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**The Psalmist's Confession
of Faith**

**Sermon preached by Mr. H. Dawson
at Union Chapel, Bethersden,
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THE PSALMIST'S CONFESSION OF FAITH

Psalm 84.10.

“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.”

If you would like, as you are here before God, to have some sure work in your soul's experience as to where you are in things divine—whether you are a sinner born again, whether you are a pilgrim to Canaan bound, if you can take up this language that dropped from the lips of godly David long ago, when out of the abundance of the heart the mouth was speaking; if you can find in your heart an “Amen” to this confession of faith, you can say with Job: “The root of the matter is found in me,” because to be able to take up such language as this can only be as the sap in that root of the matter rises up within, and then, as I have said: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth can speak. Can you do it? Young and old, is this how you do feel before God with Whom you have to do? Here you are in the attitude of worship, what does it really mean to you? To some of you, maybe you dear young people, it is burdensome; parental discipline causes you to come up where you are in the attitude of worship, but if you could do as you like you would have nothing whatever to do with it. Some of you would rather be found in the tents of wickedness than where you are in the house of prayer, a very solemn consideration if that is how you feel. Alas, that it should be so; but, there are many of you, blessed be God, who come with a feeling like this:

“I seek and hope to find
A portion for my soul”;

you have come with willing feet because your heart prompts you, and you would be glad to get a “Jabez portion”: “O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed”:

“We humbly for Thy coming wait,
Seeking to know Thee as Thou art,
We bow as sinners at Thy feet,
And bid Thee welcome to our heart”.

Listen: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit”. Remember that!

I want as the Lord shall help me to look at this subject from two or three viewpoints of it. The Psalm where the subject is found is wonderful in the description it gives of what was going on in godly David's breast at the time, and it was a very solemn time, a testing time, for the Psalmist when he entered into what is set forth in the Psalm before us. As is my usual method, I would look at the setting of the subject because it is like looking at the picture in its proper frame, and you will find by the internal evidence in the Psalm that the Psalmist was at such a pass in his life that he never, never dreamed he would be found in. The Psalm is to do with the time of Absalom's rebellion, when, as you are all aware (you are all familiar with the details) Absalom rose up in rebellion against his godly father, seeking to usurp his place on Israel's throne, and it is very solemn to contemplate how many of the hosts of Israel were on Absalom's side at that time, and to such a degree that David stepped down from Israel's throne, and fled with those who were his attendants and on his side into the wilderness of Judea. Solemn must have been the Psalmist's reflections as he went on his way into that desert locality; you may ask how it was that his thoughts would be so solemn. Not only in the humiliation of having to step down from Israel's throne awhile, and not to be aware of what would be the will of God when he should ascend it again, but it was only a little while before that the Psalmist had been guilty of grievous evil in the matter of Uriah and Uriah's wife. It had been blazed abroad from Dan to Beer-sheba, and many of the Israelites had talked it over, and to the Psalmist's detriment as regards his profession, which he had so long made:

"Watched by the world with jealous eye,
That fain would see our sin and shame",

and there were thousands in the Land of Promise of such a character, and they viewed the Psalmist like that. David was painfully aware of this, and as he went into the wilderness of Judea it was not so much that he had stepped down from Israel's throne that was burdening him, but the guilt on his conscience wherein he had been so remiss as to fall a prey to what he was by nature, and that he had brought a reproach on the cause of God and truth in the Land of Promise. I want you dear people, young and old, to keep in your mind one of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you *falsely* for My sake". If they should say about you what is the truth, wherein you have, erred in word and deed, alas; your conscience will be loaded with guilt at such a time, and you will need divine aid to "Put your mouth in the dust of self-abasement, if so be there may be hope"; and there is hope. "If we confess our

sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". That is the setting of the subject, but, you do not find the Psalmist making any mention of Absalom and his ill-behaviour, but his great concern is that matters may be made right between his soul and God, whatever the issue of Absalom's rebellion might be. The opening words of the Psalm are very beautiful: "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 word 'amiable' is very suggestive. I have told you sometimes, I hope you will remember it—I often think there is a great deal of repetition in my attempts to preach—but if at the end of life's journey you have got no benefit from it, how solemn that will be seeing these truths have been so often repeated and you have not heard to purpose and profit. Think about that as the Lord shall help you. This word 'amiable' is in relationship to the tabernacle. Had you seen the tabernacle when it was set up in the Psalmist's time, as it was in the wilderness when Israel of old wandered therein, you would have seen nothing amiable about it from the outside. To look on it would just be a drab-coloured tent as you viewed it, the amiability was inside. Inside the tabernacle there was the Holy Place, and then the Holiest of all. In the Holy Place there was the seven-branched golden candlestick, the table of shewbread and the altar of incense, and in the Holiest of all, where the high priest went once a year, there was the Ark of the Covenant with the tables of stone within, Aaron's rod that budded, and the golden pot that had manna, and the Mercy-seat on the top of it. Now that furniture was the most beautiful furniture that has ever been made, or will be. God showed to Moses in the mount what the pattern of it all was to be, and when it came to doing the work the Word of God says: "I have given unto Bezaleel wisdom"—all that he needs to superintend the work that is to be done. "See that thou make all things after the pattern showed thee in the mount." Bezaleel was appointed, and others, and they were equipped and qualified by God to do the work, and it was the most beautiful furniture that ever mortal eyes set on; it must have been amazing to look at in its completion, but even that, beautiful as it was, lovely to look at, was not the amiability of the tabernacle; it was what it all stood for that made it amiable; remember that. To see the table of shewbread in the Holy Place, and by living faith discern; "I am the Bread of Life; he that eateth of this Bread, he shall live for ever"; to view the golden candlesticks whereby there was light in the tabernacle to see, for there were no windows in it—no daylight lighted the tabernacle—which is to say nothing to do with education can give you illumination as to the things of God *whereby your soul can be fed*, but it was the light ordained of God, "beaten oil for the sanctuary",

the Word of God says, and in the light of the golden candlestick the priests did what they had to do. What does that teach us? You know one of my petitions:

“Oh, send us Thy unction, and teach us all good;
Touch with compunction, and sprinkle with blood”.

“In Thy light shall we see light”. Then to view the altar of incense, and there is one thing very pleasing to me at least concerning it, and it will be to some of you. When the golden candlestick had the lamps on it trimmed, there was always incense burning on the altar of incense, because otherwise, with the olive oil there might have been something a little objectionable, but the incense being fired on the altar obliterated what otherwise might have annoyed. When you and I often try to pray, sometimes there is quite a deal about our attempts to pray that is not always as spiritual as you would like it to be, but meanwhile:

“Jesus on the eternal throne,
For mourners intercedes”.

Yes, the incense of His infinite merit in the life that He lived, and the death He died, the triumph of His resurrection, the Glory of His ascension—the infinite merits that flow from this tremendous truth: “It is finished”. Think of Aaron, the high priest, on the day of atonement, when he went into the Holiest of all; you will remember how he had to behave then as he went into that wondrous place with incense in the censer, fired with a coal taken from the altar of burnt offering, and with the blood of the slain sacrifice in the basin, and there he stood before God with the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and at the foot of it, and the incense filled the Holiest of all with a cloud—thus Aaron stood before God on Israel’s behalf, and he lived, and Israel lived too. Now that is only a little picture that you were all aware of, for you have looked at it many a time in reading the Word of God, which shows what was the amiability of the tabernacle as the Psalmist understood it. What did I read to you? What was in the Psalmist’s mind whereby he realised: “A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand”? “One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord”—not the beauty of the furniture—“and to enquire in His temple”; in other words, to bring all hard questions and lay them at Jesus’ feet to obtain help, instruction and light thereon. “How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts”. Mark the effect of all this deprivation of the worship

of God in the public means on the Psalmist: “My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God”; and this thought I put into words: Do you feel the miss of public worship when you cannot engage in it? Do you feel the miss when not in your usual place in the attitude of worship? Do you agree with our hymn-writer:

“Oh Zion, when I think on thee,
I long for pinions like the doves;
And mourn that I should ever be
So distant from the place I love”.

If you feel the miss of not being able to worship God amongst His dear people where you delight to be, you have got a sure evidence that the good work has been begun in you and is being carried on, for you cannot feel like that arising from what you are by nature, the thing is impossible. The Psalmist, as he went on his way into the wilderness of Judea: “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”; what a simple homely picture that is. The Psalmist saw the sparrows flying about, and the swallows wheeling in the air, and he thought of them as he had seen them in the vicinity of the tabernacle, and how they were round about it, but the Psalmist was afar off from it, and he says: “Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, they will be still praising Thee. Selah”. Here, as grace is given, I want to emphasize what is a deep-down truth: “They that dwell in Thy house”; remember that godly David, Israel’s king as he was, when he went up to where the tabernacle was, could not go inside it; he could go in the outer courts, and look around at what was being done in the worship of God there, where the altar of burnt offering was, and the brasen laver. David could view that being done, but only those who were priests had any authority aright to go into the tabernacle, and be in the holy place, and do all that had to be done there in carrying on the worship of God in the centre of Israel’s camp.

So David thinks of the priests, and that they could dwell in the house of God all day long, all night too—prayer and praise never ceasing, day and night the worship of God was carried on, but carried on by those ordained to do it, the priests. Here you really ought to sing the Doxology—you can do it inwardly—but do remember that you and I have not to think about the tabernacle with all its beautiful furniture, nor Solomon’s temple in all its glory that followed it, but what do we read has happened regarding the worship of God since

Jesus Christ came down into this world to save sinners, yea, to do that great, redeeming work which He did so well, and when He had done it, what did He say: "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do".

"It is finished, cried the Lord,
In His dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the Word,
Full salvation's in it".

When Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross, what do we read? "The veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom". God did that, not man. A curtain sixty feet high from the top to the bottom, if man had tried to do it he would have begun at the bottom, but man had nothing whatever to do with it—it was just a miracle, it was to show:

"Love's redeeming work is done,
Fought the fight, the battle won",

and this: "The middle wall of partition is broken down between us". Now any poor sinner born again comes into this beautiful experience: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God", and what do you read in the Hebrews which is a wonderful opening up of this truth? "Having therefore, brethren, boldness (margin: liberty) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and having an High Priest over the house of God, Let us draw near in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water"; here is the emphasis in this great truth: "Let us draw near with a true heart". You are welcome to see the amiability of the tabernacle in all that Jesus Christ is, in all that He has done: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me". Go back a moment, and then I must hasten on to another viewpoint of the subject, and you will see in Jesus Christ what the brasen laver stood for, I have just read it to you: "and our bodies washed with pure water"; you will see the altar of burnt offering:

". . . a scene of matchless grace,
'Tis Jesus in the sinner's place";

you will enter into the holy place, and you will gather round

the Gospel table and find it equivalent to the table of shew-bread; you will come like this, if you come aright:

"A crumb of mercy, Lord, I crave,
Unworthy to be fed,
With dainties such as angels have,
Or with the children's bread".

You will realise what the golden candlestick sets forth in its wondrous light: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things"; and when you attempt to pray you will be thankful there is the altar of incense—the incense, as I have hinted at, of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ—to perfume your petitions, so that you and your petitions are "Accepted in the Beloved". Then to go right into the holiest of all, and say: "It is good for me to draw near unto God", and how:

"That rich atoning blood,
Which sprinkled round I see,
Provides for all that come to God,
An all-prevailing plea".

Ours is a lovely Gospel that we try to preach to you; oh that every one of you could enter into it, and realise its power, and see the amiability of the tabernacle—not just the drab-coloured tent that the tabernacle was of old, as it was pitched in the wilderness; no, but "*the true tabernacle, which God pitched, and not man*". Now says the Psalmist, and I like this wording, all this is linked up to our subject: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the ways of them". Godly scholars tell us that this meaning is in the original—I wish they had put it in the English of it for you and I to read: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, *in whose heart is the beaten track*"; in whose heart is a solemn awareness that "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God"; and, having that solemn awareness, realising "This is the way, walk ye in it", and be able to say—did you ever say it?—

"Let cares like a wild deluge come,
Let storms of trouble fall;
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my all".

Go back to when you were young, some of you, and you who are young, weigh this up before God, if you have it in your hearts to go along the "beaten track", which alone leads to

neaven and to God. If you have ever felt like Bunyan says about his pilgrim:

“There’s no discouragement,
Will make him once relent,
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim”.

There is something like that in our hearts in our spiritual youth (I can remember it, I wish I could feel some of it nowadays more often than I do), but there is this blessed, holy, wondrous determination:

“This prayer and this ambition mine,
Living and dying to be Thine”.

O to be the man in whose heart is the beaten track.

I now come to our subject; summing it all up godly David comes to this gracious conclusion in his mind, and then he makes what we can call a confession of his faith: “For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand”, the meaning is “a thousand elsewhere”. I will guarantee that many of you, if you weigh matters up before you were born again, can remember some days in the world that you would be very glad if that page recording all that was done on that day by you, in the world and of it, could be torn out, but there it is with its record. What a day it was when it comes back to your mind, and now you are born again how you can understand how David felt: “Remember not against me the sins of my youth”. I can tell you young people I have got many a day in my teenage life which still loads me with very sorrowful reflections, and I can say “Amen” to that petition. Have you ever pondered what Job said: “Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth”; what Job must have been before he was born again? In his low estate it comes back to him, and Satan reminds him of quite a bit of it, if so be he can harass, deject and dismay; and he comes like that to some of us in life’s eveningtime, and we think of this day, and that day, when we did what we liked, when we were just “after the flesh, the things of the flesh”, when we broke through parental discipline, and our parents went down into the grave and never knew anything about it, but we know something about it, and God knows all about it. Dear young people, keep that thought in your mind! You cannot journey on through life, and do this and that, and think you can escape the consequences: “Thou God seest me”. You might have some dark days, some

sinful days, some downright wicked days, even in your teenage life that you remember, and you do not want anyone that loves you, or anyone else, to know about it; but *you have lived those days*, and the Lord appear on your behalf, and bring you down before Calvary’s cross to tell Him all the truth. Do remember:

“Jesu’s Blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, eternal mercy, cries”.

The Psalmist is now talking about “A day in Thy courts”; a day when you gather together where God is worshipped in the public means, to spend a day there. It might not always be what you call a good day, and yet to be there is to be where you ought to be, for the Word of God lays it down: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”. “Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep; ye shall reverence my Sanctuary”. My friends, young and old, ask God to help you, and He will help you to bring to remembrance some of the days you have known in the courts of the Lord. Remember days when you heard the Gospel preached, and you have not forgotten the text; oh, what a day that was in your soul’s feelings: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God, for our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power”. It may be you can remember days when you went up to worship God feeling so unfit that the devil suggested that it was useless to go, because you were like you were in your feelings before God, and then you found in going: “And I being in the way, the Lord met with me”; and you rejoiced to find: “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer”. What a day it is when you find you are confirmed as a disciple indeed, and that your past experience is that which is of God, and you are being led forth by the right way. How do you approach the courts of the Lord? Do you come up with this feeling: “How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts”?

“We love the place, O God,
Wherein Thy honour dwells;
The joy of Thy abode,
All earthly joy excels”.

Yes, you have had days of help, days when hope has been bright; you have had some days when you seem to get nothing, yet you came hoping to obtain something for your soul, but somehow the preaching of the Gospel did not come where you

were, and you felt, in going home, a disappointment, a sense of want. Did that feeling arise from what you were by nature? No. No. What you are by the grace of God produces feelings like that. Sometimes you get what we might call, speaking with great reverence, a red-letter day, and that is when you see Jesus: "And they saw no man, save Jesus only"; and what a day to be remembered that is when, as you read in Solomon's Song: "The king is held in the galleries", and you see Jesus by the eye of faith, and see in Him: "All your salvation, all your desire", a happy day! Then, you would rather spend a day in the courts of the Lord, and feel that in being in such a place you are where you should be, than to "be found in the tents of wickedness" elsewhere. Dear young people, mark this wording: "The courts of the Lord"; the "house of my God"; but when it comes to wickedness, "tents of wickedness"; tents are taken down, the house is that which abides. The tents, wherever they may be pitched as tents of wickedness, will be struck, and swept off the earth when time shall be no more, and they that have dwelt therein, where will they be? "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all nations that forget God"; but those people taught of God, who have found their happiness in the worship of God; who have delighted to be found "at Jesu's feet to receive of His words"; who have said many a time, many a day: "Lord, it is good for us to be here", where will they be? They will all be found in that wondrous host with Jesus Christ at the head, and He will say to His Father, and everyone in that host will hear Him say it: "Behold I, and the children whom Thou hast given Me"; here they are, every one on whose behalf I lived and died, and rose again, "Saved, with an everlasting salvation". See what a mercy it is to be at home in the courts of the Lord, to dwell in the house of God. I cannot understand people who are born again, and therefore having spiritual minds, not having a spiritual home. It is essential for a sinner born again that he should have a spiritual home where he goes up to worship God. It may not always be according to our Church order, and that (do listen) is of secondary importance; what is of supreme importance is this: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them". "Everything hinges on Thy Presence hallowing our worship, O Lord";

"In Thy Presence I am happy;

In Thy Presence I'm secure;

In Thy Presence all affliction;

I can easily endure".

What is of supreme importance is just this: "Nevertheless, the

foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His". "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"; and every sinner taught of God, whatever his views of church order may be, wherever he worships God, will stand on that sure foundation God had laid in Zion; and if you stand there, too, you will say: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity".

"With them numbered may we be,

Now, and in eternity".

"For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand (elsewhere), I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness". A doorkeeper: Here I want to make one thing plain, as God shall help me; you read, especially in the Chronicles, how there were certain people set aside as doorkeepers; and, as you remember how Israel had to worship God under the law, and the Mosaic ritual had to be observed, the doorkeepers had a specific work to do. For instance, to help you understand, if a man who was a leper, with a covering on his upper lip, approached, desiring to enter in to worship God, the doorkeeper would say: "Alas, my friend, you are not allowed to enter here, because of your disease". How very different it is under the Gospel, under which you and I are living: "Him that cometh unto Me", however diseased he may be, "I will" never, no never, no never "cast out":

"The vilest sinner out of hell,

Who lives to feel his need;

Is welcome to the throne of grace;

The Saviour's blood to plead."

The margin will help you here, "I would choose rather to sit at the threshold of the house of my God". If I could only be at the threshold, in the vicinity of it, I should count that happiness; "but here am I," said David, "afar off in the wilderness of Judea, and when shall I go up again to the house of the Lord". There is one thought here, and then I must come to the Amen; you will read further on in the New Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles: "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour; and a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that

entered into the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms, and Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, "Look on us," and he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee; In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk"; and he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength, and he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God". You see a picture there of a poor sinner who was actually at the threshold, before the Beautiful gate of the temple, as it was in those days; and if you dear young people like to remember this, it is recorded in history that on the two pillars, one on either side of this Beautiful gate, there was a warning written in Greek: "No stranger is allowed to enter through this gate, on pain of death". How very different is that approach unto God that you sing about:

"The door of Thy mercy stands open all day,
To the poor and the needy that knock by the way;
No sinner was ever yet empty sent back,
Who came seeking mercy for Jesus' sake".

Only orthodox Jews could go through the Beautiful gate of the temple, but when Jesus Christ died, and as I have told you, the Way into the holiest was made, the middle wall of partition was broken down, Jew and Gentile alike are welcome to draw near to God. The Way is made plain: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me".

"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". Do remember, in the Word of God it is stated here: "Everyone of them in Zion appeareth before God"; you may not be at the threshold, but wherever you are found in the attitude of worship, you appear before God just as you are; He not only knows who you are, what you are, but what you have in your heart to be if you could be; and do remember:

"The soul that with sincere desires,
Seeks after Jesu's love;
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires,
With breathings from above".

Amen.