

"Where Else?"

**Joshua 24:1-26 Psalm 84 Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69
August 26, 2018 -- 21st Ordinary**

24: Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: ¹³I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards that you did not plant. ¹⁴"Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." ¹⁶Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God." ¹⁹But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." ²¹And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the Lord!" ²²Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." ²³He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel." ²⁴The people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey." ²⁵So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts 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, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. Selah
Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.
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 anointed.
For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents 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.

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. {11} Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {12} For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. {13} Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. {14} Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. {15} As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. {16} With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. {17} Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. {18} Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. {19} Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, {20} for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

John 6:56-69

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. {57} Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. {58} This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." {59} He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. {60} When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" {61} But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? {62} Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? {63} It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. {64} But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. {65} And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." {66} Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. {67} So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" {68} Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. {69} We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Better is one day in Your courts, Better is one day in Your house,
Better is one day in Your courts, than thousands elsewhere, than thousands
elsewhere.

That's the chorus of the song we listened to earlier which is based on the 84th Psalm which we used for our call to worship. The Psalm and the song begin with an almost wistful, certainly prayerful exclamation "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God."

We're not sure who the Psalmist was although there are many who believe it to be a Psalm of David. Only in my mind David never experienced the place described here which is the temple. A temple his son Solomon built. Not that it matters, but to me this Psalm was written by a real and true church nerd. Or in this case a temple nerd. Someone who identified with the holy place so much that it would inspire him to write those words. Better is one day in your courts, better is one day in your house, than a thousand elsewhere.

Remember the story of Jesus at 12? You know it's Passover time and the whole family and maybe half of Nazareth goes to Jerusalem for the holiday. And only on the way home do they discover that Jesus, was left behind. When they find him and Mary wags her finger at him and says, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been worried sick." Standing there with

Joseph twisting his hear Jesus says, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he said to them.” I think I understand. He was a church nerd. If they lived in Jerusalem he’d of been there every day. A place he felt close to God.

When you were ‘growing up’ or if you are growing up now, or grown up but still – growing up, what was or is your favorite place to be? Is there a place that’s so incredibly comfortable and important to you that you could spend hours and hours just wiling away the time, but just an hour was something special? Some place that seems to fit you – to be natural to you – to just be a place where you fit? Someplace you wish you could be almost all of the time.

To be sure there are probably as many answers as there are people here today. Lot’s of special places. Like that swing under the shade tree in the back yard with a good book that you savor so as to make it really last. Or may be a bench seat near your flower garden watching butterflies floating lazily near by.. On a float on the pool with a cool drink you make last and last. Or under and umbrella at the beach squeezing the life out of a day and getting up only when the sun is setting. Or sitting in the stands at a ball game – any ball game hoping for extra innings or overtime or maybe a double header.. Or out there on the fairway when the day is so perfect and you get almost giddy when someone suggest you play 36. Or listening to a symphony that you wish would go on and on and on and on.... You know some place where just a day, just an hour is worth a thousand somewhere else.

What's your favorite place? Is there somewhere for you that a day is so good, so fulfilling that its worth a thousand days spent elsewhere? I have to confess that I have some affinity with psalmist. When I was growing up my favorite place was church. It's not a holy thing, it's a church nerd thing. I liked everything about it. I liked the usual things like Sunday School and worship and the people and the stuff that needed to be done. But I also liked the less than usual. I liked the lady that sat behind us who had juicy fruit chewing gum. I liked helping to clean up after communion when, long before disposables, every one of those little cups had to be pulled from the pew racks, taken to the kitchen and washed. I liked the smell of the kitchen when the coffee was brewing. My Dad taught Sunday school and we were always early so I liked helping him put out bibles or setting up tables or sharpening pew pencils or carrying the bulletins into the sanctuary. Which is, of course, where I really liked. Sanctuaries are different. The one I grew up in was a long way off from the temple courts of the living God, but somehow, even as a kid, I knew that God was in that place, that is, although a simple concrete block building, was a holy place. Every Sunday the choir sang,

(Sheet)

I still love all those things. I love coming in here... it's just ... special.

The Psalmist says, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.... a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather sweep floors in God’s house than be the guest of honor in some palace of sin and decadence.”

It would seem, on the surface, that the other passages before us today have little to do with Psalm 84. But in truth they do. Joshua who inherits the people of Israel from Moses, complete with all of their complaining arrogance, stands before them, calling them to commitment, equipped with some amazing things to say. For forty years they had been trying to get to this place that God has given them, this promised land, this land flowing with milk and honey. It was supposed to solidify their relationship to God. So that God, rather than place would be their life.

They are gathered and Joshua starts off as he should, telling them, like good preachers should tell you, that what’s about to be said is God’s word for them. He says, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards that you did not plant. “Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away

the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.”

Joshua’s desire is to get these people, not just to ‘the place’ God wants for them, the place unlike any other place. But to God. That’s what he wants. That’s what God wants. Joshua needs for them to know where he stands so he says some words which have become very significant, “choose this day whom you will serve... the old Gods that we should have left behind in Egypt in the wilderness.... Or, “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua knows that the place, the land, is important, but choosing to be in God, in relationship to God is what’s most vital. Of course the people say, ‘yeah, sure, no problem.’ But the people of Israel then and the people of Israel today still think that what’s important is that ancient strip of land – when in fact, the place God intended for them to live in order to be happy, is in God.

Jesus knows this and wants this for his followers too. For the past few weeks he’s been trying to convince us that it is in him, that we find a place to live. So he tells us to find in him, literally, in his, flesh and blood, the living bread, the living drink. It’s after this talk some of his followers decide they’ve heard enough. It’s just too difficult to wrap their brains around. Today, Jesus is speaking with those closest to him, to the inner circle, and says, Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you

are spirit and life. ... So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? Where else would we be? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

In our faith that place, that dwelling place, that place at which, in which, a day is better than a thousand, is in Christ. Peter asks the question, our question, Where else? Where else can we find such peace? Where else can we find the answers to our most probing and difficult questions? Where else can we know we are loved absolutely without condition? Where else can we come for just an hour and be as filled as a Psalmist who sings "Better is one day in Your courts, Better is one day in Your house, Better is one day in Your courts, than thousands elsewhere, than thousands elsewhere."

Do we want that place, that holy special place, for ourselves, for our children, for our youth? This place reminds us of that place. But the place in