

Theme: The True Beauty of the LORD's House

- 1. In What He Gives Us There**
- 2. In What We Give in Return**

Psalm 84:1-4, 7-12 (NIV) (RESPONSIVE)

- P** How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!
- G** **My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.**
- P** Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—
- G** **a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.**
- P** Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
- G** **they are ever praising you**
- P** They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.
- G** **Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob.**
- P** Look upon our shield, O God;
- G** **look with favor on your anointed one.**
- P** Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere;
- G** **I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.**
- P** For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
- G** **the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.**
- A** **O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.**

From a scale of 1 to 84 (as in Psalm 84), how excited are you to be here at worship today? Would you say you are as excited as the psalmist who wrote our text? Would you describe your excitement with his words, **“My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God... Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere” (v. 2, 10)?** It's obvious this man wanted to be in church! It's also apparent from this psalm that for some reason the writer was unable to make the trip to Jerusalem to worship in the LORD's temple, or to attend one of the religious festivals, and he is obviously torn up about it. He finds the **“dwelling place”** of the **“LORD Almighty”** to be so **“lovely” (v. 1)** that his **“soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD” (v. 2)** when he is forced to be away from it. Now, there is no doubt that the LORD's temple in Jerusalem was a beautiful structure, but there absolutely had to be something else about **“the courts of the LORD” (v. 2)** that would cause anyone to say such things about a building.

How about our house of worship here? I think it's a very nice looking church. But there absolutely has to be something more about this “house of the LORD” than its physical appearance that keeps many of you coming back week after week. There are other churches that are more beautiful in this area—some are larger, more ornate; they have better facilities, better music, a better choir; they may have a more “exciting” and visually stimulating style of worship; perhaps more programs for kids and families—they probably even have a more gifted pastor!

So what is it that makes this “house of the LORD” so “beautiful”? **The True Beauty of the LORD’s House** is not found in the walls or the structure of the building; it’s what goes on inside these walls that counts. **The True Beauty of the LORD’s House** is found **1. In what He gives us here** and **2. in what we give in return.**

Now, this might sound kind of strange, but I can think of a good number of things to do on a Sunday morning that are more fun or more enjoyable and exciting than come to the LORD’s house to worship. However, at the same time I would *completely agree* with the psalmist in our text, **“Better is one day in your [the LORD’s] courts than a thousand elsewhere” (v. 10).** Why? Other activities in this life may be more fun and exciting, but you simply can’t get anywhere else what the LORD gives to us in His house as we gather for worship with our fellow Christians. Think about some of the blessings we receive here:

- The spiritual peace we receive each Sunday from the confession and forgiveness of our sins; knowing that our sin-sick souls have been completely cleansed and healed from all the guilt and shame of every last one of our sins because of the sacrifice of Christ.
- The reminder of God’s continuing presence in our lives and all the comforting promises He has made and kept that assure each one of us individually of His love and protection.
- To hear and learn from the very words of our Father who created us; from His Son who redeemed us on the cross of Calvary and destroyed death by His resurrection; from the Holy Spirit who guides us in the truth of God’s Word and empowers us to put it into action in our lives.
- The assurance of forgiveness and incredible faith-strengthening which Christ gives to us when we come to His table to receive His very body and blood given for us in the Lord’s Supper.

These are all some of the gifts the LORD Himself gives to us when we come together and meet Him in His house. Well, you’ve probably heard it said by some that “I can be a Christian without coming to church. I don’t need to go to church to worship God. I can read my Bible at home by myself; I can listen to sermons on the radio or watch them on TV or even read them off the internet.” These things may all be true, but my first question to statements like that is “Are you really going to do all those things?” and my second question is “Why would you want to miss out on one of the greatest blessings God gives to us when we gather together for worship in His house?” That great blessing is called “fellowship.” Fellowship with each other cannot be simulated over the television or the internet. [Now, for those of you who are watching, hearing, or reading these words over the internet, or in print, I am not trying to give you a “guilt trip”—especially if you are a great distance from this congregation, or if something else is preventing you from coming to the worship service, like the Psalmist was experiencing, or if this is your only means of hearing God’s Word preached and taught. I am very glad and thankful that you are listening, watching, and reading.] Let me make sure I am clear: Hearing the Word through these means can definitely be helpful to the growth of our faith.

BUT you cannot replace the blessing God gives us through fellowship when you are here sharing, worshiping, encouraging and being encouraged by your fellow believers in church. Besides, the LORD Himself has told us very clearly in His word that He wants us to gather together with those of our faith for worship, for Bible study and for mutual encouragement. Listen again to the words of our Scripture reading from Hebrews, **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV).** (“The Day” he is referring to there is the Last Day; Judgment Day.)

A pastor once read this passage to a member who had not been coming to church very much recently and was trying to argue that he didn’t really have to because he could just worship God at home through some of the methods previously mentioned. In order to make his point very clear the pastor got up during their conversation and walked over to the fireplace. After stoking the fire he took the largest and brightest coal

from the fire and moved it away from the rest of the burning coals that were flaming brightly in a heap. After a few more minutes of conversation the pastor pointed out that the coal that had once been burning so brightly was now by itself and growing dimmer and dimmer and would eventually turn into a smoldering ember and die out. As the story goes the man got the picture and said, “I’ll be in church next Sunday, pastor.”

If you have been tempted to be a “lone burning ember” and have given up the blessing of fellowship, Bible Study, and worship with your fellow Christians at church for whatever reason, you need to realize that what you are doing (or rather not doing) is not healthy for your faith. Can you still be a Christian and never set foot once in a church? Yes. Will your faith eventually die out completely like that “lone ember” away from the fireplace from my illustration? Not necessarily. But it certainly won’t make your faith stronger—or at least not as strong as it could be. The psalmist says this about the worshipers in the house of the LORD, **“Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you...They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion” (v. 4, 7)**. Why willingly deprive yourself of this strength; why neglect God’s great blessing of fellowship?

If you are currently not experiencing this blessing of fellowship with God and other believers on a regular basis, let me encourage you to do so, and let me invite you to come and worship with us here every Sunday. Be a part of these “burning embers” of faith that continually feed off of God’s Word and each other as we **“go from strength to strength”** on our journey toward the eternal “house of the LORD” in heaven.

The fact that we even gather to worship our LORD and Savior is where the other part of the **True Beauty of the LORD’s House** is found. It is found **2. in what we give back to God in return.**

- ✠ To think that we fallen creatures, who are born dead in sins, born enemies of God, are now, through God’s amazing grace His children who praise and worship Him is an incredibly beautiful thing to behold!
- ✠ To think that we, who struggle so mightily with our own sinful flesh and anti-God desires, can serve Him cheerfully through His Spirit and show love for Him and our fellow man is incredible!
- ✠ To think that our stuttering lips and stammering tongues have been chosen by God to spread His life-giving Gospel of salvation to others is both humbling and inspiring!
- ✠ To think that He, the Almighty God of heaven and earth, hears and answers the prayers we give to Him simply because He loves us and wants to bless us is truly awe-inspiring!
- ✠ To think that He can work in our hearts the desire to give of our time, talents, and even our money to the cause of His kingdom is truly beautiful and miraculous!

For all the blessings we get, and for all the ways we can give back, our souls should be “excited” to come to the house of the LORD. It should be the place we’d rather be over any other—not because it’s the most fun or exciting place, but because it’s where we meet our Savior Jesus! It’s where He speaks to us; where He gives us the comforts of His promises; where He reminds us of the love He showed for us when He took all our sins upon His innocent body on the cross and then destroyed death for us in His resurrection on the third day. It is where we are reminded that He waits for each one of us in heaven, preparing our eternal mansion. For all this how could we not want to come and give back our praise and our service to our God and Savior? How could we not say with the psalmist, **“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God... Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere” (v. 1-2, 10)**. Amen!