

Hearts Set on Pilgrimage

By Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Psalm 84:5-7 NIV

Dear Friends,

The cultural challenge to remain young places men and women of all ages on a precarious cliff for we soon learn growing old is inevitable. While each new season brings its own blessings, they also bring loss. With each loss, we discover much of life requires letting go - letting go of physical health, relationships, children, dreams, and sometimes spouses. Each "letting go" leaves a ragged hole that can make or break us. Is there a way to ease into the afternoon of life with purpose? How do we deal with these holes, regrets, guilt, and most of all change, not only in our bodies but in our roles, our relationships, our perspective? Though Psalm 84 is not specifically written as a roadmap for aging, I find in it several clues for how to live with purpose no matter my season of life, but especially in the afternoon and evening of life.

Remember the passion and hunger the writer(s) of this Psalm express for the temple of God where they often experience the presence of God in unique ways? At first glance, a reader might conclude this is just about taking a journey through a desert to attend church as required by God. But there is much more, especially for those who love Jesus.

Psalm 84, called The Pearl of Psalms by Charles Spurgeon portrays people "whose hearts are set on pilgrimage". Merriam Webster defines "pilgrimage" as a journey of a pilgrim especially: one to a shrine or a sacred place and the course of life on earth. Psalm 84 describes the Israelites on a journey to a sacred place. Nothing will deter them from reaching their ultimate destination, the temple of God in Zion. Zion, or the City of David, is a Canaanite hill fortress in Jerusalem captured by King David. Zion can also mean mountain or mountain of the Lord, the Rock of Israel as we see in Isaiah 30:29:

You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel.

Old Testament writers mention Zion repeatedly and we see Zion in the New Testament as well. Though Zion can refer to the city of Jerusalem or the hill where the most ancient areas of Jerusalem stood, in Revelation 21 Mount Zion represents the Kingdom of God. John declares he sees the “New Jerusalem (Kingdom of God) that will descend out of heaven.” Our ultimate hope of heaven can fuel our journey even when our pilgrimage takes us through the valley of tears.

The people whose hearts are set on pilgrimage in Psalm 84 know that to get to Zion they must pass through the Valley of Baca, or the Valley of Tears. But nothing deters them. They are ready for whatever comes their way. When the heat, thirst or terror of wild animals tempts them to turn back, they set their shoulder to the plow and forge ahead. They start their journey with “the way” in their souls.

We, too, are a people on pilgrimage. As God’s children, redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus, our journey takes us through the valley of tears as well as up the mountains of joy. Psalm 84:5-7 gives us a glimpse into what drives and enables pilgrims to continue their journey, whether during David’s time or our own. The Scriptures are timeless and no matter our age they can be our guides for how to live with purpose on our journey Home.

Treasured by Him,
Sharon

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Soak in Revelation 21, especially verses 1 – 7 as you consider your own journey Home through the Valley of Tears.

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth, “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death ‘or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty, I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of

life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Revelation 21:1-7

