children's ministry, this place was formed originally for the children and for this area - but can we say today to our boys and girls: 'Thank God that you were born in Ulster, thank God that you were born into the Iron Hall'?

It is our duty to make this place the comfortable home for our boys and girls, that we can lay our young here, that we can bring them here, that we can saturate them with the word of God. Now I'm not talking about stuffing things down people's throat, I know of many hard fathers who have turned their boys and girls off salvation and all that is godly because they overdid - without a spirit of grace - truth-bashing. I am talking about a loving, tender mother; a gracious, godly father; being able to say as the Psalmist: 'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations'. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty' - what does that mean? Later on in the Psalm he says, verse 9: 'Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation' - making the house of God your home.

Children that are brought up in the church, but secondly: children that are brought into the church. And what I speak of there is bringing children to Christ - you don't bring children to church to catechise them, or to baptise them, or to moralise them, or to educate them. We bring them, and I hope this is why we bring everyone to the place where God's people meet, to bring them to the only Saviour of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not believe in the doctrine of household salvation in the sense that if a father gets saved, then all of the home is blood-bought and goes to heaven and you can baptise them, and they'll all be in glory one day - we don't believe in that. But I think in not believing that we have dropped a great doctrine within the word of God, and it is Acts 16 verse 31: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house'. The gospel that is able to save the individual, is the gospel that is able to save the household! It has got the power to do it, I'm not saying it will do it - but God has got the power to revolutionise our home. But I put to you: we must bring our home into regulation and into the area of God's presence, and there's no better place than with the people of God.

How many testimonies have you heard where a boy or a girl, now a man or a woman, trusted the Saviour in a meeting where the gospel was preached? I'm not saying that's the only way it has to happen, but I'm telling you that's how many were convicted, that's how many were converted - boys and girls, they grasped what the adults couldn't grasp. Even in this last short period of a year and a half or so, there have been two children that have trusted Christ in the gospel meeting - and if they hadn't been here they couldn't have and wouldn't have trusted the Saviour! I know it's hard, I know the pressures - I can even hear your mind ticking over: 'Oh, he'll know in a number of years what he has to face!' - I know all about it, I'll face it too. But I'm asking the question: we give everything to our children, but are we giving the best? Are we making a nest for them in the altars of our God? That's the reason why this work, as I've said, was formed - that's why we have a Sunday School, a children's meeting, that's why we're going to have a Holiday Bible Club in a number of weeks, and I trust that this message will fire you and inspire you and enthuse you for it. I'm going, next week, on Beach Missions - and it's no relation to this subject - some have gone on CEF to win boys and girls for Christ, because they are winning whole lives!

Moody went into a home after one of his great meetings and asked how many that evening were converted. The host said there were two and a half people converted. He said: 'Two and a half?', he says, 'You mean two adults and a child?'. He said: 'No, two children and an adult', because the adult's life was half over. Children's workers, Sunday School teachers, do you realise the work that you are in? Mothers, fathers, do you realise the responsibility that you have? Children, brought up in Christian homes, whose parents have poured into them gospel love and gospel influence - and you have flown away from the nest made in the altars of God! Let me say to you today: you will never be happy until you get back home! You're like the prodigal who has taken all that you can get spiritually from your mother and father that they have given you, and you've gone into the far country of sin and wickedness, and you've spent it all on your riotous living, and you're not happy! Oh, we are praying in the prayer meeting, I am praying at home in my study, that you will realise that there is bread in your father's house and that to spare, and that you will come to your senses, that you will rise and go to your father and say unto him: 'I have sinned and done this great evil in thy sight, and am no

more worthy to be called thy son'. For I'm telling you the Father, maybe even your father and your mother, your family are waiting to come and to embrace you and to kiss you on your neck - but God is waiting!

We face the same problem today as the prophet Elisah faced. If you turn to it quickly in the last few moments of our meeting. We have the same problem, which is a dead child. Some of you have dead children, dead in their trespasses and in their sins - there are dead children that come into this meeting on a regular basis, that come to Sunday School, that come to the children's meeting. We face this great problem, we're like the apostle Peter at Joppa, and Paul at Troas; we have a young Dorcas or a Eutychus to bring to life, and it seems impossible to us! How can we bring these boys and girls, that have no influence, to the Master? Well Peter, I'm sure, realised that it was not of himself; and Elisha, I'm sure, had the knowledge enough in his heart that it wouldn't be anything in his bones that would bring life to that little child. Blind unbelief is sure to fail, it's not of you to raise any dead man or woman in trespasses and in sins, but what it is is simply as the hymn says:

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees,
And looks to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, 'It shall be done!'

Where are you? Are you a parent? Are you a teacher? Are you a grandparent? Are you an uncle, an aunt? Have faith that God is able! He had the same problem that we have, but he believed that God was able. The second thing is this: he also had a tried example. Elijah, his mentor, if you turned - don't do it now - to 1 Kings 17, had exactly the same problem. He had a dead child that he had to try and raise also. He had a complete example from his mentor and his forefather to follow, and if he had just followed it the way that Elijah did it the child would have risen from the dead right away - but he didn't. What did he do? He sent Gehazi with his staff. It was Elisha's staff, that's sure, it was a staff that had done many miracles and great things - but the man that was going with the staff was Gehazi. There may have been something special about the staff, but there was no power in Gehazi. The power was in Elisha, because Elisha was the man that walked with God - and it could be, in our lives, that we are holding out the staff of the gospel, but there's no power of God in our own lives?

I'll leave it with you - my daughter objects - but I'll leave it with you anyway. I ask you the question: Elisha didn't put the staff in the best hands, and if we want boys and girls to be raised from dead sins and trespasses in this place, we have got to put the Gospel in the best hands too. Do you know what Titus 2 says? Oh, we're a great New Testament church and all that, but do you know what the New Testament church was told? 'The older women instruct the younger women; the older men instruct the younger men', and we can't get Sunday School teachers in this place over the age of 30! Do we put the staff in the best hands? I tell you, if we don't, do you know what happens? We run back to Elisha like Gehazi, and we say: 'The child is not awaked'. We can blatter away with the staff as long as we like, but I believe Gehazi first of all didn't believe it was going to work, and secondly he didn't even believe the child was dead - I think that's insinuated within the statement.

I hope that we realise that these little boys and girls that will grow up to be men and women that are rioting in our district as we preach the gospel week after week here, they are sinners from their birth! They're dead, they're depraved, and oh that we could see - yes, there is a moral innocence in one sense, but that is not a spiritual innocence. Yes, God would lavish them in grace if they were taken, if their life was taken from them - we're not going into all those doctrines - but if they grow in those six years of their life into adulthood, they will be sinners and they will die without Christ and go to hell! We need to believe that they are really fallen; we need to get the power of the gospel restored into our hearts, into our minds; we need to start believing in the Gospel again, believing in its influence on lives, on homes, on society.

Thirdly: there were some necessary changes that he had to make. He didn't give up. He didn't say: 'Well, that didn't work, forget about that', but he changed his method. He didn't change it to some modern invention of men, he went back to the master's method. He remembered Elijah, and he went up like Elijah, and the child was set on Elisha's bed - and I would put to you that that was the place where his heart rested, that's where he was day and night. We need to put our children where our hearts rest. He shut the door behind him, and he got down on his knees and he prayed - and, oh, that we would pray: 'O, that my son Ishmael may live before Thee'. He prayed, and after he prayed he adopted the means that was necessary. He took the staff, and he went down the stairs, and he stretched himself over that child. What he was doing - we have got time to go into it - but he was putting himself, I believe, in the situation of that dead body. He was feeling its coldness, his eyes were seeing its ashen greyness, and he was there and he was prepared to blow all his breath - if it meant that he died - that that child would live! He was pouring his whole soul and self into that child's awakening!

He was like Bunyan preaching in chains to men in chains; he was like Ezekiel sitting where they sat; and then he felt the warmth coming back into the body. You know, I can see the warmth coming into some of you, some of you young people are beginning to be touched with the gospel - and I see and hear things that I like, but I'll tell you this: he wasn't satisfied with just warmth. He went down the stairs and he went to and fro, and then he went up again and he did the same thing again. He didn't give up! And we're not going to give up until you get saved! And then the life came back!

You know, when children are brought to the church, and brought into the church, brought to Christ, they then need to be brought out in the church. We don't have time to look at this, but I'll tell you this, someone said: 'The church is only one generation away from extinction'. I don't believe that, because Christ said: 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' - but I'll tell you this much, the Psalmist said: 'The godly man ceaseth'. On a human level, I wonder who will replace the prayer stalwarts in the prayer meeting? Who will be around the Lord's Table in the Iron Hall in 20 years time? Who will be preaching the gospel? Who will be the elders? Who will be the deacons?

Timothy was told to stir up the gift that was in him, and he didn't stir it up on the football pitch, he stirred it up with the people of God, around the word of God, before the throne of God. Will we make a nest for our young? I trust we will.

Let us bow our heads. I am deeply burdened for those children in this gathering, who are maybe still children or are growing up, and are long flown from the nest. You will never - now get this - never be happy until you fly back to Christ. Fathers, mothers, children's workers, adults, older brethren, older sisters: are we doing what we can to make a nest for our young? Father, we thank Thee that the Saviour at Calvary made the nest for us all. The altar of God was there, the blood was there, and there the haven of rest is for every soul by sin oppressed to go and find mercy. Our Father, we pray for our children, we pray for the children of this district, we pray for our Sunday School teachers and children's leaders, our young people's leaders. We pray for us all who know and love children, and our families, and around our neighbourhoods where we live - we pray, Lord, that a next generation would be risen up of God to take forth the name of Christ. But Lord, humanly speaking, the responsibility is with us as Thy divine, sovereignly chosen instruments to make a nest for them. We pray that Iron Hall will be a nest for the children gathered here today, for Christ's sake we pray. Amen.

 Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2002

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*Appendix A:****"A Time To Cry"***

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If you have a copy of the word of God with you today, we're turning to Psalm 74 for our reading of the word of God. I have been, on these Lord's Day mornings, taking you through a series on the Sermon on the Mount, but it is expedient at times - as the Lord leads - to interrupt certain series and deal with things that, I believe, the Spirit of God would lead me to deal with. This is a message that has been burning on my heart ever since, in my own devotions and meditations at home before the Lord, this Psalm has been given to me. I've felt led, this morning, to bring it to you and I want you - please - to listen to it in the light of that - in the light of the fact that it is the word of God, and in no more sense should you listen to this any more than you should listen to everything that is preached from this pulpit. But I do believe that God would see us listen to Him, and obey Him, from the words of this Psalm. So please do ponder these things as I bring them to you from the Lord, and as I bring them to my own heart. Please do obey the word of God as we hear it this morning.

Verse 1: "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs. A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? Pluck it out of thy bosom. For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers. The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter. Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name. O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually".

My message is entitled: "A Time To Cry" - a time to cry. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and verse 4: 'There is a time to weep, and there is a time to laugh; there is a time to mourn, and there is a time to dance'. In some quarters of the church there is a great emphasis today on laughing and on dancing. Today it seems that the church, God's people, sleep instead of weep. They are merry instead of mourning. I do not believe that the church today, especially in the West, is living in a day of laughter and in a day of rejoicing. They

might feel themselves to be, they might have been spellbound like those in Galatians chapter 3, where Paul could say to them: 'Who hath bewitched you', who has cast this spell, hypnotised you into believing something as it is not? I believe that, for the child of God today, our day should be a day of weeping and a day of mourning. I believe that it is a time to cry.

In this Psalm God's children of old are standing, as we have been learning on Monday nights, in a wrecked Jerusalem - a bit like Jerusalem tonight. There they are standing in the midst of the temple, in all the rubble, in all that the Babylonian Empire has destroyed and wrecked, in the ruins of a devastated place where God used be worshipped. There they are in a place destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the visible sign of God's presence, the visible sign of God's pleasure in His people, has been wiped off the face of the earth. They stand confused, beside themselves, at the end of their tether - they do not know what to do, for as far as they can see God, the covenant God, has left His covenant people! He has forsaken His covenant! That's why they cry in verse 1: 'O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever?'

There is a despairing cry - God, it seems, is not among His people any more. The enemy is advancing, and Satan's activity is more evident than God's is. That's what they are saying - in verse 4 and 5 it talks about the enemy, and how the enemy is in the very midst of God's temple, in the dwelling place of God. The enemy seems to be able to do as he likes, and the people of God are standing impotent and absolutely helpless as the enemy advances into God's territory!

Now my question to us today, and the message that burns upon my heart, is this: is this not happening now? Is it not the case that it seems that Satan is more evident than God? Does it not seem that the presence of evil, and the presence of the very devil himself, can be witnessed more than the presence of Almighty God? Our churches, generally, seem to be emptying. Great Britain's heritage that once was glorious is being swamped by a sea of religious pluralism and ecumenism. Churches are being, every year, transformed into mosques, into carpet warehouses. Christian doctrines are being burnt to the ground, to rubble and ruins. So-called evangelicals are denying the reality of hell - 'You're just dead and done for, you don't live on, you have not an immortal soul'.

Many of the preachers of the word of God are turning to immoral lifestyles. Some theologians are denying the truth of the virgin birth, original sin - 'You're not born in sin'. Some have even lifted up their voice to defy what God has revealed in His sovereign truth, that the atoning work of Christ is the only way that any man or woman will get through the gates of heaven and have eternal life. Men, and bishops, and hierarchy in churches denying that the Lord Jesus Christ rose on the third day from the grave and was victorious over life and death. They deny that He will come again - 'Where is the promise of His coming?', they say. Churches and systems seem to be uniting together, even the church of Rome, and they all seem to be opposing this doctrine that we hold so dear: of justification by faith alone.

'Not by the labour of my hands,
Could I fill God's laws demands'.

'Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone!'

In the next couple of weeks we face an impending general election, and there will most likely be a second term of a Labour government that seeks to take all remembrance of God and dismantle it. I don't know whether you see the future as bleak as I do, the possibility of it being bleak. But even among God's people - among that remnant that there are that still believe that the Bible is the word of God, that still believe in the

fundamental doctrines of the faith - there is still a cause for despair, there is still a reason to cry: 'O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever?'. Why? One: because I believe there is a satisfaction with our spiritual lukewarmness. There is a satisfaction to stay the way we are at this moment, and 'If it goes along like this for good, I'll be happy'.

There is a desire in high echelons of theological knowledge to wrangle over foolish questions and let the world go to hell. There is a willingness to have a 'one night stand' with the church, without committing yourself to the vows of fellowship and putting your shoulder to pushing the wheel. There is a materialism that has made many spellbound, and has muffled their ears to the call of Christ: 'Take up your cross and follow Me. Deny yourself and follow Me. Him that loses his life shall find it, and him that saves his life shall lose it'. I feel, friends, that we would have to be blind if we cannot see that the presence and the power of God that was so often distinct in meetings, even in this place and in the land of Ulster, God's power is absent!

In my life and in your life, there is a toleration of sin that too often causes us to fall. The condition of the whole generally, is too often the disposition of our hearts personally. What is going on around us in the church and in our land just reflects what is coming out of our heart, and the dedication and the commitment that we have to the Lord Jesus Christ. But my question, as we look at this Psalm, is: do you see yourself standing in the rubble? Can you see this? Or is it just me? It seems that God is not among His people, at least in the way that He once was! Do you find - like many people I have spoken to even in this assembly - that there is a dark cloud, it seems, hovering over us shutting out the life of God's blessing, and the light from shining in upon us and bringing life?

Now I know, and I want you to beware - and I have to be absolutely honest at this - I hear, sometimes, people saying how well we're doing here. I think we are doing well in comparison with some things that are going on in this nation at this time, and some churches that are dwindling - but I want you to beware of that voice, because I believe that voice is from the very depths of hell! Because such people, who say those things, are not listening to God's word!

I want you to turn with me to 2 Corinthians 10, and I want this to settle this, and I want no-one ever in this assembly to take the attitude: 'We're doing better than anybody else, or we're doing as well as anyone else - let's just be content'. Second Corinthians 10 and verse 12, and Paul is speaking: 'For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise!' I would remind you of another verse of Scripture in Corinthians: 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall'.

Now, my friends, there are two things that I want to leave with you. I'm asking you: is there in your heart, first of all, what was in the Psalmist's heart - and it is this: a cry of despair at the enemy's advances? Is there, in your heart at this moment, a cry of despair at the enemy's advances? He says: 'Lord, have You cast us off? Have You left us? Have You gone away from us? We sense the retraction and subtraction of Your presence from among us, things are not the way they used to be!'. Spurgeon says: 'When a church is in a forsaken condition it must not sit still in apathy, but turn to the hand that smiteth it and humbly inquire the reason why'.

Now, we believe in eternal security - thank God for it - and we believe that God can never cast His people off finally, and even when He does seem to cast us off it is in His goodness to waken us up and to draw us back to Himself. There are three illustrations that the Psalmist gives, at least in this Psalm, of how he is despairing at the enemy's advances. The first is found in verse 1, it is: smoke damaged sheep - smoke damaged sheep - 'Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?'. This is almost unthinkable!

It is a mercy, even in this verse, that it is smoke, it's not fire. It is smoke - in other words, the point is: the sign of God's anger is upon God's people. Literally His wrath is not poured out upon them, but this is a sign of God's anger - God is not smoking here against His enemy, God is smoking at His own sheep. As the children of God watch that smoke rising from the temple, rising from the ruins of Jerusalem, they begin to realise and correctly interpret it that God is angry with them! God is smoking against them! What they are doing in verse 1 is: they are asking that God would remove all signs of His displeasure with them. I believe that God's Holy Spirit is grieved, and I believe that that is a serious thing - and I believe that's why we find ourselves under a cloud of smoke.

There are smoke damaged sheep and the second thing is: a lion in the sanctuary. If you look at verse 4: 'Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs'. There is a lion and, as the Babylonians came in and wrecked Jerusalem, that is exactly what Satan wants to do with the church! Do you believe that? Do you believe that Satan is alive? Do you believe that Satan is real? Do you believe that Satan has a plan for your life to destroy it, and to make you as unusable for God as possible? Satan would seek to wreck the church, and indeed wreck this church. He has some of us, personally, between his teeth. He is the one who walks about like a lion seeking whom he may devour. The Psalmist says: 'Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations' - where there was once the singing of angels, there is the roaring of beasts. Where our forefathers once praised God, they now blaspheme His name - and the cleric and the theologian cry aloud in their denials of our Lord's blood and of His person.

In verse 4 we see it says: 'They set up their ensigns for signs'. In other words, when they pulled that temple down they took in their military and their pagan religious emblems and set them up in God's temple! What a picture of today! What a picture of this very moment, where sins of every kind from sodomy to dead orthodoxy have been enshrined in the house of God, and men and women in the world look at this and say: 'This is Christianity?'. The idolatry of Romanism has been embraced by the Protestant churches, whose forefathers went to the flames rather than endorse such a transgression of God's first and second commandments. This is the day that we're living in - but it seems that God people are anaesthetised, desensitised, that it's happening!

In verse 5 he depicts the evil one as them all 'lifting up axes upon the thick trees'. The picture is of a lumberjack in the forest furiously turning at each tree and knocking it down, destroying everything in his sight. He is saying: 'The enemies of God are destroying the beauties of the temple with the violence of a woodman'. Does that not seem like now to you? Does it not seem that everywhere we look something is being lost, that nothing is sacred? We're no longer surprised when the next great warrior of God falls, or another outright sin is made law from our government. It doesn't surprise us any more when a fundamental doctrine of the word of God is diluted or utterly denied by those who take the name of Christ! It doesn't surprise us that, today, men are proud in destroying what their fathers were proud in erecting. Gone are the days when men used to wield their axe against sturdy trees of error and false doctrine and heresy - and they're turning it upon themselves in the church of Jesus Christ, and felling as diligently as they can the truths that their forefathers built!

In verse 6 the Psalmist described how the sledgehammer is smashing the word of God and the gospel of God while the church is asleep. In verse 8 he tells us that the evil one has extinguished that flame - the evil one is 'destroying them altogether: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land'. Oh, my friend, the Lord Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church, but that infers that the gates of hell seek to prevail against His church. Do we see that what the devil wants in Ulster, what the devil wants here in the Iron Hall, is to extinguish the flame of the gospel and godliness and holiness? He has resorted again to his only and old plan. Our government is doing it for him, our monarchy has become the devil's lapdogs as they enshrine adultery, fornication, Islam!

Oh, there is a lion in God's sanctuary - and thirdly there is an extinction of prophets. If you look at verse 9: 'We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long'. 'There are no prophets of God. We see their signs, their signs are going up in abundance, but we don't see God's signs. We see the hostile signs of the Babylonian military, we see the signs of pagan religious ritual everywhere - but where are the signs of Jehovah? Where are His altars? Where are His sacrifices? They're nowhere to be seen! Where are the miraculous interventions of God on our behalf? Like the Red Sea, like the prophets of Baal - where is our God who used to interject in our affairs to deliver us?'. He is conspicuously absent.

Now listen: will we wait until there is no sign of God in Ulster at all before we do something? Are we going to wait? Just wait until all that we see is godlessness, and pagan idolatry, and apostate religion. We who are the people of God, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, we are the ones who can make a change with our prayers and our lives, and with the preaching of the word of God. Are we going to wait until there is nothing only evil in this nation?

The prophets voice was silenced at this particular time - and you remember from our studies of Ezekiel that, indeed, Ezekiel was told: 'I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house'. The point here is that there was absolutely no-one who knew how long this would go on. There were no prophets to give the people of God guidance. There were no prophets to tell the people of God what to do. There was no-one there to lead them, to guide them, to direct them and teach them. Men of spiritual perception and discernment were extinct, and no wonder the Psalmist in another place could cry: 'Help Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men'. There are no godly men left to guide, to direct!

Ask yourself for one moment - I want you, you see I'm trying to pull you from this era into now and see that we're in the midst of it! Ask: where is the Christian voice in our nation today? If you watch the television you will see that it has been relegated to a position of absolute insignificant ranting of idiots! It is scorned, it is laughed upon! Things that were once the very foundations that made this nation great are decried as humorous! We may ask: where are God's divine interventions in our lives? Where are the miraculous works of God among us? Where is the conviction of sin in the pew that weeps, that cries uncontrollably, and shouts out in the midst of absolute anguish of sin upon them: 'What must I do to be saved?'. Where is it? Where are the godly men who can discern the need of the hour, and lead the people of God to repentance and blessing?

There is a famine in the land - oh, that we would realise it, that we would realise that there is a famine among the church, there is a famine among society. All of the institutions that we have held dear for years and years are crumbling under a foundation that is false, because they are not built upon the word of God - and, if the truth be told, our lives are not either! There is a need for an awakening - and if you don't believe it, well then I will reserve you to absolute finishing in God's calendar and scheme. If you want to just go out in a blaze of 'unglory', if you just want to die and go to heaven empty-handed - well, you do it! But we're not all going to do it!

My friends, we need an awakening in the Iron Hall! We need an awakening in Ulster, for I believe it is our only hope! You know that I read a great deal about the Isle of Lewis revival. Before the awakening that island was in dire straits, spiritually there was a great fear - but we, I believe, are a hundred-fold worse. It was a place that had once experienced umpteen revivals, and refreshings of the presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. But they had grown cold and indifferent, and in the view of that situation the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis made the following declaration in the Stornoway Gazette and the West Coast Adviser, and they publicly expressed their deep concern.

I want you to listen to this, this is what they wrote in the press: 'The Presbytery of Lewis, having taken into consideration' - listen - 'the low state of vital religion within their own bounds, and throughout the land generally, call upon their faithful people in all their congregations' - listen - 'to take a serious view of the present dispensation of divine displeasure - not only in the chaotic conditions of international politics and morality, but also and especially in the lack of spiritual power from the Gospel, and to realise that these things clearly indicate that the Most High has a controversy with the nation!' The Presbytery goes on: '...affectionately plead with their people, especially with the youth of the church, to take these matters to heart and to make serious inquiry as to what must be the end should there be no repentance! They call upon every individual, as before God, to examine his or her life in the light of what responsibility pertains to us all - that happily, in divine mercy, we may be visited with a spirit of repentance and may turn again unto the Lord whom we have so grieved with our iniquities and our waywardness'.

Now, my friend, they were nowhere near the state that our generation is in now. Nowhere near! It is for this reason I believe, for us here, it is time to seek the Lord. It is time to sow to yourself righteousness, to reap in mercy, to break up the fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till He come and rain righteousness upon you. I don't know about you, but I am tired of hypocrisy in my life, I am tired of powerless fruitlessness - and I believe it is time for me to seek the Lord, is it not high time for us to take God's word seriously? Is it not high time to follow Him fully? Will you come with me?

You know there are some men in this Assembly who have been exercised to have a day of prayer and fasting - and we're going to do it. We're going to do it on the tenth of June, Sunday the tenth of June. Maybe it would be impossible for you to do that, and that's okay, you don't have to do it. But in our own personal homes, in our lives, we're going to fast - some of us - and you may join us on that date: for the land, for our church, for our own individual families who are not saved, for our personal shortcomings and fallings. Maybe you can't fast for medical reasons, well, have bread and water for the day or whatever you can have - but do something! This church will be open, and if you can't get peace at home you can come here and pray. But my friends, the cry of my heart is this: whatever we do, we must not do nothing!

What motivates such a thing? I'll tell you what motivates it: a cry of a desire that God would vindicate Himself, that's what it is. What you find in verses 9 to 23. Look at verse 3, the Psalmist says: 'Lift up your feet! Lift up your feet - do you know what he's saying? 'Hurry up Lord! Hurry up, and come and examine this situation, this rubble that the enemy has left. Come and see the desolation'. In other words it's a bit like what David was saying to his brothers: 'Is there not a cause?'. Is there not cause for us to get on our faces before the living God and fast and pray that He will bless us? Don't tell me there's not!

The Psalmist had a cry of desire that God would vindicate Himself in activity. Look at verse 10 and 11: 'Lord, are You going to let these people blaspheme You forever?'. Oh, isn't it wonderful, there's a hope in this. My heart overflows with a great hope, because I believe - if we pray - that God's going to do it! Do you know why? Because there is always a hope that God will come and avenge His dishonoured name. There is always a hope that He will come when we cry: 'Lord, where is Your hand? Take it out of Your bosom, let's see You move amongst us, in our midst!', when we say to Him: 'Lord, it's going to go on like this unless You do something about it'.

My friend, whether we like it or not, I know that's not the way I pray. You might say: 'Is that too forward?'. No, it's not - the problem is: we are too backward! We are too backward with God. We need to say, as the poet:

'Why dost Thou from the conflict stay?
O Lord, why do Thy chariot wheels delay?
Lift up Thyself, hell's kingdom shake,
Arm of the Lord: Awake! Awake!'

'Pluck Your hand out of Your bosom, Lord! Work again amongst us, Lord!' - this is what we must have: fervent prayer. We need this, this isn't an option for some spiritual few - we need it! We need to say, as He said in verse 22 - look at this: 'Arise, O God, plead thine own cause'. In other words: 'Lord, in a day when there's no-one to stand and fight Your cause, You're going to have to fight Your own!'. Oh, we need God to come through for us today. We need God to come and have a regard for His own glory. We need God to respect His own honour. We need God, again, to come - we need to argue God into action prayerfully and from a position of trust! As Chrysostom, the old church father, said: 'We need to argue the mercy from God!'

Remember the widow who wearied the unjust judge? She pestered him and went everywhere after him, and it annoyed him so much that he had to be pleased to give her what she wanted. Perhaps a better example would be the woman of Canaan, and how she came persistently, she nagged the Lord Jesus, she nagged the disciples. The disciples desired that she be dismissed, but the Lord knew what was in her heart. Let me tell you this, old Augustine said - and he was right: 'She argued mercy right into Christ's bosom'. Of course the mercy was there - of course, His bosom's full of mercy - but do you think He gives mercy out willy-nilly? It had to be a heart that was willing to plunge its spiritual hand into His bosom and get the mercy that was there!

Let me say: there's mercy with the Lord for us! There's blessing from the Lord for this place! There's blessing for your life, but you've got to get it! 'For from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force'. In other words this blessing that we are seeking, and we are going to seek, is like a garrisoned kingdom - and unless you're willing to climb the walls, unless you're willing to break through the bricks, you're not going to get it if you sit and watch television for the rest of your life, and go to glory happy.

The Psalmist found strength in knowing that God was a God of strength. Oh that I might leave you on this note as we finish: he told God what God had done. Do you think God needed reminded? Yes, He did! He needed reminded to know that His people hadn't forgotten who He was! He told them: 'Lord', verse 13, 'Thou divided the sea, Thou art the God of creation, Thou art the one who divided the Red Sea and delivered us from Egypt. We need deliverance from the world now, Lord, and You can do that! You are the God who came and could overcome leviathan, that great sea dinosaur, that sea creature. You're the one who could overwhelm what overwhelms man', that's what he's saying!

Oh, what overwhelms you? What overwhelms you? What sin overwhelms you? What habit overwhelms you? Is there just this lethargy - I've lived through this - this lethargy, that you can hardly pray, that you don't want to read the word of God? You find you're continually falling into the same temptation - God can overwhelm what overwhelms you! Verse 15: 'You broke open the fountains at creation and the flood'. Verse 17: 'You set all the borders' - what borders did God make? He separated day from night. He separated the sea from the land. He separated summer from winter, and autumn from spring. He even set national boundaries. Do you know what the word of God is saying? Whatever boundaries are limiting God in your life, He can smash them! Hallelujah! There is hope!

But there is no hope if we will not believe God to do it again. Some of us are going for it, will you be left behind?

Let us bow our heads to pray. Let me say this: this portion of Scripture has gone through my heart like a two-edged sword, and I have had to uncover sins in my life that I did not want to - and I'm still looking for victory to stay away from those things, and I'm hoping that I can take the grace of God that He will give me. I'm not reprimanding you, my friends, I'm putting myself in the same boat. I have had to re-dedicate my life afresh to Christ.

Now listen to me: I believe, and I believe it's more than me believe, that God wants blessing for this place. My friend, it's going to take more than a Sunday morning and evening. I'm going to ask you to do something that we don't normally do here, that is: if you are willing to covenant your prayers and your life for the prize of blessing in Iron Hall, I want you to stand. No-one will be looking, all the eyes will be closed, and we will pray together. Please stand.

Father, Thou canst see our hearts. Lord, Thou knowest whether we honour Thee with our feet, and not with our hearts. Lord, even for those of us who are willing to be made willing, help us to be what Thou wouldst want us to be. Lord, I confess my sin, and we each confess our own sin - for if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and make God a liar. So, Lord, receive this offering and help us in the future days to be ready for Thy blessing. In Christ's name, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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*Appendix B:**"Draw Near To God"*

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to that passage that I mentioned to you from James chapter 4. Our text is verse 8, but we'll take time to read the context of the passage right down to verse 11 from verse 1 of chapter 4. Let me say that in the Gospel meeting this evening I want to preach on the subject: 'How Do I Know That I Am Really Saved?' - how do I know that I am really saved? Can I be sure? Am I sure? Should I be sure? How can I know I am sure? For in the land that we live in many say that they're saved, many say that they have been saved, many say that they're backsliders - but who is saved, and who is not saved? I was in America on my holidays, and it's no different - everybody is a Christian, everybody's born-again to a certain extent! But what is it? What is this life? What is this Gospel? Come tonight, God willing, and we'll look at that from the word of God.

James chapter 4 verse 1: "From whence", from where, "come wars and fightings among you?" - now he's talking to believers now. They're fighting - and they're still fighting today! Where do all these quarrels, squabbles, come from among you? "Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?". 'Pleasures' the margin says - now that means, and we're not going to digress here, but think about this for a moment: lust has more of a negative meaning, doesn't it? But pleasure - we tend to like pleasure, don't we? Now that means that there are people among us, we'll not name any names, but there are people among us who love to quarrel and to fight. It's a pleasure to them, they satisfy themselves bickering and moaning.

Verse 2 expands on it: "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain" - now that is the intrinsic nature of lust, and we look at lust in weeks gone by. We looked specifically at David and Bathsheba, and then the week after we looked at how lust can be expanded not just in a sexual way, but over everything that you desire sinfully. But this is the intrinsic nature of it: that it is a desire that is never ever satisfied. It's insatiable, you want more of it - if it's sex, the world wants more sex, sex, sex - and the more sex they get they want more! Money, money, money - and the more they have the stingier they get, and the more they want! Lust - if it's a wrong desire for a thing - never ever satisfies.

Now, James is saying: "[This is what your lust is like:] Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not", verse 3, this is the reason they don't have even when they do ask, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts". Now think about this: half of them are not spiritual because they don't even pray - you don't have because you ask not. Those of you that think you are spiritual, and are doing all the praying, you're not getting because you're asking because you want God to spiritually relieve your lust. You want God to satisfy - you know if you go down the street and take that drink, or get drunk, or you go down and sleep with that woman, you know if you do that that God will judge you for it. So what do you do? You make it spiritual, and they're actually praying to God, asking God to give them their sinful desires so that it's alright.

It sounds a terrible thing, doesn't it? That's why James says in verse 4: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" - what time we could spend on that! "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world" - look at this! - "is the enemy of God". Categorical! If you're a friend of the world, you're an enemy of God. "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us

lusteth to envy?", and we'll explain that a little bit later, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble".

Now, here's the train of thought that we're entering into this morning, verse 7, one: "Submit yourselves therefore to God". Two: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you". Three: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you". Four: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners". Five: "Purify your hearts, ye double minded". Six: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up". Now here's verse 11 for all the backbiters and the quarrellers: "Speak not evil" - he's not saying, look he didn't put parentheses after it, he didn't qualify it and say 'Speak not evil (but only when it's justified)'. He didn't say that, he didn't say: 'Speak not evil (only when it's true)'. It says: 'Speak not evil'.

Watchman Nee, whose writings I love, writes in a book about lying - and if you read in his book what he classes as lying - it's not just what we would call 'telling a fib'. It's all kinds of exaggeration! He would even say that passing on evil about another - say some brother falls into sin grievously, and you are telling others - he would say that is lying, bearing false witness, because you're putting yourself above that brother as if you couldn't fall into the same sin - a false witness. But that's not what we're thinking about today...

Verses 7 through to 11, all these injunctions: submit to God; resist the devil; cleanse your hands, the things that you do; purify your heart, the depths and motives of the things that you do; be afflicted and mourn, don't laugh and rejoice when you're in a sinful state; humble yourselves; speak not evil. Now all these things, I believe, are summed up in the text that we have in verse 8, where he says - this is a summary of it, the crux: 'Draw near to God, and he will draw near unto you'. Now to understand the Scriptures - and it's important that we do this - you need to understand each word as it is written, you need to understand each word in the original language as it is written, because it wasn't written in English.

Now, the word that is used here: 'Draw near unto God, nigh unto God, and He will draw near unto you' - the word 'draw' is found in other Scriptures. In John 6 you find it, verse 44 - turn to it for a moment, John 6 verse 44. Now, this is the Lord Jesus Christ and He's speaking about salvation - and we're thinking today about God's magnetism, God's attractability toward men. John 6:44: 'No man', Jesus says, 'can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day'. Now that word 'draw' is the same word 'draw' that we find in the book of James - 'Draw near to God and He will draw near to you'. Jesus talks about that drawing in the respect of salvation. Turn to John 12, John 12:32, and again He uses the same word: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' - the same word. John 21, look at it, John 21 and verse 6 - you'll remember that the disciples were in the boat, and they were fishing all night and they caught nothing, in verse 6 of chapter 21: 'He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes' - the same word.

Now look at James again, chapter 2 and verse 6 - and you remember that they were bring the rich men in through the door, the men with the big rings and the fancy dress, bringing them to the front seat, and the pauper comes in and they set him at the back. There are some places still do that, set somebody you don't know at the back - but the word of God teaches that that is not the way, that's not how you relate to those who are outside the church of Jesus Christ: 'But ye have despised the poor', he says in verse 6 of chapter 2, 'Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?'. Do you see the picture? The men that you are showing respect to are the ones that are bringing you before the judgment seats and putting Christians to death. They are drawing you - do you see the sense of the word? Taking you by force to the judgement seats!

Now the Greek word 'draw' that we find in our text, verse 8 of chapter 4 and in all those texts that we've been reading this morning, is the Greek word 'helco' (sp?), and it literally means 'to drag'. Now, I don't want you to misunderstand this: it's not dragging in a violent sense, it's not grabbing and harming violently, that's another word 'sirro' (sp?). But this word 'helco', 'to drag', is of the sense 'to induce to come' - rather than to force to come. It is used in this way in these texts, and the idea is 'pulling against a force', using a force to pull against another force to overcome it. We can illustrate it in gravity, I've used this illustration before. If I stand up in the choir box, there's a force of gravity, and there's the force of all the air between me and the ground and everything else, all the forces between - but because I'm heavier than all that, if I jump off it my force will overcome the other forces and I will hit the ground, isn't that right? Now this is the sense of this word: one force overcoming another force, whether it's friction - you know what that is - you go out to your car and perhaps there's a lot of rubble because of all the trouble that's going on, and if you needed to you could put the boot to the board, and the force of your engine and the wheels turning round could overcome the friction of all the rubble on the road, isn't that right? One force is stronger than the other, and it overcomes it.

Now is that not what the Lord Jesus Christ meant in John chapter 6:44? He was talking about salvation, He said: 'No-one can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him'. What is it in the Christian, when he is born-again - that force that overcomes another force? He is dead in his trespasses and in his sins, he is dead when he is born, his spirit is dead - and then he begins to practise those dead things. The stench of that person, all of us, before the throne of God is immense. We have a law working in us that is the law of sin, there is the attraction of the world all around us, then there is the devil and the principalities and powers trying to trip us up day-by-day through temptations - and in order for God to save us, it takes the power of God. It takes a greater power than the power of my sin, a greater law than the law of sin that dwells within me, to overcome my sinfulness and to bring me to Christ. Isn't that what it's all about? How Christ has drawn us to Himself?

It's not - don't get me wrong now - it's not this forcible thing, it's not as if God puts our arm up our back and says: 'You're going to be saved whether you like it or not'. Do you know what this word means? It is a steady, constant, strong inducement, conviction and convincing. Do you get it? It is not someone being forced, but what happened when we were saved was that God's Holy Spirit came to us and He showed us our sin, and He convicted us by the law of the wrong that you have done: 'You did that David, and My law says you don't do that! Your conscience tells you don't do that! The world around you tells you that I created it, and I have laws, and you're breaking those laws'. God's Spirit was revealing all these things to our hearts, isn't that right? But what did He do? He then revealed to us Christ - the love of Christ constrains us. Isn't that what the word of God says? He revealed Christ to us, and it wasn't that He forces us to come to Him in a sense, but His power is so great, His drawing inducement, that He melts our hearts so that we willingly cry: 'I must have You, and have nothing else!'. The power of God is so great that we can testify in this place that He changes men, doesn't He? He changes the hearts of men! It's only the power of God that can overcome the evil that is in us. It is only the love of Christ that is there at Calvary, that work that we were thinking about, that is finished! That's the only basis that the Spirit of God can come and melt individual hearts around here and bring them to Christ.

Do you see the drawing that the word of God is talking about? It's not the idea of a swift catching, or a rough abduction, but this is what the word means - listen: a steady, ordered, yet strong, solid, inevitable attraction - a loving and determined wooing. How He wooed us to Himself, by revealing to us the love of God in Christ. The word is found in the Old Testament - you remember me telling you on one occasion, the Old Testament is Hebrew, the New Testament is Greek, but there is a Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. We can learn the meaning of some of the Greek words by how they were used in the Greek Old Testament. The way this little word is used is found in 2 Samuel 22:17, David is saying of God: 'He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters' - do you see it? It's not a quick, swift: 'You're coming!'. 'He drew me out of many waters'.

In Jeremiah 38 and 13 the word is used about Jeremiah, being drawn with cords, taken out of the dungeon: 'So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison'. It's the idea - see those ships in Belfast harbour? You see when they want to start up and go across the ocean to the Baltics, what do they do? They start the propellers, and the propellers go round and round, and they don't scoot off right away sure they don't? It goes round and round and it's steady, strong, definite propelling. What happens is it gets so fast and so strong that that force overcomes the force of the vast mass and volume of the sea and it begins to move. That's the word that we're talking about here today, the tugboat pulling the great vessel into the harbour, the compelling of the magnet - this is the magnetism of God!

Now, this text is for the Christian. This is the strange thing about this text, because God had to seek us first in salvation, and then we responded to Him - this turns it on its head. This is saying: 'You draw near to God and He will draw near to you'. Now you know in physics that for there to be momentum, in other words for there to be movement, the force and the object must come together. To make a ball move you've got to kick it, your foot must hit the ball for the force to hit it, and then for it to have momentum and move away. It's the same for salvation, you've got to come into contact with God! I wish people would get this in these days that we live: it is not a 'decision', it's not a 'resolution', it's not a walk down an aisle - it is God meeting a man! You have to come in contact with God, God has to do something in your life, the Spirit of God through the word of God must come into contact with the dead sinner - and as Wesley put it:

'Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee'.

Now, this is a difficult text. You might say: 'How can I be near to God when the hymn says, based on scripture, that I am as near as He?'. What does Ephesians say, and we've been studying it, chapter 2 verse 13? 'Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ' - made near - but our text tells us: 'Draw near to God'. Now if we have been drawn to God in every conceivable sense through salvation, why do we need to draw near to Him again? The implication is that one of the parties has moved, isn't that it? If we have to draw near to Him, something has happened for there to be a distance between us and God. It can't be God that has moved, for He has said - and He is true to His word as we've heard already: 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you'! He said He'd never do it, so He'll never do it!

The answer is always: I have the problem; and secondly: the problem is sin. Isn't that always the answer? That's always the answer to every moral question in the world. Why are the people in our land running riot? They have the problem, and their problem is sin! Don't put it, or dress it up, in red, white and blue - it's sin! It's in the depths of men, and it takes a God who is Almighty to get it out! You see this text, as you've been looking from verses 1 right through to our text, verse 8, has been talking about sin, hasn't it? It's been talking about the reason why these Christians have moved afar from God. They have been moved away, it talks about what has moved them.

Look at the verse, now I'm going to read it in the Amplified - listen, look at verse 1: 'What leads to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fightings) originate among you? Do they not arise from your sensual desires that are ever warring in your bodily members?'. What has caused this? Feuds, their bickering! Secondly: their quarrelling. Thirdly: it's all down to their sensual desires that are warring in their body. Verse 2: 'You are jealous', another sin: jealousy, 'and covet', covetousness, 'and you have desires that go unfulfilled; you have become murderers'. In other words: 'To hate is to murder as far as your hearts are concerned'. You burn with envy and anger and are not able to obtain [the gratification, the contentment and

the happiness that you seek], so you fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask'. A lack of prayer! '[Or] you do you ask and yet fail to receive', listen to this, 'because you ask with the wrong purpose and evil, selfish motives. Your intention is [when you get what you desire] to spend it sensual pleasures'.

James hit the nail on the head. He was telling them that sin had separated between them and their God. Look what he calls them in verse 4: 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses'. Now if you read that, and just took it for face value, you would think they were sleeping around and they were leaving one another's wives and going off with other wives and husbands - that's not what it's saying. This version says that they were 'like unfaithful wives', listen, 'having illicit love affairs with the world!' Hmm...that's different, isn't it? You see, Jesus talked about this when He talked about His own generation as 'wicked and adulterous'. The biggest challenge that the church faces today is not liberal theology, it is not the Roman Catholic Church, it is not the charismatic movement, it is worldliness. Worldliness in our hearts, I'm not talking about the way you dress - no, the attitudes of our mind. Our morals, our philosophies of the way we think we ought to live, of priorities of the way we evaluate and make choices within our lives and within our families. The greatest commentary of the verse we have just read, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses', is found in 1 John 2:15 to 17 where he says: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'.

We have been drawn to God by our salvation, but do you know where the trouble comes in? When we're no longer drawn to God, when God doesn't have that magnetism any more. Harold Linsdale (sp?) said this: 'It is right for the church to be in the world, it is wrong for the world to be in the church. A boat in the water is good, that's what the boats are for - however when the water gets inside the boat it sinks!'. Now I don't want to spend time looking at the love the world, because I believe I've done that in the weeks gone by - but I believe that there is a remedy, there is such a dynamic remedy for the world that is in the church. I believe there are people in our fellowship, people all around, that are asking the question: 'I know that we have problems, I know that there are things that are wrong, but tell me this: I want to get nearer to God!' - that's brilliant! 'I want to know God, I want to get close to God, how will I get that nearness?'

Someone said that there are two sights that the Christian ought to covet most, that's the devil's back and Christ's face. There are three things that I want to leave with you from this text today: how you can experience God's magnetism; drawing near to God; and then the result: Him drawing near to you. James gives us three ways, the first is found in verse 5: the Holy Spirit. Look at the verse: 'Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?'. Now this is one of the most difficult verses of scripture to understand, and evangelical scholars differ - there are three interpretations of it. This little word 'spirit' is difficult, men don't know whether he's talking about the Holy Spirit or the spirit that is in the depths of man. What some believe the verse is saying is: 'Do you think the scripture is false when it says that our spirit that is dead in trespasses and in sins lusts and envies?'. They think that it's talking about the dead spirit that is within our souls - I don't think that's what it's talking about.

The second interpretation is that James is asking the question: 'If this is the Spirit of God that is in you, living within you, would the Spirit of God make you lust and envy after all these things that you're doing?'. Now that makes a bit of sense, because when you go to the start of the book James says: 'God tempts no man with evil', isn't that right? But he's tempted when he runs away after his own lusts. That's what we have within the book and it seems to make some sense - the first chapter verse 13: 'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God', and then in our own chapter, chapter 4 verse 2, 'Ye lust and ye have not' - it's already talking about that lust that is in the depths of men. But I don't think that's what it means - it may mean that and I may be wrong - but I happen to believe in the third interpretation: that God's Spirit is within you, and the book of Romans teaches that no man is saved unless God's Spirit is in him. He is in you, and because He

is in you He yearns with jealousy within your breast that He would have a chaste, single-eyed devotion after Christ in your life.

Listen to what the Amplified says in verse 5: 'The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us - and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] - with a jealous love'. Is the Holy Spirit welcome in our lives? Is He? I'll tell you: you see when you start to welcome Him? It causes a bit of bother, because you look at a thing and He tells you: 'Now you shouldn't be looking at that'. You go a place, and you think: 'This isn't the place for me' - and it makes you feel uncomfortable. Did you know that the Holy Spirit makes you feel uncomfortable? Because we have sin in us, and He won't have sin about Him! When He gets in, He wants to drive everything else out - He wants to be at home. Another translation says: 'He jealously yearns for the entire devotion of our hearts'. Jeremiah said: 'Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion'. He was jealous of His Old Testament people, He was married to them - that's why He called them adulterers. His New Testament people, the church, He is married to them - there's a covenant, we are the bride of Christ, we're His and He's jealous over us.

You know what some of you men would feel like doing if some wise-boy tried it on with your wife. It's happening all around us, isn't it? Even a look, if you see someone looking at your wife, you're ready to get the coat off - isn't that right? That's sinful, but God's jealousy is pure, and that's the way He feels about us. When we wander, when our eyes wander, when our feelings wander, when our priorities are removed, He loves us so much that He gets jealous over us. Now, this is marvellous: if you want to get near to God, my friend, the strange irony is - I was talking about how God draws us in the beginning, and that's true, and how it seems here that we are to seek after God and draw near to Him - but this is the reality again: that it all has to start with God or we get into a real mess. His Spirit is in us, and it's Him that gives us all the desires that He wants - and He is desiring that we get nearer to God, and that must erupt within our souls. Let me plead with you that if there is the littlest, smallest ember of a desire after God in your heart: fan it! Fan it with the word of God, fan it with the fellowship, fan it with prayer, until it becomes a consuming fire that will take over your whole being! For if we don't have God, we have nothing.

The second thing we need to realise - first we need the Holy Spirit - secondly, verse 6: we need the grace of God. 'But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble'. This translation says: 'But He gives us more and more grace [power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this tendency and all others fully]. That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and the haughty, but gives grace', the sense and the tense is 'continually' to the lowly - those who are humble-minded [enough to receive it]. The old Christians used to talk about the means of grace. Now I don't really like that term in a sense, because it sounds as if you have to do something to get grace from God - you don't have to do anything, grace is free isn't that right? But, in a sense, I know what they're talking about: there are ways that we can avail ourselves of the grace that God has given us to grow in our individual lives. When they were talking about the means of grace, they were talking about the word of God, the Bible, and prayer, intercession, supplication, devotion and adoration to God. We need to avail ourselves of His grace!

If we don't realise that the grace of God is there for the taking, do you know what happens? I enjoyed my holiday, but you know you can relax on holiday, and you can relax a wee bit spiritually at times. Do you know what happens? As one old man put it: 'The old man within us that is dead, you start to see the soil on the top of the grave moving', isn't that right? You start to see him coming out again in your thoughts and in your feelings, in your emotions. The godly life is characterised with a conflict with sin. Now listen, believers: if you're prepared to fight it, God's prepared to give you the grace to do it. What does the hymn say?

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
 He sendeth more grace when the labours increase.
 To added afflictions' - that's all afflictions: sickness, sadness, bereavement, everything that we face that is a
 result of sin - 'He addeth His mercy,
 To multiplied trials He gives multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
 When our strength is failed 'ere the day is half done,
 When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
 Our Father's full giving has only begun.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
 His power has no boundary known unto men.
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
 He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again'.

Hallelujah! Is it any wonder that Paul said in Ephesians that we, in Christ, have the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Thirdly, and finally, verse 7 says - verse 7 on, we don't have time to look at it - but it says that we have an act of our will to fulfil. There's a list of actions here, verse 7 says: 'Submit', that's not a strong enough word in this translation - it really means 'Surrender', to kill oneself, to put oneself to death before God. Then it says: 'Resist' - that's too strong a word, because we can't resist the devil too much, we need everything that God gives us. It means to stand, as Peter said: 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith' - a conscious decision to resist him, all his works, all his ways, all that is in the world, all of his influence. 'Be cleansed, be purified', it says, 'in heart. Be mournful over your sin. Humble yourself, watch for your tongue' - now all those are essential, but I believe James sums them up in our text - listen: 'Draw near to God, and he will draw near unto you'.

Now, that's an act of your will. There's so much imbalance today - Andrew Murray said this: 'Christianity is a religion of the will'. Now what was he talking about? There are mornings I get up and prayer is the last thing in my head - I hope I don't fall from a pedestal for saying that (I shouldn't be on one anyway!). Now if I was to go with the way I felt, I would never pray - that's what Andrew Murray is talking about. It's a religion of the will: you have to determine, make a choice consciously, forget about your emotions - you've to make a determined choice that the sheets go back, the knees go down, and the prayers go up! If you don't do it it will never happen. You know, some people think that for some Christians there's a radiant display of the presence of God as soon as you waken up in the morning, and God's Holy Spirit lifts you from the bed and brings you down beside it, and you just pray and pray and pray and pray without any problem. That does not happen without an act of the will - you've got to consciously decide: 'I will draw near to God. I will seek God until I find Him'. You can't have the promise of God drawing near unto you, until you fulfil the command of drawing near unto God.

It means prayer, it means Bible reading, as Alec Mateer (sp?) calls it, it is: 'Deliberately cultivating fellowship with God'. Now I'm nearly finished, but I want you to grasp this. Remember the word 'draw', remember what it means? Do you remember the intensity of it? The strong, slow, determined, definite drawing and inducing - that is the way we ought to feel about God! We ought to, by our wills, make a definite decision to draw consciously, strongly, determinedly, steadily, constantly to God. When we do it He says that He will draw near to us. We are to overcome all the forces - remember the propeller on the boat? We're to overcome all those forces of our tiredness, of the things that we've got to do during the day. We've to overcome all those other things, to draw near to God, to continually seek His face. Listen, this is what He says: 'I will draw near to you!' The Greek word means: 'I will be disposed to do it, I am minded, I intend to

do it, I will never refuse to meet one who genuinely comes to me' - 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'.

You seek God, my friend. You see going through illness? Seek God! Going through heartache, in a backslidden position: seek God! Do you know one of my favourite Psalms? I love the Psalms - Psalm 63 and verse 8, where David says: 'My soul followeth hard after God'. Do you know that word in Hebrew, 'followeth hard', means? 'To hunt down', that's lovely isn't it? I am so determined to find God I'm going to hunt Him down! That's not irreverent, that's the way God wants us to feel about Him. Whatever your need today is, do you know the only way it can be met? By being near to God. Why not start today? If you've never done it in your Christian life: actively, consciously, steadily, and consistently draw near to God.

'Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me...
Then with my waking thoughts,
Bright with Thy praise
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise'.

Lord, we thank Thee for wooing us and winning us - but Lord we pray for the Holy Ghost in us, by Thy grace, to make such a fire of desire after Thee that we must have Thee or we must die. We thank Thee that there is a comfort, that one day through eternity, ever we will be, nearer my Saviour, still nearer to Thee. Bless us dear Lord, we give Thee thanks, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2001

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*Appendix C:**"The Malnutrition Of The Soul"*

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The book of Numbers and chapter 11 - now, I did not intend doing a series in the Psalms, but the Lord intended it obviously, and that's why we're going to be in the Psalms a little bit later. But this is the context of the Psalm that we're going to read later on - and indeed it's important to know when you are reading the book of Psalms, that often there is a context, an historical context, to the things that David, or the other Psalmists, are expressing.

Numbers chapter 11 and we'll read from verse 1: "And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord:" - now to put you in the picture, the children of Israel are wandering now in the wilderness - they've been delivered from Egypt and from slavery, they've crossed over the Red Sea and they're wandering now in the wilderness - "and when they complained it displeased the Lord and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the Lord burnt among them. And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes. And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it. Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased". Verse 18, God said to Moses: "And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?". Verse 31: "And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague". And we know that the Lord will bless His own inspired word.

Now keep your finger in Numbers chapter 11, because we're going to be looking down that text. But our main text this morning is Psalm 106, Psalm 106 and only one verse, but we'll read a couple of verses just to get the context - Psalm 106 (keeping your finger in Numbers 11) and verse 13. Now this is speaking of the children of Israel, again in the wilderness - OK? - so it's the same context and the same situation. Verse 13: "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and

tempted God in the desert." - now this is our text - "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul".

'He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul'. Let's bow in a moments prayer: Father, this is Your word and we need Your Spirit to come and take the words from off these pages and write them upon the tablets of our hearts. Fill by Thy Spirit, we pray, Oh God, in Jesus name. Amen.

Another translation of the Hebrew says this: 'So He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them'. Another translation says: 'He gave them their demands' - stronger than 'requests' now - 'the demands of their heart, and He thinned the numbers of them by disease and death'. Now if you look at the beginning of the Psalm, you'll note in verse one that it begins with praise: 'Praise ye the Lord, oh give thanks unto the Lord'. And if you look at the end of the Psalm, you find that it ends with praise: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting'. But between the start and the finish of those two doxologies of praise, we have an historical record of the misfortunes, the fallings, the sins and the transgressions of the children of Israel as they walked in the wilderness. Now this is our first lesson: it's important never to forget history. I know that it's sometimes dry reading the book of Numbers, and Exodus, and Leviticus, and Deuteronomy - and sometimes those are the books, that if we're going to skip over any when we're reading the word of God, we'll skip over them. But we need to see, today - and I believe we're going to see - how important the history of Judaism is, the history of the children of Israel - because it's by knowing these important things of history, especially biblical history, that we can learn their mistakes and we can know how to avoid them in our individual walk, in our church, in our lives.

Now, Israel's history here - I believe - is recorded by the Holy Spirit of God for one reason primarily. It is here, and this Psalm is written, probably by David, to illustrate all human sin. He wants you, and I, and the whole world - the people he was speaking to at this moment in Judaism, and the people that followed after him, and the Christian church now - to see the psychology of sin, to see the steps of degradation and depravity that we as human beings, whether consciously or unconsciously, step into in our minds and hearts, the moment we decide, or are enticed into sinfulness. In fact, the whole Psalm, as you read it, is not simply a personal confession - it's not like Psalm 51, where David gets on his knees and cries to God for his adultery, that we were thinking about last week, with Bathsheba - this is a national confession. He is not reciting his own personal sins, but he is reciting, confessing, and acknowledging the sins of the whole nation before God.

Look at the Psalm, the first few verses recite Israel's sins in Egypt before they were delivered by God in the hand of Moses. Then, as you go further into the Psalm, it talks about the sins within the wilderness, in their desert wanderings. And then it even goes on further, nearer the end of the Psalm, to speak of the sins of the children of Israel in the promised land, in the land flowing with milk and honey - Canaan. Now, as we come to the word of God today - and indeed as we come to the word of God any day - how should we read this passage, and the verse that I have brought before you? Well, you read it the way you ought to read all of the word of God, in other words: you ought to put yourself in the context! Put yourself in the passage, use the word of God as a mirror - ask yourself, 'Well, what is God saying to me through this verse? What does this mean for our situation here in our church, and in the land of Ulster?' - because this is a national confession. Should we bemoan our transgressions? Should we, like Israel, be crying onto God, asking God to forgive us for our transgressions, our iniquities, and our sins against His name, against His holiness, and His holy law? Should we be crying to God for mercy? Should we be praising God, as he does at the end of the Psalm, that God's mercy is infinite, that it never fails, that His loving kindness endureth forever? Well, I believe we ought to, and we ought to look at this verse, this morning, very seriously, verse 15: 'He gave them their request, but He sent leanness into their soul'.

The historical context for the Psalm, as I've already said, is Numbers 11 - turn to it with me now, Numbers 11 - and you'll also find it quoted in Psalm 78, where the writer there says: 'They', the children of Israel,

'tempted', or tested, 'God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?'. Now what had happened here? It's quite a complicated story. The children of Israel are out of Egypt now, and God is taking them on their wilderness journey to the promised land, but they are a mixed multitude. Now what does that mean? Well, when they left Egypt to go to the promised land, they didn't leave alone. If you go into the book of Genesis you find - and in the book of Exodus also - you find that when they left Egypt, there were some Egyptians [who] left with them, there were some Semites left with them also - in other words, derivatives from the Jewish race long ago, in the beginning. But a different 'hotchpotch' of nations and people, who didn't all worship the Lord God, saw their opportunity to perhaps leave Egypt, and left with the children of God and clung onto them. What happened was, God told His own people, 'I'm going to feed you Myself', right? 'I'm going to give you angel's food! The food that God gives! The bread of heaven, and you're going to - and you have to - eat that!'. Of course, the mixed multitude wasn't under that regulation, so they just ate meat. They went into the desert and they found some animal, or some bird, and they just fed away, and ate it, and cooked it, and enjoyed themselves - and their God was their belly. And Israel looked on at this, and they thought to themselves 'What are we putting all these restrictions and regulations upon ourselves, when they can get away with eating a good feed of a plate of meat?'. And they turned to God and said: 'God! Why can't we have meat? Why can't we do what they're doing?'. And God gave them their request, but it brought leanness to their soul.

I want you to see this, because it is the subject of lust. And we thought last week on the subject of lust, we thought more of sexual lust - as David eyed, and saw, and scoured Bathsheba with his eyes that night, and he focused on the wrong thing. And it all started, way back, when he took many wives - you remember all the process of how he lost his purity before God. But let me say this: lust, in the Bible, is not always a sexual sin. Lust speaks, and testifies, of any unholy, unhealthy, unrighteous desire of a man within his heart. Passion! Desire after what is wrong! Now the problem with the people in Numbers 11, and in the Psalm that we read, was one thing - and I want you to get this: they became dissatisfied with God. Right? God didn't 'do it for them' any more. God didn't give them that thrill. And what happened was, the spiritual law kicked in that we thought about last week, which is: that we conveniently forget how God has blessed us, and the relationship that God has to us, when we are contemplating and feeling the passions of lust within our soul. Isn't that right? When we are tempted, when we are presented with sin, the last thing on our minds - and that we want on our minds - is God!

We live in a consumer society, don't we? And in the shops, and in the town, because we are a prosperous nation - and no matter how poor you might think you are at the moment, believe me, in comparison with the rest of the world, and to what we used to be here, you're quite well-off - and most of us can walk into a shop and we can say: 'I see it! I like it! I must have it!'. Now inevitably, that attitude will flow into the spiritual realm if we are not careful. And in our sin, because we see it - lust of the eye - we like it - lust of the flesh - we must have it - pride of life! And before we know it we've become a 'consumer-Christian' in the realm of sin. And in that moment, we learnt - remember? - that all consciousness of God fades away, all the blessings that He has poured into our lives that ought to mean something to us disappear into oblivion! As Dietrich Bonhoeffer (sp?) said, we repeat it: 'When lust takes control, at that moment God loses all reality. Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of Him'. We forget we're saved, we don't want to contemplate what God has done in our lives. When you're about to sin, you don't remember the date, and the hour, and the place that you knelt before the Lord, and before the cross, and got saved - do you? You don't do it! You don't think of the myriad of times that God has protected you, God has guided you in your life. You don't think of the passage of Scripture that you were reading - or maybe weren't reading! - in the morning. You don't think of the gift of prayer that He has given you, and the riches of His grace that is sufficient for you to get out of the fix, and the hole, that you're in at that moment - why? Because most of us want to do it! Let's be honest...that old man inside.

And that's what the Israelites did, if you look at Psalm 106 and verse 13 it says: 'They soon forgot his works!' They forgot what God meant to them, they forgot what God had done for them, they forgot His works and '...they waited not for his counsel'. Verse 21 says: 'They forgot God their Saviour!' And because of that their downfall came, and they give in to what I have called 'fleshly obesity' and 'spiritual bulimia'. God gave them their request, but he sent leanness into their souls.

I want you to look at Numbers 11, and we're going to go down it in the time that's left, and we're going to take time to go down it all. The reason why I've called it 'fleshly obesity' is, you'll know obesity - and I know all too well - is an over-intake of food, and it begins to show on you. Bulimia is a craving for food that is never satisfied - why? - because the food is always, habitually expelled from the body, which brings leanness to the body. Now we're talking in the spiritual realm, we're talking about obesity in the flesh, carnal, obesity of sin, feeding yourself with sin until you can't take any more sin, until sin makes up your whole body, your whole metabolism operates, and ticks, to the time of sin! What happens is: that brings spiritual bulimia. Your spirit will never be satisfied with the obesity of the flesh, nevertheless it brings more and more leanness to it - it destroys you!

Now the first lesson I want us to learn - this is all a digression, degradation into sin and there's a path, there's a pattern, there's a formula - and I hope, if you're almost on the brink of beginning this, or you're maybe in the middle of it, or you're maybe at your wit's end of it, that you'll see this, and that you'll waken up! The first thing is: an attitude of discontent with God and His ways. An attitude of discontent with God and His ways - verse 1 of Numbers 11: '...and when the people complained', they murmured - they complained! Who knows anybody who complains? Huh, everybody! And sometimes we're guilty of it ourselves, aren't we? Complaining, and murmuring, and gossiping, and backbiting, and saying that famous sentence: 'I'm going to tell you this, but don't repeat it', or, 'I wouldn't say this to their face, but you know that...'. Right? They began to complain. Now I believe that this is the process, the beginning - how it begins, even in our lives - the process of backsliding, the process of spiritual leanness - and you've seen it! Christians get together in a social way, and the company begins to discuss a matter, and talk about it, and perhaps (and I don't want to be 'superior' here) - but perhaps with the limited knowledge that they have about a subject, biblically, or a matter practically within the church of Jesus Christ - they come to their conclusion! And usually that conclusion suits their own particular lust! That's human nature - and you know what I mean - a few people on a Sunday night begin to discuss how long is given (and this is something that's on my heart) how long is given to the preaching. And maybe they think there's too much time, and other legitimate things are pushed away, and then they debate this until they conclude that the Scriptures should be relegated to epilogue status! It's happening all around, in the churches around us - the tendency is everywhere, and what is the real reason? What is the reason? They are succumbing to their own lust - probably because when they hear the word of God preached, they don't understand a lot of it, because they don't read the word of God at home, they don't study it at home. And then when it's preached it's over their heads - now I know that some preaching can be over their head, and preachers are guilty of that, and I'm guilty of that. But is it the lust, or is it because there is sin in the life and when the word of God - like the children were learning - the light, the laser light, of the word of God scorches their life, they don't want to hear it! Now let's face it, no one likes being made uncomfortable. But you know, most moral or theological departures from orthodoxy, or from holy, sanctified living - you will probably find [were] conceived in an unholy huddle, where carnal Christians who were discontent with God, His ways, His standards, and His precepts decided that they knew better!

They began to murmur. Now I want to make this practical to you. Does it depress you to come to church? Now I'm not talking about the facade of church, and the outside, peripheral things - I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about coming to meet with God. Do you find it hard to get out of bed in the morning? Well, I find that hard - to get out of bed in the morning. But do you stop there, and not get out of bed, because there is not that desire enough within you, the lust for sleeping, or the lust for staying at home is more than the lust

- if I can say it reverently - the desire, and the passion after God! Is reading the word of God more boring for you than anything that you can possibly conceive of? Let alone coming twice on a Sunday to listen to it preached for half an hour more? Is prayer not an issue in your life, simply because you just don't do it? It doesn't turn you on, you've never seen God in a miraculous way, answering your prayers. And here's the crux, here's the principal: do you view God's principles and standards as restrictive upon your freedom? Now if you see God in that way, my friend, you're not seeing my God! Because my God lives for freedom! My God is freedom!

Have you begun to have an attitude of discontent with God and His ways? But secondly: they had an ingratitude for their present existence. Now this is where history really does baffle me it, but in a way it doesn't because I can see myself in these Israelites, and I can see the psychology of a sinner. Look at verse 2, God's anger, because they complained, He was displeased and He heard it, '...and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched'. Now what happened? Because they complained God was displeased, because He was displeased, He heard and His anger was kindled and He sent down fire from heaven - and some people, probably around the edges and periphery of the camp, were wiped out because of the fire of God. So what do they do? They run to Moses, run to the man of God! When you're in trouble run to the Pastor, run to the church, run to your spiritual uncle! Isn't that what we do? Pray for me! 'Moses, pray for me!'. What did Moses do? Onto his knees, and he prayed to God, and what happened? It stopped!

Now what did they do next? Verse 3: 'He called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the Lord burnt among them. And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again'. Now this, I've called this: the omnipotence of forgetfulness. This is the sinner's omnipotence - his all ability to forget! To forget what Christ did at the cross, to forget what Christ means to you, to forget how God has blessed you in your life. And at the moment - at that moment when the hairs on the back of your neck rise, and the warm sweat comes onto you, and you're about to contemplate sin - you forget Him! The blindness of the sinner who has just witnessed the consequences of sin, a particular sin, and turns round and commits the exact same sin after they have been saved from it! Is that what you're doing? They forgot that their present existence was from the hand of God.

Let me ask you why you're saved? It wasn't because you made a decision some night, you know. It was because Jesus Christ died 2000 years ago, and if He hadn't died you could make all the decisions you like and they would come to nothing. But it's because He died - that's what you've to thank God for - it's because the Holy Spirit revealed to you that He did die, and He gave you the grace to trust Him, and to make that decision. What about your family? What about the blessings God has given you? What about wealth, success, your job? Who has given you your home, the roof over your head? Who has given you the clothes that you wear? If I asked you that, you would probably say, 'Oh, God did. David, I believe God gave me all these things - of course I believe that!'. Now listen: I'm not talking about a wink and a nod towards God, that when you do something you pray that He blesses it. I'm asking you the question: do you realise that every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights? That what you are, and what you have at this moment of time, is because God has given you these things? But the tragedy could be that those very things that you have desired after, and you have brought to yourself, and brought into your life, are the very things that are making you forget God.

You know, one of the hardest things to handle in life is not failure, but success. What do you do in your life, practically speaking? Do you realise that the place where you are is because of God? That's why they - it says they forgot Him and they sought not His counsel - they didn't seek God's guidance. You see, when you have an important decision to make, do you seek God's face? Do you rely upon your own wisdom, your own

expertise and experience, or do you seek God's face in prayer and search His word for an answer? He wants to tell us the decisions that He wants us to make!

But thirdly: they envied - verse 4 - they envied the unconverted and the carnal. 'The mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?' - the rabble, the mixed multitude, the unbelievers. And what's happening today in our world, and in our churches? The teenager sees the club, they see the pub, and the bar, they see their friends going in - and they hear on a Monday morning about the great time that they had together, vomiting over one another's shoes and dancing all night! They see the hard men, the 'Casanovas', and all the girls that they can get! They see it and they think: 'That's much more exciting than Christ!'. Isn't that right? Or the young graduate sees the executive, the lifestyle, and the luxuries, and the perks that can be achieved quicker if you're in the right crowds, and you learn the right tricks, and they think, 'What am I missing by sticking to Christian principles and precepts? This is a dog-eat-dog world, it's survival of the fittest, and if you don't fight - you'll lose!'. You can trace the pattern of envy right back to sexual behaviour in teenagers, to the way, at times, we can run our churches as businesses.

How do you view the world? Do you copy the world? Do you ape the world when it suits you? Do you naively, superficially, look upon it as something that is tasty and attractive? Or do you see it transparently? Can you see through all the facade, all the rubbish? Can you see past the bright lights and the thrills, to the broken homes, to the venereal diseases, to the substance addiction? Can you see that? Because if you don't - and most likely you're the child of a believer, a Christian parent - the reason is, is the devil has duped you. He is the angel of light, he is a liar from the beginning, he is the father of lies - and that is just how he entraps people in his serpent-way, to get them into the world. And when he gets them in, the sad thing is, he usually entices them by what we find in verse 5: he makes them fantasise about the greener grass. Look at it: 'We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick'. They were murmuring about what they remembered in Egypt - they were in the middle of slavery, but they forgot readily that God had saved them, all they could remember was the great food that they had, and now they don't have any food. They're free! They're saved! But the grass is greener on the other side of the Red Sea. Isn't that always the way? It's the psychology of sin again. You take an alcoholic, and I guarantee you that a lot of them for the rest of their days will still have a temptation to drink. The very thing that maybe destroyed their life, destroyed their marriage - because we are so sinful, that thing still has a pull upon us. One author says this: 'The grass might be greener, but it has no nutritional value'. And when you eat of that grass, it's only the appearance, it's only the sinful attraction - and he gets you! And what ultimately happens is found in verse 6, look at this: 'But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes'. This is the thing I want you to notice: that the gifts of God devalued for them!

Where did it all start? An attitude of discontent with God and His ways; secondly: an ingratitude for their present existence; thirdly: they began to envy the unconverted, and the carnal; fourthly: they fantasised about the grass greener on the other side - and then what happened? The gifts of God devalued for them! Their soul dried away and they said disdainfully, 'Is there nothing for us to eat only this old manna?'. Manna was God's good gift, manna was described as angel's food - bread of heaven - and at one time they were satisfied by God's manna! But because of their downward process of degradation, God and His gift devalued for them! Verse 35 of Psalm 106 says: 'They were mingled among the heathen and they learned their works'. The hymn writer expressed it poetically, and well, when he said: 'Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His word? What peaceful hours I once enjoyed, how sweet their memory still - but they have left an aching void that the world can never fill!'

You see, this is sin's vicious circle - it goes round and round. When you sin your fellowship is broken with God, then when you hear the word of God it makes you uneasy, so you try not to hear or read the word of

God because you don't want to be made uneasy. And let's face it: we don't want to feel uneasy! And it's the continual, vicious circle of the deceitfulness of sin - and the amazing thing is this: all these steps, so far, were before they committed the sin! You see, sin isn't an act, it's as much an attitude.

Do you have no desire after God's gifts? Do you have no desire after prayer? Do you have no desire to hear or to read the word of God? Do you have no passion in you to fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ, and at every opportunity be among them? Have you no desire to go out to that world and shout at the top of your voice that Jesus died for sinners? If not, consciously or unconsciously, you've probably been grazing in the other field, with the greener grass - you've probably pitched your tent towards Sodom.

But finally, and I want to leave this with you: God - and this is tragic - God often lets you stay in your sin until it sickens you. We see it in verse 19 and 20: 'Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?'. This is amazing, God answered their sinful request! Spurgeon says: 'Prayer can be answered in anger and denied in love' - and because a man gets the desire of his heart from God, does not mean that it was a spiritual desire. How many of you - and let's think about this - have seen a man become richer, in body, in intellect, but poorer in soul? How many young people have you seen get married, and acquired a family, and no longer have time for God? How many Christian preachers have acquired a reputation, or an education, and lost the Spirit's anointing - because they fed the flesh and not the spirit? It says that 'it came out of their nostrils' - that's disgusting isn't it? Do you know why? Because it is disgusting!

I want to exhort you, as we close, not to waste your Christian life or your unsaved life any more in sin. But do what Daniel did, who purposed in his heart that he would not eat the king's meat, and out of all the candidates for government, he out of them all, prospered the most. He starved the flesh, and God fed his spirit.

Let us pray, and if you are backslidden, you need to repent and plead the blood of Christ in your life, and leave sin and follow Christ. If you're not saved, you need to do the same: turn from your sin, plead the blood of Christ, and follow Him. But we all need to do business with God on a daily basis - and keep short accounts with Him - and if you need to, be done with sin and do it now. Now unto Him that is able to keep us from stumbling, be eternal glory, dominion, and power in Christ's name. Amen.

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