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Sermon Notes

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A Heart Set on Pilgrimage

Psalm 84

I. Introduction: The Christian Life a Pilgrimage

A. Compulsion of *Pilgrim's Progress*

B. Pilgrimage Around the World

1. Ancient Pagan religions in Greece... "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians"
2. Islam: called a "Hajj" once in lifetime obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca
3. Hindus travel to the Ganges River to bathe in its water and supposedly wash away their sins
4. Buddhists in Japan: Island of Shikoku had 88 Buddhist temples... [look up on Internet "Pilgrim's Progress" and the #1 choice was www.dharmatours.org specializing in Buddhist Pilgrimages in Nepal & Tibet
5. Medieval Catholicism: holy relics, Rome with the Holy Staircase & Via Dolorosa, Canterbury Tales (origination of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*)

C. Basic Concept of Pilgrimage: "locality of deity"... God is "more here" than "there"

D. Evangelical Christianity

1. Rejects concept of pilgrimage... God is spirit, God is everywhere
2. BUT modern evangelicalism has lost sense of TRUE SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE
 - a. Christianity originally called the "Way"... implies a Journey to God

Jn 14:6 "I am the Way the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me"

- b. evangelicalism: static... only one "Pilgrimage"--the "Sawdust trail" down the aisle
- c. "Brother, are you saved?" means "Have you prayed the sinner's prayer"
- d. journey of sanctification lost... static view of "salvation" equals only forgiveness of sins... justification only

3. Puritan vision: clearest vision journey of Sanctification central part of true salvation
 4. No one wrote more vividly or picturesquely about this Pilgrimage than did Bunyan
- John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* a perfect example of this... "Through many dangers toils and snares" Christian makes it to the Celestial City... through the Slough of Dispond, the Hill Difficulty, the Valley of Humiliation (where he battled Apollyon), through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, through Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle... through also the pleasant stops of refreshment as well...the Christian life is indeed a Pilgrimage

II. Old Covenant Shadow: A Pilgrimage to Zion

A. Law of Moses Ordained a Pilgrimage

1. Three times per year, all Jewish men had to make pilgrimage
 - a. Exodus ordained the three feasts (Exodus 23:14-17)
 - i) Feast of Unleavened Bread ii) Feast of Harvest Firstfruits iii) Feast of Ingathering
 - b. Deuteronomy clarified the need to TRAVEL to a special place

B. From Tabernacle to Temple

David yearned to build a cedar temple for God's Ark... but Solomon built it instead

It was not immense or imposing... BUT it was exquisite in beauty...

Haggai 2:3 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?'

It was Blessed with Heavenly Glory

1 Kings 8:11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

It was to this temple that the Pilgrims traveled three times a year!!

From Dan to Beersheba, they would begin their ascent to Jerusalem... they would travel the highways built in the Promised Land leading to Mt. Zion, the City of David—Jerusalem.

C. "Songs of Ascents": Hymns of Jewish Pilgrims

Psalms 120 through 134 labeled "Song of Ascents"

D. Psalm 84

1. Yearning for the Temple, Yearning for God (vs. 1-4)
2. Pilgrimage to the Temple, Pilgrimage to God (vs. 5-7)
3. Prayer for the Anointed King, Blessed by God (vs. 8-9)
4. Celebration of Life at the Temple, Blessed by God (vs. 10-12)

1. Yearning for the Temple, Yearning for God (vs. 1-4)

vs. 1-4 How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! 2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. 3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young-- a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

- a. Psalmist remembers past pilgrimages to the temple
- b. memory stirred by temple's spectacular beauty
- c. more than that, Temple reminds singer of God Himself... Temple represents fellowship with the Lord Almighty
- d. so, the Psalmist's soul is deeply stirred with hunger for true fellowship with God

2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

- e. sparrow and swallow are details he observed: basic lesson PROXIMITY MEANS SECURITY

3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young-- a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

The sparrow a symbol of worthlessness: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?"

The swallow a symbol of restlessness: able to wing its way for hundreds of miles without lighting

The sparrow finds its worth near God... the swallow find his peace and rest near God

If I can only be near you, O Lord, like the sparrow and swallow—I would love to live with you forever! I would love to gaze on your beauty and praise you day after day!

And so, the Pilgrim begins his pilgrimage

2. Pilgrimage to the Temple, Pilgrimage to God (vs. 5-7)

vs. 5-7 *Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. 6 As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.*

a. strength for the Pilgrimage: God Himself

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you...”

b. commitment to Pilgrimage: from the heart

vs. 5 *“... blessed are those who have set their hearts on pilgrimage”*

NOTE: Hebrew word is “highways”... referred to raised roads: center surface built up, ditches at left and right side for drainage

“Blessed is the man who sets his heart on the highways”

c. even toughest part of journey blessed

vs. 6 *As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.*

“Baca” may be related to the Hebrew word for “weeping”

d. renewed strength as the Pilgrim needs it

vs. 7 *They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.*

At the end, everyone makes it to Zion!! No one is left behind, or fails to complete the journey

NOTE: collective sense of pilgrimage... no one is traveling this road alone!!

NOTE ALSO: ultimate goal of Pilgrimage is “appearing before God in Zion”

3. Prayer for the Anointed King, Blessed by God (vs. 8-9)

vs. 8-9 *Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Selah 9 Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.*

a. as the pilgrims makes his way up to Jerusalem, his heart thinks of the whole nation

- b. his mouth utters a prayer for God to bless the Davidic King, the descendent of David
- c. “Anointed One” = Messiah, in Greek “the Christ”

NOTE: “shield” (magen) here probably means “Sovereign” or “Benefactor”... the protective King who goes out on behalf of the people to fight their battle for them; from the booty of His spoils, the whole nation is blessed... So also verse 11: The Lord God is a sun and a “shield”... i.e. Sovereign King is acts as Benefactor for His people

4. Celebration of Life at the Temple, Blessed by God (vs. 10-12)

vs. 10-12 Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. 12 O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

- a. total superiority of being near God over anything wickedness has to offer
- b. life of a Pilgrim a life of choices... one thing is better than the other!!
- c. even a humble life of service in God’s house better than the highest honor a wicked man can bestow
- d. God’s is a constantly generous provider
- e. God is NEVER stingy

vs. 11 no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless

Satan constantly tempts the Pilgrim to think of the sacrifices he’s making to walk the Pilgrim Way... but actually God withholds NOTHING

- f. ultimately a life of faith and trust in God

12 O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Scripture is totally consistent: salvation comes through faith alone... only those who TRUST in God, who put their confidence in Him, will enjoy His richest blessings

NOW... this is the Old Covenant understanding of Psalm 84: the song of a Pilgrim who deeply yearns for fellowship with God in the temple courts

But this was merely the shadow... the reality is found in Christ

III. New Covenant Reality: Christ

A. Christ IS the Temple, and the Entire Sacrificial System

1. Moses saw vision of the heavenly reality that is Christ... the Tabernacle was merely the earthly shadow of that reality

Hebrews 8:1-5 [Earthly high priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

2. Christ's death on the cross abolished forever the Temple sacrifices

Hebrews 10:14 ... by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

3. With that, Christ became the place where God and Man meet for fellowship

In John 2, Jesus called His body a temple: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith

4. This is why there is no longer any earthly place of pilgrimage

[Samaritan woman] John 4:21-24 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

No longer a "place" where people would have to go to worship... through Christ, everyone who believes can worship God directly in Spirit and in truth

Illus. Pilgrims of Plymouth Plantation were not making a pilgrimage TOWARD anything, but more AWAY from harassment of England and the decadence of Holland... all they needed for their worship was to be left along someplace on earth

BUT... there IS a pilgrimage!!! A **SPIRITUAL** PILGRIMAGE!!!

B. Christ IS the Pilgrimage

John 14:1-6 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

1. There is a destination

"... my Father's house"

2. There is a journey to be traveled

"You know the way to the place where I am going" "No one comes to the Father except through me."

"Already and not yet"... Already intimate fellowship with the Father... not yet FULL fellowship in the Father's house!! We are still distant and need to come close

3. The Pilgrim way IS Christ

The earthly pilgrimage is FULFILLED in Christ and in His New Covenant

BUT this is an ALREADY / NOT YET matter... we are already "home" in Christ... but we still have a Pilgrimage to make

IV. Future Perfection: Heavenly Glory

The Old Covenant context was of a faith-filled Pilgrim longing to be in Jerusalem, to be near God

The New Covenant context is of a faith-filled Pilgrim trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and walking with Christ daily through growth in holiness

The Ultimate fulfillment is face to face fellowship with God in heaven, transformed by His glory into glory... Jesus is the perfect, heavenly temple!!

NAS Psalm 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

A. Beauty of Christ's Glory: Christ is the Sun

1. Psalmist begins with yearning for the beauty of God's temple

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!

2. No earthly beauty could compare with the beauty of the glorified Christ
3. Psalmist calls God a "sun"... Christ is the perfect fulfillment of this
 - a. in His earthly ministry

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory

- b. even more in His heavenly perfection **TURN TO REVELATION 21**

Revelation 21:22-23 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

B. Eternal Dwelling Place in Perfect Proximity to God

1. God's glory through Christ will illuminate all of heaven

Revelation 21:10-11 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

The Holy City ARE former Pilgrims... people who have been made perfect by God's grace... now they are fully united with each other and permeated with God's glory

2. The Perfect Beauty of that Eternal Home is Indescribable! Every Color Represented

Revelation 21:18-21 "The wall of the city was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh

chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.... The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.”

**Red: sapphire Orange: chrysolite Yellow: topaz Green: emerald Blue: beryl
Indigo: jacinth Violet: amethyst**

Transparent gold?? What is that? Well, everything has to be transparent to allow the glory of God and of Christ to radiate through them

There is no beauty apart from God and from the Lamb... and that heavenly beauty is absolutely perfect!! All aspects of color are merely aspects of Christ, attributes of His perfection.

And His people will receive and be transformed by that glory as well!! TURN BACK TO PSALM 84

NAS Psalm 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

First grace (forgiveness of sins and the whole redemption plan), then glory

And who gets that glory? Pilgrims walking by faith along the Pilgrim Way:

“No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly!!”

Walking uprightly means walking moment by moment by faith in Christ

12 O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

3. God’s people will dwell in perfect proximity to Him

Like the sparrow and swallow, they make their home near God...

Like the Sons of Korah, they spend eternity praising God

But even better, God is not only NEAR them by His glory permeates them forever

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 22:3-4 The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

V. Present Application: Set Your Heart on Pilgrimage

A Pilgrimage Characterized by:

A. Yearning for Christ's Heavenly Glory

Flavel: Is Jesus Christ altogether lovely? Then I beseech you set your souls upon this lovely Jesus. I am sure such an object as has been here represented, would compel love from the coldest breast and hardest heart. Away with those empty nothings, away with this vain deceitful world, which deserves not the thousandth part of the love you give it. Let all stand aside and give way to Christ. O if only you knew his worth and excellency, what he is in himself, what he has done for you, and deserved from you, you would need no arguments of mine to persuade you to love him! Esteem nothing lovely except as it is enjoyed in Christ, or used for the sake of Christ.

Colossians 3:1-4 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This constant yearning to see Christ's glory and be transformed by it will expel the idols from your hearts!!

Walk as a hungry Pilgrim... an alien and stranger here on earth; yearning for the day when at last you will see Christ face to face... beholding Him in His beauty

B. Trusting in Christ Alone

C. Being Strengthened Daily by Christ's Power

vs. 5-7 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. ...7 They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness from glory to glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

D. Persevering through Christ's Sufferings

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

Illus: Christiana in the Valley of Humiliation

[Great-Heart, escorting Christiana and her children] "This Valley of Humiliation is of itself as fruitful a place as any crow flies over... It is the best and most useful piece of ground in all those parts. It is a fat ground, and as you can see, consisteth much in meadows; and if a man was to come here in the summertime, as we do now, if he knew not anything before thereof, and if he also delighted himself in the sight of his eyes, he might see that it would be delightful to him. Behold how green this valley is, also how beautiful with lilies. I have also known many labouring men that have got good estates in this Valley of Humiliation, for 'God resisteth the proud, but gives more, more grace to the humble.' For indeed it is a very fruitful soil, and doth bring forth by handfuls."

Thomas Watson: The humble man is contented; if his estate be low, his heart is lower still. He that is little in his own eyes, will not be much troubled at being little in the eyes of others."

Matthew Henry: Those circumstances that will not disturb a humble man's sleep, will break a proud man's heart."

E. Growing Consistently in Christ's Holiness

vs. 10 I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

1. Salvation is bigger than walking the aisle... "Getting saved"
2. Justification is always followed by sanctification... daily, gradual growth in Christlikeness
3. The Pilgrim Way is the Way of Holiness... there is no other!!

Isaiah 35:8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.

F. Being Blessed Daily through Christ's Provision

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

1. Daily provision from Christ is the sweetest of earthly blessing
2. Genius of Pilgrim's Progress: Bunyan understood the rhythm of the Christian journey... times of severe trial (the Hill Difficulty, Valley of Humiliation, Valley of Shadow of Death, battling Giant Despair or Grim), times of delightful refreshment (at shady arbor, at Palace Beautiful, at Gaius or Mnason's house)

G. Enjoying Fellowship with Christ's Pilgrims

2. Christian had Faithful and Hopeful to travel with
3. So also we enjoy sweet fellowship with others traveling that Pilgrim Way
4. That fellowship will be perfected in heaven, when at last we see Christ face to face and we are "one" as He and His Father are "one"