

Psalm 84:10-12

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[0 : 00] If you could live anywhere, where would it be? Even in posing the question, I fear that I may have lost you now as you fantasize about a Caribbean or maybe even a Hebridean paradise.

Well, as you ponder on where you would choose to live if you could live anywhere. What about way down under? What about in Australia?

I don't know how many of you have seen the program, maybe parts of the program, Wanted Down Under. Those of you who have will know exactly the format. For those of you who haven't, just very briefly, the program involves a family who dream of living in Australia, being given one week down under to experience this possibility for a new life.

And so they view houses. They explore employment opportunities. They taste something of the lifestyle. They discover about the cost of living and all of these things they think about and ponder on.

And then they have to choose. They have to make their choice as to whether that is indeed where they wish to go and live. And as the program comes to its conclusion, the family members, they're given a piece of board, like an A4 size like this.

[1 : 31] And on one side they have the Union Jack. On the other side they have the Australian flag. Not a sermon. But they have a flag on both sides. And they spin this little board around.

And we're waiting for the outcome. Maybe I'm very easily entertained but I get quite excited about what the outcome will be. And they're spinning the board around and then they have to decide what flag they'll place before the camera.

The Union Jack or the Australian flag. And they make their choice. Where it is they would live. Where is their preferred place to spend their lives.

And then having chosen, of course you sometimes have disagreements. And not always do all family members agree. And you can just imagine the trouble that brings when they're split down the middle or there's one who stubbornly wishes to stay in the UK.

Well anyway. But then they give their reasons. They give their reasons. Well this is why I want to live in Australia. Or why I want to remain in the UK. In the closing verses of our psalm that we've been giving thought to over these past couple of weeks.

[2 : 45] The psalmist shares with us a choice that he has already made concerning where he longs to be and to live.

Both in this life and I think also his desire extends beyond this life to eternity.

Notice what he says in verse 10. The first of the three verses that we want to give some thought to this morning. 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. He declares what his choice is.

Where he wants to be. Where he wants to live. But as well as being presented with a choice.

[3 : 43] Or in this case the outcome of a choice that has been made. The psalm closes with what we could call a challenge. And this morning what I want to do is spend a little time giving thought to both the choice and the challenge that we find in these verses that close the psalm.

And we'll start with the choice. Now in considering the psalmist's choice we can distinguish between the choice declared and the choice explained.

In verse 10 the verse that we've read we have the choice declared. He declares what his choice is. But then in verse 11 he explains why he had come to that conclusion.

Verse 11 begins, For the Lord God is. And then he continues. And really what he's doing is he's explaining the reason of his choice. This is where I want to be.

This is where I want to live. And here are the reasons why. So we have a choice declared. The outcome of his pondering declared.

[4 : 55] But then also he very helpfully explains for us why he has so chosen. And so we can think about these two aspects of what really is the same matter.

But two aspects that give us insights into this whole matter of the choice in question. So let's think about his choice declared first and then we'll move on to the explanation he gives.

Now what has he chosen between? Well what he's chosen between the options that he presents or that were before him were basically two.

He had the option, the choice to live in God's courts. To use the language that we have in the psalm. To live in God's courts or to live in God's house. Or to live in the tents of the wicked.

Again, simply using the language that the psalmist himself uses. These were the choices before him. To live in God's house or to live or to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

[5 : 58] Now when the psalmist writes these words. And those of you who have been able to be with us the past couple of weeks. You'll know this and you're familiar with this. When the psalmist was writing what he had in his mind's eye was the temple in Jerusalem.

This is what he was so drawn to. This is what he longed to be. This was a physical place. It was Jerusalem and within Jerusalem the temple or the tabernacle. Depending on when the psalm was actually composed.

But we know that even for the psalmist and especially for us. The matter isn't about physical location. It's about the choice between living close to God or living far from God.

These really were the two options. Before the psalmist and he came to a conclusion on what was his preferred option. To be near to God. To be close to God.

To live with God. Or to live far from God. To live as if God did not exist. To do your own thing. In your own way. In your own time with no reference to God.

[7 : 07] These were the choices. And really they're the choices that stand before all of us this morning. They're the choice that stands between everybody. Whether they recognize that such a choice even exists or not.

To be with God. Or to be against God. To be close to God. Or to be far from him. Well what was the choice of the psalmist given the options that he had?

Well he declares his choice in this verse. The answer is clear enough. But he presents his choice by means of two contrasts. One contrast is in terms of duration.

And the other is in terms of location. There in verse 10. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. There he speaks of length of time. Or makes reference to length of time.

And then he goes on in the same verse. To speak of being a doorkeeper in the house of my God. In contrast to dwelling in the tents of the wicked. There the reference is to location. Let's just think about these two.

[8 : 06] Better one day. Just one day. As the psalmist ponders on the matter. Just one day with God is better by far than countless days.

Far from him. A thousand. And of course a thousand simply represents. As long a period of time as you could imagine. Better one day.

As we think about this contrast that he paints. Or the manner in which he paints it. And we think about it in terms of the reality for ourselves. The wonderful reality. The beautiful reality.

The glorious reality. Is that we don't need to content ourselves with one day. That isn't actually the choice before us. God isn't saying, well, what will you have? One day with me?

Or a thousand days elsewhere? No. We're not limited to one day with God. In fact, the inverse is the case. When we throw in our lot with God and commit ourselves to him, we enjoy not only one day, but a lifetime and indeed an eternity with him.

[9 : 12] Of course, the sobering contrast is that the world can't offer us that. Anything the world can offer us is fleeting and temporal and passing.

It's mercurial. It's in our hands. And then it slips from us. Better one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

But then in the same verse as he declares his choice, he presents it in terms of location. Where would he rather be? And he speaks of his preference for being a doorkeeper in the house of my God in contrast to dwelling in the tents of the wicked.

Now, it's interesting that this word here in verse 10 that's translated doorkeeper, it's really an attempt by the translators to make sense of a verb that is actually used in the original Hebrew. And the verb could be translated to stand. And so one way of translating this expression here in verse 10 is, I would rather stand on the outer fringes of God's house.

[10:17] I would rather stand in the doorway of God's temple than to lounge in the master bedroom of a palace far from God to change the imagery a little bit.

I would rather stand right in the doorway. That would be a better place for me than the grandest palace the world could offer.

Let me illustrate that contrast that the psalmist presents in the language that he chooses to employ in another way that I hope, perhaps in some measure, can get across the idea or the force of what the psalmist is saying.

A few weeks ago, the McPherson males, and you know, those of you who know our family, we dominate in our family. Poor Martha's in a minority of one.

But the McPherson males headed down to Glasgow for the League Cup semi-final. And we boarded the train in Aberdeen.

[11:18] And it was heaving with fans. You can imagine thousands made their way down to Hamden. We won't think about the outcome of that trip. But we'll just leave that to one sign. I don't want to spoil the atmosphere.

But the point is, we headed down to Glasgow. We got onto the train. And there were so many people that there wasn't going to be enough space for everybody, certainly not, to sit down. So probably very selfishly, but certainly rather deviously, we managed to commandeer a table. And we did have somewhere to sit. But many who came in after us, even some who came in before us, weren't so fortunate and ended up standing.

And you can imagine standing all the way down to Glasgow. It's not particularly comfortable. Well, just imagine if in those circumstances this had happened.

Now, this didn't happen, but just imagine, indulge me, if this had happened. Imagine if, as we were awaiting departure there from Aberdeen Station, and many folk standing, standing room only, imagine if this announcement had been made on the train along these lines.

[12:25] All standing supporters are invited to board the first-class carriages on Platform 2, where they're guaranteed a seat, a much more comfortable seat, a cooked breakfast, free Wi-Fi, and complimentary newspapers.

You just need to move from where you are, standing, uncomfortable, to the trains on the next platform. But there's a sting in the tail. The announcement goes on.

However, be aware that the train in question is going to Inverness. So what are you going to do? You've got a choice.

Discomfort, but heading to where you need to be, heading to where you want to go, heading to where the main attraction is happening, or all the comfort you could imagine, but heading in the opposite direction.

What do you choose? Well, I think it's obvious, isn't it? Any self-respecting Aberdeen fan will stay on that train, however uncomfortable, because that is where he needs to be or she needs to be.

[13:32] Standing room only on the right train is way better than the lap of luxury in a train going in the wrong direction. And I think that's the kind of idea that we have here with the psalmist.

And I would ask you this morning, what about your own life? And I would urge you to be less concerned with the ease of the journey than with the direction of travel.

The direction of travel is what matters. Sometimes we're so consumed with the ease with which we can travel that we lose sight of where we're going, and what merit is there to enjoy ease and comfort if you're heading in the wrong direction.

And it's along these lines that the psalmist expresses, declares his choice. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper. I would rather standing room only in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

And yet, he presents his choice in this manner. But as was the case when we thought about duration, that we don't have to choose just one day with God.

[14:48] So also in this matter of location, God is not offering us only to be on the outer fringes of his house. No, we are invited into his near and dear presence.

So the psalmist declares his choice. Better by far to be with God than to be far from God. But the psalmist also grounds or gives reasons for his choice. And that's what he does in verse 11. So verse 10, his choice declared. And in verse 11, his choice explained. As we noticed at the beginning, the verse begins with this word for or because. And it does so for a good reason. What follows in the verse is an explanation of his declared choice. He answers the question of the hypothetical questioner. Why have you chosen to be with God? You're telling me that it's better to be with God. You're telling me that that's your choice. But why? Why is that your choice? [15 : 57] And he gives an answer. And the answer that he gives involves two or consists in two overlapping reasons for his choice. That we could summarize in this way.

Who God is and what God gives. Who God is and what God gives. If we begin with what he says concerning who God is.

Then in verse 11. For the Lord God is a sun and shield. God is a sun and shield. What do these pictures tell us about God?

What does the picture of God as a sun tell us about God? Well, as we were thinking about a little with the children. The sun is our source of light and life.

And so too with God. He is our light. The one who dispels the darkness and shows us the way to go. God is our life. He grants us life.

[16 : 55] Both physical and spiritual. And the life he gives is life in all its fullness. Or to use the language of the Bible.

It is eternal life. Which isn't really about never ending life. Though it is. It's about quality of life. It's about fullness of life. It's about richness and depth of life. And this is what God gives.

Because that is who he is. Our God is a sun and shield. One writer comments on the sun and on its impact.

And on its purpose. The sun vivifies and nourishes and rejoices the world. And then he compares how that speaks of God.

How his benign countenance. How his gracious smile fills with joy the hearts of his people. Who God is. He is a sun.

[17 : 56] Light and life. God's salvation is all about light and life. The psalmist really joins the two concepts.

As if they were one at the beginning of Psalm 27. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? Who God is. He's a sun.

But also a shield. In the picture of a shield. It's very evident. What is telling us about God. A shield is that which protects from danger and from loss.

The light and life given by God are also secured for us by God. Our very salvation is in perfect safety under his protection.

His shield secures us. It secures us even from ourselves and our own folly and foolishness. And not only our salvation but each of us as his dearly loved children are surrounded by God as our protective shield.

[19 : 00] Why has the psalmist chosen to be near God? Because of who God is. God is a sun. God is a shield. But then also he speaks of or he makes reference to what God gives.

You see he goes on then in verse 11. For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows. He gives. He grants. He bestows favor and honor.

The Lord bestows favor and honor or grace and glory. And to speak of God's favor. To speak of God's grace. And to speak of God's grace very especially as we do today.

In the light of the coming of Jesus and of his saving work. Is to speak of all the benefits of Christ's saving work on our behalf.

We're cleansed. We're justified. We're ransomed. We're forgiven. And so much more. All of this comes under the umbrella of this language of God bestowing favor.

[20 : 06] Of God bestowing grace upon his own. But favor or grace is accompanied by honor or glory.

You see after God has taken the faithful into his favor. He also crowns them with honor and glory.

We are received as sons and daughters of God. We're designated co-heirs with Christ.

We are appointed as ambassadors of heaven. Great. Honor. Honor. Bestowed upon us by God in his grace.

In his generosity. The psalmist goes on. No good thing does he withhold. No good thing. God loves giving.

And his giving is extravagant. Nothing is held back. Nothing held in reserve. No good thing is withheld. And he is the owner of every good thing.

[21 : 04] So any good thing that would be good for us. He owns. He disposes of. And he grants. He withholds nothing from those he loves.

No good thing. James Philip who was the minister in the Tron in Glasgow. Has very helpful notes on really the whole of the Bible.

It's not really a commentary. Bible reading notes I think is what they're called. And you can actually find them on the Tron website. And he says something very interesting with regard to this expression that the psalmist uses.

Or this reality that he speaks of. That God withholds no good thing. And he says this. He that is God gives his best to those who leave the choice to him.

I thought that was a very interesting way of expressing it. God gives his best to those who leave the choice to him. See our great mistake so often as men and women.

[22 : 09] Is that we are the ones who want to decide what is best for us. What is good for me. And we scramble after what we think is best. What we think is good.

And what the psalmist is saying. Is it much wiser to leave the choice to God. We choose God. And he will determine what is good for us.

And he will grant to us what is good for us. And he will withhold no good thing from us. We will be perfectly satisfied with his choices for us.

Rather than frustrated by our foolish choices on behalf of ourselves. A choice declared and a choice explained. And really it was for the psalmist in the light of all that he says.

A no brainer. What is he to choose? Given the reasons that he's given. What is he to choose? To be with God or to be far from God? And it's no contest.

[23 : 08] I trust that that's also true for you. Choose to be close to God. But as the psalm draws to a close. We also find a challenge.

And much more briefly. Let's just notice the challenge that we find. And it's a challenge that we can also consider. Using the categories of declared and explained. Though we'll merge them in what we have to say together.

A challenge declared and explained. What is this challenge? Well, what do we find there at the end of verse 11? For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold. But then what does he say? No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. This is the challenge, if you wish.

The declared challenge. You see, so far in what we've seen, it's all been wonderful. You might think, well, is it too wonderful? Is it too good to be true? And is this seeming condition a blameless life?

[24 : 13] Is this the small print? Or is this the sting in the tail? Yes, God is our sun and shield. God is the one who bestows grace and glory. God who withholds no good thing from us.

Ah, yes. But only from those whose walk is blameless. Houston, we have a problem. Yes, all these wonderful blessings.

But for those whose walk is blameless, what is the problem? Well, the problem is clear. Our walk is not blameless. Your walk is not blameless. My walk is not blameless.

Is the psalmist, is God, playing some cruel, tantalizing game? Is he showing us the banqueting table? But even as he does, is he placing upon us a condition that we cannot meet, that will forever bar us from a place at the table?

We're looking through thick glass to see it, but we can't get in because we're not blameless. Our walk is not blameless. In the light of this seeming problem, what we need to understand is that the man whose walk is blameless is the same man who trusts in you.

[25 : 28] As the psalm ends, O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you. The call or demand for a blameless life goes hand in hand with the call or invitation to trust in God.

And this is the challenge explained, if you wish. This call to trust in God, a trust that is the secret and source of blessedness or happiness, must be understood and acted upon in the light of Jesus and His saving work on our behalf.

It is as we trust in Jesus that the unreachable becomes reachable, the unattainable attainable, the impossible possible, as we put our trust in God's Savior, as we put our trust in the one He has given to be our Savior.

Let me just outline very fleetingly how trusting in Jesus opens the door to the blessings that this psalm describes. It is Jesus, as we trust in Him, who takes us by the hand into the Father's house or presence.

We don't go into the Father's presence alone. We don't go in our own merits. We go held by the hand of Jesus. We pray to Him in Jesus' name, resting on His work on our behalf.

[26 : 49] He takes us in, and without Him by our side, we couldn't possibly enter in, but we can with Jesus and trusting in Jesus.

It is Jesus, as we trust in Him, who clothes us for the Father's house or presence. Jesus clothes us with His righteousness, His blameless life, if you wish.

And so when the Father sees us approaching, He sees the righteousness of Jesus. He sees us, as we are in Jesus, blameless, righteous.

And so all these blessings correspond to us. It is Jesus, as we trust in Him, who helps us in the here and now, as we still struggle with sin and disobedience.

It is Jesus who helps us to walk in a manner that befits the Father's house, the Father's presence.

In the here and now, we are indwelt with the Spirit of Jesus that we might, little by little, become ever more like Him, ever more like Jesus, and ever more walk as He walks.

[27 : 54] O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in You. Are you trusting in God? Are you trusting in His Son, Jesus? Have you been brought to the point in your life where you recognize that you are a sinner, that your walk is not blameless?

Have you been brought to see and understand that God has provided for you a Savior, who has died for your sins and secured your forgiveness?

Do you see in Jesus such a Savior? Have you come to Him in repentance and faith, confessing your sins and asking Him to be your Savior?

Are you trusting in Jesus as your Savior and following Him as your Lord? To such, and only to such, is promised every blessing and every good thing from the hand of our giving God.

So what will you choose? Imagine you have that board, that A4 board, and on one side, to be with God or to be far from God, to trust in Jesus or to reject Jesus, and you've got the board there in front of you and you're spinning it around.

[29 : 12] Where will you stop? What will you choose? To be with God or to be far from Him, to trust in His Son who He has given to be your Savior or to reject His Son and to go your own way.

It's your choice. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to You and we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the experience of the psalmist that he shares with us as he reveals his heart and his choices.

We thank You that we can learn from him. We thank You for the case that he makes. Such a convincing case. Better by far. Better by far to throw our lot in with Yourself.

Better by far to seek to live near to You than to live far from You. We thank You for the way that has been made possible in and through Your Son, Jesus, who has opened that way, who has given us the opportunity to come close to You.

And so we pray that we would be enabled, that we would, day by day, know what it is, to trust in You, that it would be true of us, the words with which the psalm ends, O Lord Almighty, blessed, happy is the man who trusts in You.

[30 : 34] Amen.