

The Best Place On Earth

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 February 2023

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] I want to ask you, what's the best place in the world? If you could visit anywhere, if you had like a free ticket to go anywhere for a week in the whole world, where would you go?

Haven't you thought that before? I've thought that before. You know, where would you go if you could go anywhere in the world? Maybe there's a particular favorite place you just think is the best place in the world. Well, I looked online at some travel brochures and I found these places, for example.

Jane Chateau in Aspen, Colorado. Now, let me just tell you about the Jane Chateau. It's surrounded by the beautiful Rocky Mountains and you've got like 360 degree views of the Rocky Mountains around you.

You can go out and ski. There's ski slopes right outside. And when you're not outside, inside there's exclusive premium art. There are six bedrooms, nine bathrooms, an indoor swimming pool, a wine cellar, three bars, a full gym, a grand piano, and a recreation room with a number of games and entertainments.

Don't you think that would be an amazing place to spend a week or so? Or here's another one. The Via di Cassonella in Italy.

[1 : 12] This is on a lake. It's only accessible by boat. It has a floodlit tennis court, a heated infinity pool, finished with 22 carat gold tiles, a gym, seven acres of garden, and a private motorboat on call.

Wouldn't you like to stay there? Wouldn't that be an amazing place to visit? Would you go there if you could? I think so. Maybe there's another place.

Maybe there's another place that if you could, you would go there. Well, sorry, you probably can't go to places like this in this life because they cost over \$300,000 per night.

And so the best you can do is probably read about them in the travel brochures, which is depressing itself. I don't know about you, but when you read about these places in travel brochures, I get more depressed than happy reading about all the places I can't go in this life.

But this morning, I want to do something different. I want to open up a different type of travel brochure. Because that's what Psalm 84 actually is. It's a travel brochure to convince you to go somewhere.

[2 : 29] Specifically, Psalm 84 is written to convince God's people at the time, the Israelites, to go to the temple in Jerusalem.

It's one of the Psalms of Ascent in the book of Psalms, which are all written to encourage and motivate Israelites to take the pilgrimage to go to Jerusalem and go to the temple.

And this Psalm, Psalm 84, is an important one because it's written to convince you that that is the best place in the world. It's written to convince the Israelites, firstly, that the temple in Jerusalem is the best place in the world.

That that location on earth is better than the Jeanne Chateau in Aspen or the Villa di Cassinella in Italy. And the reason that the temple in Jerusalem was better than any of those other places you could go is because when this was written, that was the place on earth where God dwelt.

And there is therefore no better place for a human to be than where God is. And this morning, I want to try to convince you of the same thing.

[3 : 44] And I want to tell you where that is today and how you can get there. So the first thing we notice in the Psalm, have a look. Psalm 84.

The first thing we notice in the Psalm is that the Psalmist is not there at the moment. Psalmist is not there. But he longs to be there. Look at verse 1 and 2.

How lovely is your dwelling place. How lovely it is. O Lord of armies. I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and flesh cry out for the living God. Have a look at those two verses there. What's on the heart of the Psalmist? He has a deep longing, doesn't he?

He longs to be at the temple in Jerusalem because that is a unique space on earth. He knows it. At the time that this Psalm was written, that temple was a unique space on earth.

[4 : 47] There was no place on earth like it because it was the place where the real presence of the real God was available. It was literally the place where heaven and earth overlapped.

Where both of those realms occupied the same space. And that's why he yearns to be there. He knows this is an amazing place.

There's no place like it. He yearns for it. Because think about it. Greater than any place filled with God's gifts.

Like the chateau in Aspen or the villa in Italy. Better than any place filled with God's good gifts is a place that is filled with God himself.

Surely. The source from which all good things come. The source from which all pleasures flow. And that's why the Psalmist yearns. That word yearn in the original is a hunger.

[5 : 46] It's the same word used to describe a lion seeking for prey. There's a hunger. There's a yearning. If you've ever fallen in love and then you've been separated for a time from the person you're in love with.

You know what that feeling is? It's this deep yearning. This deep longing that can only be satisfied when you're back with that person. Well that's how the Psalmist is feeling about the place where God dwells.

He's got a deep yearning for it. And the reason is because he has experienced the happiness of being there. He has experienced before the happiness of being in God's presence.

That's why he knows that the dwelling place of God is lovely. Because he's experienced it. And that's why he says in verse 4, How happy are those who reside in your house.

How happy. The word in your Bible might be blessed. A very religious word. But it literally just means really, really happy. And he's saying how happy are those who reside there where God dwells.

[6 : 49] And he's not trying to be pious. But he's trying to convince the reader of this Psalm that there is true happiness to be found in that place. True happiness. Do you want to be truly happy?

I think that is a universal feeling, isn't it? We all want to be happy. We all want happiness. And we all seek happiness in the best ways we can. Whether it's through relationships or our hobbies.

Or sport. We all do those things, actually, if you boil it down. Because we want to be happy. We want those to give us happiness. How's that going, by the way?

How successful are you in the things you seek for happiness? Is it working? Maybe. To a greater or lesser degree.

But this Psalm is written. The Psalmist wants you to know that that happiness that you seek deep down inside is available. And it can be found in the place that God dwells.

[7 : 52] You were made to find your happiness in Him. Look at verse 10 of Psalm 84. It says, Better a day in your courts than a thousand anywhere else. There is no other thing on earth, no matter where you go.

No matter what you can find to give you happiness. And there's a lot of things out there that can make you happy. But He says, Better is one day in the courts of God than a thousand anywhere else.

He knows that that is the place where true happiness, real happiness can be found. I wonder if you believe that. I wonder if you really believe that.

I wonder if you really believe that experiencing God's real presence can make you happier than anything else on earth. Do you really believe that?

Because if you did. If you really believe that experiencing the presence of God is the source to the ultimate happiness that nothing else can give.

[8 : 52] Right? Well then you will seek that with all your heart. And you will put everything else aside. To seek that. And to get there.

The question is. How do you? How do you get into that place where God's presence dwells?

Where you can actually experience and enjoy the presence of God on earth? Well, the psalm says we've got to go to the temple. The place on earth where God made his presence really available for a time in history.

But where is that now? Because it's no longer the temple in Jerusalem. Where now is the place that heaven and earth overlap? Where is the place where God's real presence can be found?

And you can experience it. Really experience it and find happiness in it. Where? Is it the church building? Lots of people love visiting church buildings.

[9 : 57] You know those, especially those old ones. Built of stone. And they've got these high ceilings and this amazing stained glass. And you walk in there. I've visited a few overseas.

And you just feel this kind of awe of this presence. And lots of people love just going in there and sitting and praying. And they feel the real presence of God in that place.

Or maybe the modern version with smoke machines and lights. And you go into what's called the sanctuary of God. You know, often you go into those big mega churches. And they've got

The place. There's the lights. And the music. And the sound. And the experience. And you come into the sanctuary. That's the language that's used. And you feel excited. Something within you lifts up.

Because you've come into the house of God. Or maybe for you it's not church building so much that you find the presence of God.

[10 : 55] Maybe it's nature. Maybe it's nature. I've spoken to some surfers in Muesenberg. Who say, The ocean is my church, man. And maybe for you, Maybe for you it's hiking out in the mountains.

And you experience just the birds and the silence. And creation around you. And you look at this amazing sunrise coming over the sea. And you just, you know, you feel the presence of God.

And those are all great things. You know, the architecture of these old churches. Nature. Nature. But you know, the Bible doesn't say that any of those places are where God is found.

Those are not the temples. It's not a church building. It's not up in the mountains that you find the presence of God. You know what the Bible says?

The Bible says you find the presence of God in the loving community of spirit-filled Christians. 1 Corinthians 3 verse 16.

[11 : 59] What does it say? It says, Don't you yourselves know that you are God's temple. And that the spirit of God lives in you.

And that you, I've said it before and I'll say it again. That word you in the original Greek is not singular. It's not you, individual, are God's temple. But you, the community of Christians, is where God dwells.

Followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whose sins have been forgiven by His death. Which, by the way, the death of Jesus on the cross fulfilled all of the sacrifices that happened outside the Old Testament temple.

And that was, by the way, the reason that the temple in Jerusalem was the only place you could go to find the presence of God. Why? Because it was the only place where atonement could be made. Effective atonement that God accepted. And He only accepted that actually because it was fulfilled later in Christ. But that was the only reason that you could find God's presence there.

[13 : 04] And that He allowed humans to approach Him was because there was a place of atonement. Well, that today is found in Christ. And so now all who truly trust in Christ and have been justified.

And their sins have been forgiven. And they are being sanctified. And their lives are therefore infused by the Holy Spirit when they get together. And I'm not just talking about on Sunday.

The Bible says when they actually share their lives and they start to learn to love each other deeply with this heavenly power and a type of love that you can't find in the world.

But is available through the Holy Spirit in the community of Christians. But they've got to go and learn to do that. And when they do that and they love each other deeply with this heavenly power, that is the place on earth where God dwells and there is no other place like it in all the earth.

That is the place that heaven and earth overlap. And that is the place today where God's presence can be found. More than even in your personal quiet time.

[14 : 09] Good and healthy as that is. Vital as that is. But there's a reason. Jesus says in Matthew 18 verse 20. Where two or three are gathered together in my name.

There I am among them. Now he's not saying that he's not accessible privately to a Christian. But the Bible teaches that he manifests his Holy Spirit in the Christian community gathered together in a way that you can't experience at home by yourself.

That's what the Bible teaches. Now let me ask you if that's true. If that is the way God has chosen to manifest his power and his presence on earth today.

If that is the place within the relationships of Christians loving each other with this new type of love that the Holy Spirit enables them to love with. If that is the place where God has said he can be found today.

And his power can be accessed. And his presence can be experienced. Don't you want to be there? I mean imagine.

[15:21] Imagine for a second. That Jesus was coming to visit Plumstead. Okay. Just roll with me for a second here. Imagine Jesus said to us.

Somehow. That he is coming to visit Plumstead. He'll be available at Plumstead Public Library from 5 to 6 on Wednesday evening. Okay. Now this is.

And he's going to be there in the flesh. He's going to. You can see him. You can meet him. And he says he's going to be there. Wednesday evening. What did I say? 5 to 6. 6 to 7.

5 to 7. Whatever. He says he's going to be there. And he guarantees you he's going to be there. This is God the Son. The King of Glory. Through whom the cosmos was made.

And he's going to be in Plumstead Public Library. On Wednesday evening. Let me ask you. How much effort would you make to be there? What would you put aside of what you were currently doing?

[16:20] Whatever other plans you had for Wednesday night. What would you put aside to be there? To be in the presence of the King of Glory. Well if you're not willing to put those same things aside to be with your Christian community.

Then you don't yet realize that that is where he is present. In a real and powerful way today. We should feel about being with Christians.

The same way the psalmist felt about being in the temple. How lovely is your dwelling place. Lord of armies. How lovely it is.

How happy I am. When I am in real Christian loving community. And we should be taking every opportunity.

To be with our Christian brothers and sisters. And putting other things aside to do that. When you're invited. By a Christian brother or a sister to get together.

[17:23] Grab that opportunity. Because that is no ordinary social event. When Christians gather together. Especially when they gather together around God's word. If you have an opportunity to be part of a growth group.

Take it. And if you don't. Then carve out time. For that. Because. When we gather together with other Christians around God's word.

And we're filled with the Holy Spirit. And we learn to love deeply. And we allow others to love us deeply. God promises that there you will experience his powerful presence.

In your life. And how will that happen if you don't actually make time. To be with them. If you're not in regular Christian community.

Outside of just church. Then you're not experiencing God's presence in your life. The way he wants you to. And even if you are. You can experience it more.

[18:22] You should be longing and yearning for it. And you can experience it better. And deeper. If you would just take the necessary steps to do that.

Because you know what the psalm goes on to tell us? Psalm 84. It doesn't just tell us. That we should desire to be where God is present.

But it goes on to tell us. That we should get off the couch. And leave our comfort zone. And go there. That's what verses 5 and 6 are all about actually. Look at them.

Happy are the people whose strength is in you. Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. You might have a different translation. But that's the essence of it. Whose heart is set on going to where God is present.

Who have set their hearts on that. They've got up off the couch. And they've packed their bags. And they're making the pilgrimage there. Verse 6. As they pass through the valley of Barca.

[19 : 21] You know that was a very arid valley. There wasn't much growing there. Very hot in the Middle East. And it was a valley that was quite a trial. For the pilgrims to walk through on the way to Jerusalem.

But what happens? Verse 6. They make it a source of spring water. Even the autumn rain will cover it with blessings. You know when this psalm was originally written to the ancient Israelites.

The journey to go to the temple in Jerusalem was very costly. It would cost you a lot of money. And a lot of time. And a lot of effort.

And it was uncomfortable. It was much easier to stay at home in your little village. And carry on just doing what you do. Much easier to stay in your comfort zone.

But the psalm promises those pilgrims. It's a promise. It's a psalm of ascent. It's a promise to the pilgrims. That as they make the effort to go to where God is present. Where they know God is present.

[20 : 24] As they make the effort to reach the temple. Even as they're going there. They will be blessed unexpectedly. What they thought were arid valleys will become places of refreshing. And it's the same for us.

When we leave our comfort zones. To step out. And to go to where God has said his presence is available. To be in real Christian community.

To be in real Christian community. And I'm not talking about just seeing a person once a week. And having a cup of coffee with them. I'm talking about real Christian community. Where we are loving each other deeply.

Where we have a loyalty to one another. That outstrips our loyalty even to our nuclear family.

Because this is our eternal family. To love in that way. To develop that kind of community.

Where God says he is present. That's going to cost you. That's going to cost us. It's uncomfortable. Especially in our culture we live in. Which is so individualistic. It's uncomfortable.

[21 : 25] We'd much rather be at home. Living our carefully curated lives. Where we're in control of our time. But the promise of Psalm 84.

Is that as you take those steps. As you make those sacrifices of time and effort. You will be blessed unexpectedly. The arid valleys will actually become places of blessing.

What you think is costly. Oh. Oh. It's growth group this evening. Man. I've had such a hard day at work. We've got so much going on in our lives.

I just need this night to recharge. When you actually get up and go. Those end up becoming the most refreshing times of your week. More refreshing than you could ever get.

Sitting at home watching Netflix. Because that is the place where God dwells. And he's told us that. And so if you say you don't have time for that.

[22 : 29] You're saying to God. I don't have time to be in your presence. I don't have time to be in the place that you have said. I can access your real presence. And I don't really believe that your presence can make me truly happier than anything else on earth.

But it can. And it will. If only you are willing to make the pilgrimage. And you know how that starts? Because God is not present at the Jerusalem temple.

But God is present in the community of believers loving each other deeply. around the word. For you to go to get up off the couch and make the pilgrimage to the place where God dwells.

Requires. It starts just with committing yourself to a group of Christian brothers and sisters. And really committing yourself. Whether it's a growth group at church.

Which is what they're for. Or maybe you're in a place that you can't go to a growth group. But there are Christians there. Committing yourself to a group like that.

[23 : 36] Committing yourself to a growth group at St. Mark's. And learning to love those people deeply. And taking the time to spend with them so that you can get to know them deeply.

And love them deeply. That's how it starts. Jesus said, As I have loved you, so now love one another.

This is what he said. It's the command he's given. His new commandment he gave to his disciples. As I have loved you, now love one another. Jesus didn't love you once a week.

Jesus didn't love you just because he liked your conversation. Or you had something in common.

Or it benefited him to be with you. And so that shouldn't be the criteria with which we love one another.

When we learn to love each other as Jesus loves us, it's then that we start to taste heaven and find a joy that nothing else on earth can give.

[24 : 43] Let's pray. Oh Lord, we confess that we are not spiritually healthy.

but we thank you for giving us one another and putting your spirit amongst us so that as we take the time to be together and to do what you commanded, Lord Jesus, to love one another as you have loved us.

We thank you that you promised that we will experience your very presence with us. Lord, I pray for anybody here who is not connected to Christian brothers and sisters deeply, more than just on Sunday.

I pray, Lord, that you would move them to make the pilgrimage, to take the steps that are necessary so that they might know you deeper, more intimately and then they might experience the happiness of being in the place where heaven and earth overlap.

Lord, would you move us this year to love one another as a Christian community genuinely, deeply and would you be glorified in that in Jesus' name.

[26 : 12] Amen.