

Better [Psalm 84]

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INTRODUCTION

1. Comparative adjectives are a grammatical tool that allows us to contrast to things.
 - a. Note, this is different than superlative adjectives which compare three or more things.
 - b. You would think that the word **better** is less impressive than the word "best"
 - c. And this would be true, except in the world of advertising.
 - 1) The Federal Trade Commission actually is more stringent with the claim "better"
 - 2) When you use "best" in advertising, it's interpreted as "equals to"
 - 3) But when you use the word "better," you're actually claiming it to be the "best"
 - 4) When you use the word "better," you "better" have proof to substantiate your claim
2. For example, **Papa Johns Pizza** has the slogan, "better ingredients, better pizza."
 - a. This approach backfired on them when, in 1997, Pizza Hut filed suit against Papa Johns.
 - 1) They touted the "better taste" of Papa John's than Pizza Hut's pizza.
 - 2) They also "dared" anyone to find a "better pizza."
 - b. Originally, Pizza Hut won their suit. It was overturned on appeal.
 - c. Pizza Hut was unable to prove that the misleading advertising actually affected consumers' purchasing decisions.
3. The reason this is taken so seriously: you and I make comparisons everyday.
 - a. Maybe it's a simple comparison between two beverages you might choose.
 - b. Perhaps it's a couple of employment opportunity you're trying to weight out.
 - c. Or maybe you're comparing your life against that of someone else you wish you were.
4. But what if, in your efforts to find better, you're actually missing out on something **BETTER**?
 - a. This evening, as we continue our studies in the Psalms, we come across comparisons
 - b. But these comparisons will help give us a perspective on any others that we make.

VERSES 1,2

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place, 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.

1. First, you need to understand that this is a later psalm, likely written after the Exile
 - a. This is about 5 centuries before Jesus was born, and 500 years after King David lived.
 - b. Thus, this DWELLING PLACE is the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. UNDERSTAND . . .
 - 1) The worship of the Lord in Jerusalem was an event for God's people.
 - a) Not everyone lived in the city, so they only worshipped during pilgrimage.
 - 2) The exile meant a prolonged separation from worship at the temple (70 years)
 - c. So the people singing the song might not have had a frame of reference for worship.
 2. It's important to know that the majority of the temple had been destroyed by Babylon.
 - a. It wasn't until decades later that it was rebuilt, and it was a shell of its former self.
 - b. **Ezra 3:11,12** *"And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy."*
 - c. Why the tears? The loss grips at their very existence.
3. The words of verses 2 and 3 in this Psalm seem to speak to this great loss.
 - a. It's less about the building and more about the struggle and what was lost.
 - b. For decades, they had no tangible connection to the Lord, and absence creates longing.
 - c. There's something embarrassing for you and I when viewing this language, right?
 - 1) Note the passion for God. We might tweet that about a cronut, but about God?
 - 2) When is the last time your body felt moved by the thought of the Lord?

VERSES 3-7

³Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

⁴Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

⁵Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

⁶As they pass through the Valley of Baka, 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.

1. The key to this Psalm is understanding the pilgrimage spoken of in verse 6.
 - a. It describes one of the 3 major feasts of Israel, when people were summoned to Jerusalem
 - b. The Feast of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles and Booths) is given to Israel after the Exodus.
 - c. In **Leviticus 23:34,42,43** "The LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites: "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'""
 - d. Jews still observe the feast today, and just wrapped it up this past Wednesday.
*Observed in September or October [Jewish calendar fluctuates],
2. Sukkot marks the end of the harvest season harvest, when farmers finish their work.
 - a. Key observance this feast was the building of Sukkah. Sukkah is Hebrew for tent or booth"
 - 1) They were to leave the comfort of their homes to go to Jerusalem.
 - 2) There they were to live in a homemade shack for the week.
3. WHY DID WE GO THROUGH THIS WHOLE EXPLANATION? Now read the text and it makes sense
 - a. In verse five the pilgrimage/Highway to Zion, is taking a trip to Jerusalem for the feast.
 - b. When they pass through the valley of Baka, this is allusion to a valley of WEeping.
 - 1) When we discussed Psalm 23, we talked about the dangers of valleys for travel
 - 2) Valleys of shadow of death could bring tears (same emotion seen earlier)
 - a) Our God transforms TEARS into SPRINGS, from DEATH TO LIFE.
 - 3) No fear of the autumn rains which bring flooding, it provides strength for the journey
 - c. Going backwards still, in verse three, those who make it to the temple praise God.
4. And in the lens of Sukkot, the talk of the birds finding homes near the altar of God.
 - a. This is talking about the temporary shelters set up all over Jerusalem.
 - b. This psalm is a return to the house of God, a fulfillment of an ultimate road trip.
 - 1) Did you go on family vacations when you were younger? How was the anticipation?
 - 2) this is what God's pilgrims felt as they went to set up temporary housing in Jerusalem.

VERSES 8,9

⁸Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob.

⁹Look on our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.

1. In the midst of the Psalm, a prayer breaks up the story. And it's a prayer for the king.
 - a. Last week, in Psalm 61, we saw King David offering a prayer on his own behalf.
 - b. We mentioned that the prosperity of the king spoke to the prosperity of the people.
2. This week, in a similar prayer that seems antiquated to you and I, another thought.
 - a. We see the reference in verse nine of the king as SHIELD.
 - b. The shield highlights the protection of the people.
 - 1) But why not just ask God? Isn't he the one who ultimately provides?
3. This should remind us that God indeed works through humans to accomplish his will.

VERSES 10-12

¹⁰Better 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.

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

1. And we finally arrive at the comparisons. First better is one day in God's house.
 - a. Obviously, the comparison highlights the overwhelming benefit of being in God's presence
 - b. As his people camped in tents outside of the temple, they would understand it.
 - c. If you were to live 75 years, you would live 27,375 days, so that would be just one month
 - d. Is there anything you would sacrifice your whole life for in exchange for one month?
 - 1) I really doubt it. As a result, we see what the Psalmist is saying: his house is unequaled.
2. A second comparison: that it'd be better to be the temple doorman.
 - a. There's a certain allure to the tent of the wicked; perhaps it's a Sukkot remark.
 - 1) Even though the faithful gathered in Jerusalem in their booths, not all were saints.
 - 2) There were likely some "smutty" tents where many not nice things were happening.
 - b. But to be the doorman means that you're just catching glimpses of God's glory.
 - 1) The psalmist is saying that it's better just to get a taste of the Lord if nothing at all.
3. Verses 11&12: Blessings flow in and through the Lord.
 - a. When we walk blameless before him, he cares for us.
 - b. As we sit in tents with our eyes looking at the temple of God, we know it's true.

CONCLUSION

1. In the end, there's a simple message that emerges from this Psalm: **HE'S BETTER.**
 - a. Perhaps it needs to be a mantra or reminder for you as approach your life.
 - b. As you continue to live life, contemplating the opportunities before you: **He's Better**

* When you've been waiting to feel the presence of God, have no doubt . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you think your current walk can't compare to what you once had, know that . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When harvest comes and you have all you need, DO NOT FORGET THAT . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you're traveling the highway of life, headed towards the valley of tears, no fear . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you're looking for a place to rest your head and feel at home, take courage . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you pray to the Lord for guidance and protections, trust it'll come because . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you feel homeless, don't opt for the tent of the wicked because . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you're hoping for one day, don't sweat as God'll give you an eternity as . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you feel homeless, don't opt for the tent of the wicked because . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* When you're walking blameless before him, know he'll honor and favor you since . . .

HE'S BETTER.

* And when you think of the story of the Scriptures, and that sinless God gave all for you and me, dying a horrible death on the cross, conquering the grave and giving us life eternal, remember that it's all because . . .

HE'S BETTER.