

The Loveliness of Thy Tabernacles

Text: Psalm 84

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Our Scripture reading is Psalm 84, with focus on verses 1 and 2: *“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.”*

This psalm belongs to the collection known as the Pilgrimage Psalms (Pss. 120–134), sung as God’s people journeyed to Jerusalem to worship. Yet Psalm 84 is not merely about travelling up to the temple – it reflects the entire Christian life as a pilgrimage to communion with God. Verse 5 says, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.” The “ways” refer to the road to Zion, the path of worship, and the believer’s desire to meet with God.

The theme of this Psalm is revealed from the start: *the preciousness of communion with the living God*. The name most repeated in this Psalm is “LORD of hosts.” There are other names – “living God,” “my King,” “our shield” – but “Lord of hosts” frames the Psalm, appearing at the beginning and the end. This name reveals why worship is so dear to the psalmist. Surrounded by enemies, knowing his weakness, he finds hope only in the LORD of hosts.

The Expression

“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts.” The word “tabernacles” means “tents.” Children, you may have camped in a tent before. Israel, during the wilderness, lived in tents, and God instructed Moses to build a special tent – His dwelling place, the Tabernacle. Later, Solomon built the temple, a permanent house. But here, the psalmist refers to God’s tent – “thy tabernacles” – the dwelling place of Jehovah.

Note the name: “O LORD of hosts.” “Jehovah” (“LORD”) is God’s *covenant* name: “I AM THAT I AM” (Exod. 3:14). It tells us God is sovereign, eternal, unchanging, and personal. He saves His people and brings them into covenant fellowship. He alone has the power to deliver. This name reveals that salvation is not in man’s will, but in God’s sovereign grace.

But here the name is expanded: "LORD of hosts." That name means Jehovah of *the armies*—especially the hosts of angels. These angels are powerful spirits created to do His will. Psalm 103:20 says, "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." They serve and protect God's people, and they execute His justice. Jehovah does not gain strength by having angels; He creates them to *show* His strength. They fight for us. The psalmist finds comfort in this: the LORD of hosts is with him.

Verse 2 continues: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." "My soul longeth"—this is no passing wish. It's a *fixed, persistent, and unyielding* longing. Think of Joseph, sold into Egypt, longing for his father. The psalmist's will is actively desiring God's courts. But it's more: "yea, even fainteth." That means he is *exhausted* by the yearning, consumed and undone without God. He is saying, in effect, "Give me God, or I die!"

"The courts of the Lord" refer to the outer areas where the people gathered—not the Holy of Holies, not the inner sanctuary—but even being *near* the temple fills him with joy. He isn't asking for prestige or position—just to be near God. Like a deer fleeing in exhaustion that finally reaches water, so the believer reaches for God. This is not a desire for a *building*, but for the *God* who dwells there. It's a spiritual hunger. He desires the *living God*, not just ritual or tradition. That name—"living God"—means that God is self-existent. He needs no one. He is the fountain of life. All creatures are dependent upon Him. He does not grow or diminish in joy. He is eternally full. This is the One the psalmist longs for.

He uses the word "*how*"—"How amiable." Not just "amiable," but *how* amiable. He is grasping at language to describe the beauty of God's dwelling place. Just like when we see a beautiful sunrise and fall short of words, the psalmist reaches and says, "How lovely!" Not just that it is lovely, but overwhelmingly so.

Note also the plural: "tabernacles." There is only one tabernacle, yet he says "tabernacles." This plural form expresses *greatness*. Just like "Holy, holy, holy" exalts God's holiness, so "tabernacles" in plural magnifies the glory of God's dwelling. The beauty of God's presence stands in a category by itself, incomparable to all earthly glory.

The Explanation

Why such a powerful confession? Why is the Tabernacle so lovely to the psalmist? First, because of the *setting*. Israel, as the church in the Old Testament, was surrounded by enemies – Assyria, Edom, Egypt, the Philistines. Psalm 83:4 records their enemies saying, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.” The child of God knows: without Jehovah, we are finished. Isaiah 1:8–9 describes Jerusalem as a “besieged city.” And it says: “*Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom.*”

The child of God knows his own sin as well. He knows he deserves to be far from God, cast into darkness. Yet he sees the tabernacle—the symbol that Jehovah is near – and his heart rejoices.

Exodus 25:8 says, “Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” The purpose of the tabernacle is clear: that God might dwell with His people. It is the *covenant formula* in visual form: “I will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Lev. 26:11–12).

The psalmist sees the tents of the Lord and remembers: Jehovah is near. Not only is He the sovereign protector – the LORD of hosts – but also the *gracious covenant God* who dwells among a people who deserve death.

Believer, we also know we are surrounded by the *threefold enemy*: the devil, the world, and our own flesh. Satan tempts and accuses. The world pressures and persecutes. Our own indwelling sin rebels. Without the presence and power of God, we would fall.

That is why the *worship of God* is precious. We don’t just come to a building – we come to meet *the living God*. He speaks to us in His Word. He assures us, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” The LORD of hosts fights for us.

The Satisfaction

“My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” That word “crieth out” means *singing for joy*. The psalmist is not only longing, he is *rejoicing*. There is *satisfaction* in worship. His soul is *full*, not empty – full of joy, peace, and the presence of God. When he sees the sacrifice, the blood sprinkled, he is reminded that *atonement* is made. God accepts him. Though he deserves death, God provides a substitute.

At the same time, there is a *bittersweet note*. He says later in the Psalm that even the *sparrows* get to dwell near God's altar (v. 3). The Levites get to stay and serve. But he must return home. His time in God's courts is *brief*. He rejoices, but he *longs* for more. His flesh groans for the day when he shall see God face to face.

This is the tension we feel. The joy of the Sabbath – yet the knowledge that it is not the *eternal Sabbath*. We return to our workplaces, to the tents of wickedness. We feel vexed and afflicted again. And we cry, "When can I come back?" We long for the day when the courts of God will no longer be temporary, but eternal.

We in the New Testament have even greater *clarity*. John 1:14 says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Literally: "tabernacled among us." Jesus Christ is the *true tabernacle*. In Him, God comes near – Immanuel.

Jesus said in Matthew 26:53, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" He is the LORD of hosts – yet He submitted to death, for us. He wore the crown of thorns, bore the wrath of God, and cried, "It is finished." What can be more beautiful, more lovely, than *Christ crucified*?

Every Lord's Day, that is what is set before you: Christ, the living Tabernacle, the Word made flesh, who died and rose again. The LORD of hosts became man to deliver us from our enemies. He is our Sun and Shield (Ps. 84:11).

Yet even now, we feel a holy longing. The Sabbath ends. The world presses in. The tents of wickedness surround us. We cry, "Come, Lord Jesus." We long for the *final Sabbath*, when we will never leave God's courts again. Revelation 21:3 declares: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them." That is the final fulfilment. Not that man climbs up to God, but that God descends to dwell with us. Heaven and earth become one. The Tabernacle of God – heaven itself – comes down.

Let us pray with joy and longing: *Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.*

Our Father, which art in heaven, may Thou be pleased even to strengthen us by the preaching of Thy Word, to assure us by the power of Thy Spirit, that although we are surrounded by the threefold enemy, Thou, Jehovah of hosts, hast already accomplished the victory. Keep our hearts and our minds on the things of heaven above, and not on the things below. These things we humbly ask and pray, in Jesus name alone. Amen.