

The Knowledge of God

Psalm 84.

Notes of an Address by F. B. Hole.

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While recognizing the Jewish character of this Psalm, we may profitably consider it in the light of the New Testament, and thus make it the vehicle of a little New Testament instruction and encouragement. The theme of the Psalm is the exceeding blessedness of the knowledge of God and, as we might say, adopting an old phrase, the practice of the presence of God. True blessedness is to be found in the knowledge of God Himself. Of course for us to-day the knowledge of God, as revealed in Christ, has reached a completeness that was not possible in the days when this Psalm was written, yet to be put in touch with God Himself, and taste the reality of His presence, that is blessedness indeed, beyond which there is no blessedness to be known.

Now that is the theme of the Psalm. It says, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts." I hope that in some small degree we can all take this language upon our lips, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord." Of course, for the godly Jew who was not of Aaronic or Levitical descent there was no access at all into the immediate presence of God. The high priest could only enter the holiest once a year, and then under the most stringent regulations. This meant, as Hebrews 9 tells us, that the way into the holiest, the immediate presence of God, was not yet made manifest. Thank God, for us it is made manifest. We have a new and living way, and a great High Priest over the house of God, who has taken up His seat in the very presence of God. Do we in any measure long for the presence of God?

Can we say, "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God"? Yes, I think even the youngest and simplest believer in this audience can say that, though admittedly in modified form. Have you never felt that you are going through a world which is just a wretched sham, that there is no real truth in the world? The world is dominated by the god of this age. He is a liar and the father of it. Truth has come out in Christ. We go through a world where things are not what they seem to be, and our souls long for that which is true and real. Give me the living God in a world of death like this, we cry. You may say, "I wish my heart always so cried out." So do I. Still, it does cry out. Your heart, though you have been but recently converted, surely enough does cry out for the living God. You never find absolutely unalloyed satisfaction and joy other than in the presence of God, now of course well known in Jesus' love.

We want the presence of God, and if anyone said to us, "Why do you want the presence of God? Why is it that you say in the language of the Psalmist that 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand,' and 'I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness'?" we could reply, "First because of what God is, and then because of what He gives."

He is a sun and He is a shield. How fully that has been verified in our Lord Jesus Christ! The sun is the Divinely appointed centre of our little solar system. The sun is the light-bearing and the attractive centre that holds the whole system together. That is what God is. All the light and attraction is found in Him. Happy for us if, like the planets, we have swung into the attraction there is found in that great Sun, and find ourselves under His blessed direction!

Remember that there is no region of twilight between darkness and light. We may try to make a kind of third ground, a kind of neutral ground between the two, but you do not find that neutral position

here. You find the courts of Jehovah and the tents of wickedness. You may say, "I live in a house where they are all unconverted." Yes, but where does your heart find its home? Where is your mental and spiritual abiding-place? To what spot does your heart resort in its leisure moments? That is a searching question for us all.

We can say He is a sun and shield. He is light and warmth and an attractive centre. What does He give? "The Lord will give grace and glory." In the light of the New Testament we would revise it, and say the Lord God *has given* the most abundant grace, and very shortly He is going to give the most abundant glory. As Titus tells us, the grace of God which brings with it salvation for all men has appeared, teaching us that we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory. Grace has appeared. The glory is about to appear. "The Lord will give grace and glory," said the Psalmist. We say, "He has given grace, and we stand on the threshold of glory." Verily the coming of the Lord is near. Glory is ahead of us and as to the time between, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." Do you say, "I am a poor man"? Well, it may be good for you. A little more money might have wrecked you spiritually. He will give you what is good. He will withhold nothing that is for your spiritual good, nothing that will lead to advancement for you in the day that is coming. The Lord will give all that is really good to the one that walks uprightly, that is, in the fear of God.

We have been speaking about the excellence of the realized presence of God. Now in verse 4 you get the first of the three occurrences of the word "Blessed," and they are divided one from the other by the little word "Selah." The "Blessed" of the first section is in verse 4, of the second section in verse 5, and of the third section in verse 12. They evidently occur in what we may call a descending scale. "Blessed are they that *dwell* in Thy house." Happy, says the Psalmist, are those who have found in the presence of Jehovah a point of repose and dwelling. They are so blessed that they will be still praising Thee. They will have their lips continuously full of praise. They will praise and praise and go on praising. Find the Christian whose heart abides in the blessedness of the presence of God, and you will find one whose heart is filled with praise that springs from-the knowledge of Himself.

I am here reminded of what we get in the second chapter of the first epistle of John, where the aged apostle divides the people of God into three classes — the fathers, the young men, and the children. There is an extraordinary likeness between the three classes of 1 John 2 and the three classes of our Psalm. Here you have what answers to the father. He has reached the source of eternal good and blessedness in God Himself. Blessed indeed is that one who knows God in such a soul-satisfying way that, whether the storms blow this way or that way, he abides in the presence of God, and his heart is continually filled with praise. Probably every one of us here will say, "I wish I were like that, but I do not know much about it." That is how I should speak.

But then, there is an encouragement in the second section. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways." Another translation says, "In whose heart are the highways." Blessed is the man who, if he has not yet found his abiding place in the house of God, has the highways that lead to the house engraved like a map on his heart. The literal simple meaning of those words applied in a spiritual way is something like this: It may be quite true, I honestly confess, I do but very little abide in the presence of God. Instead of being above the storms I am often blown about in all directions and mightily perplexed. Instead of having my heart filled with praises, I am often filled with inward complainings. I get under the power of a thousand and one things that would not affect me in the same way if I were dwelling in the presence of God. Yet I do know the way. I have got the light and truth and direction of the Word of God in my heart.

It is a very good thing if we have. Happy is the man who has before him the highway of blessing. Happy is the one who knows the way of true sanctification, true devotedness, true abiding satisfaction in the "excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Happy is the man who has the highway to the desired end mapped out in his mind's eye. Happy is the man who finds his strength in God while he is on the way. Unhappy is the man whose strength is in himself. "Happy is the man whose strength is in Thee." That is a lesson we have to learn. You say, "I hope I am learning it." Very good; you are on the right road. That is like the young men in 1 John 2.

They are strong, and the Word of God abides in them. As regards the anti-Christian activities of the devil, they have overcome the wicked one. They are not yet "fathers," but the road opens out before them, for they know the Word of God, and it dwells in them.

They pass through the valley of Baca (which means "weeping") and they make it a well. They get into all kinds of troubles and exercises, and out of their very troubles and exercises they draw the waters of spiritual refreshment. It is through our own troubles and exercises that we learn most valuable lessons. It is when we are reduced to a point where we could very well weep that we learn something that will stand us in good stead. Oh, turn the valley of weeping into a well out of which you draw the waters of refreshment and blessing! If you do, you go from strength to strength, and "every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Thank God, they get there!

But a person may say, "I am afraid I know but very little about this second section, and those people whose strength is in the Lord, and in whose heart are the highways." So you come to the last four verses, and the Psalm closes on a simple note. See how the Psalmist emphasises what God is, because what God is, He is to the feeblest and most failing believer as well as to the most faithful. It is recorded of Mr. Hudson Taylor that, talking in a meeting once, he quoted those lines of Miss Havergal's:

"They that trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true"-

and said, "That is very nice, but I know something more wonderful than that — those who do *not* trust Him wholly find Him wholly true." Praise God, so it is. God is what He is, no matter how failing I or any one of His saints may be. God is not what He is because I am very good, and He will not change because I am very naughty. Those who trust Him only ten per cent will find Him as wholly true as those who trust Him one hundred per cent.

How desirable that you and I should walk in communion with God! "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee!" That is like the babes of 1 John 2. We can come in there. We cannot, perhaps, say much about this great strength and these experiences. We hope we may turn the valley of weeping into a wellspring. We want to go on. We feel sure there is no lasting satisfaction in the world.

We believe it is only in God Himself there is to be found that which really satisfies. Oh, that we may know Him, that we may know Christ and explore His love! Then, happy is the man that simply trusts in Him.

Let us start with that — we *trust in* Him. We are on the road, and we know as we go through this vanity fair of a world, that there is no real, lasting happiness except in the knowledge of God Himself made known to us in Jesus. It is as we dwell in His presence, as we taste the bliss of His company, as we enter into communion with Himself, that we are really blessed, and that we find a satisfaction which abides.

