

## Psalms 91, 137, 126, 84:

### The God who saves, and a journey from exile to the temple of the Lord

#### *Psalm 91: "Surely he will save you"*

1. Read Psalm 91, an eloquent testament to deep trust in God. As those who follow a crucified Lord, the promises of Psalm 91 are best expressed by 1 Peter 5:5-6 and Phil 4:6-7; God genuinely cares for our welfare and even in our trials will walk with us and give us his peace. Now read David and Goliath, p. 149 par. 3-154, par. 1. Gladwell's thesis is that whereas a "near miss" can traumatize you and impair your courage, a "remote miss," where you escape mostly unscathed, has the opposite effect. Whether or not you buy this theory, what do you think of Shuttlesworth's statement, "if the Lord saved me from this, I'm here for the duration"?
2. We all can point to traumas and troubles serious enough for us to call out to God for rescue, experiences or periods in our lives which we will never forget, even if they resolve well. Can you think of experiences which, instead of strengthening your trust in God, have shaken it? Can you also point to times in your life which you feel have left you bolder and more willing to trust in God? While these might be physical, they could also include scarring experiences in service at church, traumatic work experiences, etc.

#### *Psalm 137: Remembering Jerusalem*

3. Read 137:4-6. Why can't they sing songs of joy in exile?
4. They had gone into exile to Babylon and suffered terribly at the hands of their captors and the Edomites. The psalmist chose not to sing, lest the exiles forget and become too at ease. While we are not subject to the horrors of exile, we can learn from this psalm. Paul says that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). Peter urges us "as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). When are you most aware of your status as a resident alien? Do you ever consciously abstain from something desirable (like the psalmist's songs of joy) to remind yourself that your treasure is in heaven?

#### *Psalm 126: A cry for God's renewed blessing*

5. Psalm 137 tells us to remember. Psalm 126 recalls a time of great blessing, of laughter, joy, dreaming, of God's glory spreading even outside Israel. The psalmist cries to God for a return to these blessings. Sometimes we are so dry spiritually, and the family of God so tired that we forget the times when God's blessing were poured out abundantly. We stop dreaming, and even stop asking. Can you recall a time (or is now such a time for you?) when God's blessings on you or the church filled you with joy and expanded your mind to just *dream* of what God would do next?
6. One way to read this psalm is as a yearning for renewal. Listen to Tim Keller's lecture, "A Biblical Theology of Revival" from The Gospel Coalition 2013, 10:40-17:04.<sup>1</sup> We don't pursue revival for its own sake; instead, we rejoice when we so become so dedicated to and hungry for the Lord that God is more able to use us for his kingdom and glory. Keller elsewhere<sup>2</sup> lists three means of revival: a *recovery of the gospel*, which entails "a rediscovery of the wonder of grace"; *corporate prayer*; and *creativity*, in that "no revival is just like the last one."

<sup>1</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIRSzsUSRZA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIRSzsUSRZA).

<sup>2</sup> [www.xenos.org/classes/media/documents/Keller-TenMarksofRevival.pdf](http://www.xenos.org/classes/media/documents/Keller-TenMarksofRevival.pdf).

Psalms 126 and 137 show that a first step toward revival is remembering how close we *can* be to the Lord. What else should our church or small group do to increase our dedication and hunger for the Lord?

*Psalm 84: Pilgrimage to the house of God*

7. This Psalm has three beatitudes (4, 5, 12). What are they?
8. For Christians, the house of God (4) is the body of believers (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Corinthians 3:16; and 1 Peter 2:5). Read Psalm 84, paraphrased with this in mind:

How lovely is *the family of believers in which your Spirit is pleased to dwell*, O LORD of hosts!  
My soul longs, indeed it faints for *the congregation* of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing  
for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her  
young, *in RCRC's high eaves*, O LORD of mighty armies, my King and my God.

Happy are those who *are ever going to our little church* to sing your praise. [Selah]

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose hearts are the road to *Sunday worship and  
Friday huddle*.

As they go through *the Irondequoit creek valley the snow melts, the trees bud with leaves and  
they make it a place of rushing springs and singing birds*.

They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen *in our humble church, and his  
presence will be felt in our committees and Sunday-school classes*.

O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! [Selah]

Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of *your Son, Jesus Christ*.

For an *evening at Holy Huddle and a dinner with brothers and sisters at Koinonia* is better than  
a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a *third-shift janitor at RCRC* than live in the  
*McMansions* of wickedness.

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the  
LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you, *who trusts you have not forgotten your  
beloved church*.

Pray for God to fill our souls with yearning for the presence of his Spirit and to satisfy that yearning. Pray for  
God's strength to bring spring to our humble church.

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*Fun fact:* "The Talmud says that [Psalm 137:6], 'if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy,' should be read at a wedding to the bridegroom as he awaits the arrival of the bride, as a reminder that *no* joy, not even that of marriage, could be as great as the joy associated with Jerusalem." (James Limburg, *Psalms*, 467)

## Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,  
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

<sup>2</sup>We hanged our harps upon the willows in the  
midst thereof.

<sup>3</sup>For there they that carried us away captive  
required of us a song; and they that wasted us  
required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the  
songs of Zion.

<sup>4</sup>How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange  
land?

<sup>5</sup>If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right  
hand forget her cunning.

<sup>6</sup>If I do not remember thee, let my tongue  
cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not  
Jerusalem above my chief joy.

<sup>7</sup>Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in  
the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase  
it, even to the foundation thereof.

<sup>8</sup>O daughter of Babylon, who art to be  
destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth  
thee as thou hast served us.

<sup>9</sup>Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth  
thy little ones against the stones.

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## Psalm 84

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of  
hosts!

<sup>2</sup>My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the  
courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh  
crieth out for the living God.

<sup>3</sup>Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and  
the swallow a nest for herself, where she may  
lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of  
hosts, my King, and my God.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they  
will be still praising thee. Selah.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee;  
in whose heart are the ways of them.

<sup>6</sup>Who passing through the valley of Baca make  
it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

<sup>7</sup>They go from strength to strength, every one  
of them in Zion appeareth before God.

<sup>8</sup>O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give  
ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

<sup>9</sup>Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the  
face of thine anointed.

<sup>10</sup>For a day in thy courts is better than a  
thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the  
house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of  
wickedness.

<sup>11</sup>For the LORD God is a sun and shield:  
the LORD will give grace and glory: no good  
thing will he withhold from them that walk  
uprightly.

<sup>12</sup>O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that  
trusteth in thee.

## Leader's Notes

Tonight's study will be on four psalms. The first, Ps 91, is a famous hymn of trust in God. The other three psalms, 137, 126 and 84, represent a progress from exile, to a recollection of a time when God poured out his blessings, and ending in a pilgrimage to the temple of God. Unlike some passages we've studied, these psalms require little exegesis to appreciate their meaning, which is deep and heartfelt.

### Psalm 137:

The focus on 137 is often on the curse which the Psalm ends with. We will focus on a different aspect of the psalm, but a word is in order. 137:7-9 uses legal language: the psalmist is presenting before God the brutality of Edom and Babylon, as the "happy" of v. 9 is better understood as "blessed", in the sense of doing God's will. For the cry for retribution is nothing more than God has already promised for Babylon in Jer 51:56, and while retribution was not to be used in personal matters (Prov 24:29), it was expected in legal matters (Dt 19:19). This retribution is nothing more than the hard and impenitent of heart can expect from God (Rom 2:5). The psalmist's curse is no worse than Jeremiah's and in fact may have been inspired by it. Certainly as Christians we know that we should always first seek a blessing for our enemies.

I have included the KJV of Pss 137 and 84 since the language is pretty close to that of the settings used in the King's College performances linked to on the web site.