

The Sons Of Korah: Door Keepers

Psalm 84

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Please turn to Psalm 84. This is one of my favorite hymns in our hymnal, which I have many, but this is one of them. It is page 65, How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings. This song is from Psalm 84. In fact, page 66 is also from this psalm. And today, I am going to focus on this psalm.

I want to read verse 10 of Psalm 84.

Psalm 84:10 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God. Now what is a doorkeeper? Well, there are other terms that you can use for the doorkeeper also: gatekeeper, and a more modern term that we use is porter. And so what is a doorkeeper and is it a position that should be important to us today?

In our modern world it is a position that usually is well overlooked. Do we really ever really notice the doorkeeper or the greeter at Walmart? Or do we even notice the security guard at the bank or other buildings? Their roles are frequently menial and secondary.

But a doorkeeper in the Scriptures, does it matter? Now some would say no. In fact, some scholars, and according to John Wesley Wright from *Guarding the Gates*, he says gatekeepers of the Temple were officials of somewhat of a lower order, Levite or not, and have not proven an area deemed worthy of scholarly energies.

I do not know if he is the only one that feels that way, but some of these scholars do not see them as important. Now, if you are going to ask me, are they important? I say, absolutely.

Today, I want to look at the doorkeepers, the gatekeepers. Now, the gatekeepers were Levites stationed at the gates of God's house. They had the task of opening the doors in the morning and closing them at night.

In the Scriptures, gatekeepers were appointed. This is a position that they, again, stood at the door. Their responsibilities included receiving and distributing tithes, gifts that were brought to the house of God. They were in charge of the vessels of the Temple. They were appointed over the furnishings and over the implements that are used in the sanctuary.

Some of them were over the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices. And some of the sons of the priests were in charge of making the ointments for the spices. But some of them were bakers, and they were in charge or had the responsibility of preparing the showbread for every Sabbath.

But most importantly, they stood guard at the entrance of the Temple to make sure that no unclean person would enter into God's house. They stood guard for hours on end, day and night. Now, this may not seem to like to be a glorious job, but it was an exceedingly important duty to the point where the psalmist said there is no place he would rather be than at the threshold of the Temple.

And as I said earlier, this is a position that was appointed or you could even say the position was ordained. So, they understood that this duty was of a profound trust and an honorable position. Of course, what better way to serve than to be at the threshold of the door into the presence of God.

And I think the doorkeepers standing guard at that entrance of the Temple is a reminder to us today that communion with God is a privilege and should not be taken lightly.

Now I want to go back to Genesis for a moment, Genesis 2, to the Garden, and ask the question, were there doorkeepers in the Garden? Well, no. There was no need for restrictions into God's presence. Not until sin had entered Adam and Eve. In Genesis 2:15, it says,

Genesis 2:15 Then God took the man and put him in the garden to tend and keep it.

Now the word tend here means to serve, to labor. But the word keep is *shamar*; it means to keep, to guard and protect. Now I do not know if Adam had the ability to guard the entrances of the garden. And when Satan came in as the serpent, I do not know that he had the power or the ability to stop him. But the one thing I think Adam did have the ability to do and that was to guard against the influence and not to be deceived, and guard against committing sin. And as a result of that sin, they were driven out of the Garden.

And then when we see over in chapter 3, verse 24, it says,

Genesis 3:24 So He drove out the man; and placed cherubim at the east entrance of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Here the word guard is *shamar*. It is the same thing. They were kept to protect the presence of God after the sin of Adam and Eve.

Through the grace of God, He found a way still to have fellowship with man. When God had turned away Adam and Eve, He still found a way to commune with them. It was not directly anymore, but He did find a way to have fellowship with them because holiness demands respect.

And through our sins, we could not come in direct contact with our God. So God made a way. In fact, for example, Moses when he was at the burning bush, he could only come so close; he had to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. And then, when Moses spoke to God face to face, Moses could not see His face. He could only be so close.

Then in Exodus 19:12, we see that God at Sinai told Moses to put limits around the mountain because whoever would touch it would be put to death. And so, when they entered into the wilderness, God found a way to be in the midst of His people, and God instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle.

This was to be a physical sanctuary so He could dwell directly with His people. Of course, there were specific regulations of the construction, instructions for sacrifices to atone for their sins, and even detailed arrangements for each tribe where they camped around the Tabernacle. And then there were detailed duties for the Levites, all spelled out by God, so He could have a relationship with them.

So God established the means for fellowship despite our human impurity. This dwelling place functioned as actually a mobile meeting place, allowing God to lead them, interact with them, and reside in their midst.

Now, in Numbers 3, we see that God set apart the tribe of Levi to help the priests, to do the performances of the Tabernacle. And this is where the institution of the gatekeepers begin. Now, there is no place in the books of Moses, in the first five books, that even speaks of doorkeepers or gatekeepers. However, 900 years later, in I Chronicles chapter 9, we read that Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was in charge of the gatekeepers. So there must have been gatekeepers at the time when they were going through the wilderness. And we see in verse 20 of I Chronicles 9, where it talks about the role of the gatekeeper and Phinehas. Verse 20 says,

I Chronicles 9:20 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar had been the officer over them in time past; the Lord was with him.

So this grandson of Aaron was in charge of the gatekeepers. But why is it important? And the term here I think is important is that God was with him. And there is a reason why.

If you look back into Numbers 25, we will see here why Phinehas was given such an important responsibility. Here we see in Numbers 25 detailed information on how Israelites had fallen into idolatry, sexual immorality with the Moabite and Midianite women, even to a point of bowing down to Baal, which prompted a plague due to God's anger. Twenty-four thousand died from that plague.

Even in that, an Israelite leader openly took a Midianite woman into his tent in front of everyone and committed fornication with her. But we see that

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Phinehas was zealous for God. He got up, took his javelin, went into the tent, and ran them both through.

Because of his action, God stopped the plague. And He granted a covenant of peace, promising everlasting priesthood to his descendants. So we can see why Phinehas had responsibility because he is the model doorkeeper because he was fervent for God. He was fervent because he did not want immorality or idolatry to stain the rites. Because he protected the holiness of the camp, we see that says in,

Numbers 25:13 . . . he was zealous for the house of his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.

So, the chief guard, this gatekeeper, it does have atoning value.

Please turn to I Samuel chapter 3, verse 1.

I Samuel 3:1 Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.

So these verses show how this is the first calling of Samuel. And of course when he heard the voice, he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am," and Eli told him that is not me. Now while the Bible does not state what his exact age is, the commentators and most scholars think he was around 12 years old at the time.

Let us drop down to verse 15.

I Samuel 3:15 So, Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.

You see, Samuel was a doorkeeper, a very young doorkeeper. In fact, I think it is a reflection of how evil the situation was because there should not have

been a boy opening the doors of the Temple. So I think it is a reflection of the time they were in. Even though he started out with such a humble role as the doorkeeper, he had become, of course, an outstanding priest and judge.

Then during the reign of David, his greatest desire was to build a temple for his God. He spent much of his reign gathering things together, finances so he could build this; he wanted to build this temple. And he spent also a lot of time organizing the priesthood, so they could do various duties to serve in that temple once it was built. And this is a huge project, but I just want to focus on one little part.

I Chronicles 23:5 Four thousand were gatekeepers, and four thousand praised the Lord with musical instruments, "which I made," said David, "for giving praise."

That is a staggering number: 4,000. Now again, I went through earlier, there was a lot of duties and roles that the gatekeepers did, but this is a major responsibility on a grand scale.

There was one family though that David chose or appointed to be the gatekeepers, as well as the musicians and over them. I want to go to I Chronicles 9, verse 17. The little heading here is The Levite Gatekeepers.

I Chronicles 9:17-19 And the gatekeepers were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their brethren. Shallum was the chief. Until then they had been gatekeepers for the camps of the children of Levi at the King's Gate on the east. Shallum, the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brethren from his father's house, the Korahites, were in charge of the work of the service, gatekeepers of the tabernacle. Their fathers had been keepers at the entrance of the camp of the Lord.

I Chronicles 9:22-23 All those chosen as gatekeepers were two hundred and twelve. They were recorded by their genealogy, in their villages. David and Samuel the seer appointed them to their trusted office. So they and their children were in charge of the gates of the house of the Lord, the house of the tabernacle, by assignment.

Now I want to focus on that one family he chose. If you notice here, it was the Korahites. They were the sons of Korah. This brings us full circle back to Psalm 84. If you read the heading on Psalm 84, it says: To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

You see, it was the sons of Korah who wrote and sang the words, I would rather be a doorkeeper. I would rather be stationed at the threshold of the Temple, protecting it, for the house of my God. Psalm 84 speaks of the devotion that the sons of Korah had for this dedication to their job and the seriousness of this duty.

It is very apparent in this work, in these verses. And there is an amazing irony here because this psalm was written and sung by the sons of Korah—well, who were the sons of Korah? They were the descendants of that Korah that led the rebellion against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16:3! He says,

Numbers 16:3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You take too much on yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

Korah did not have the proper respect and honor for God's chosen leader. In response, Moses told Korah and his men to appear the next day before God, and that God would show them who was holy and who was to be the leader. And when they gathered, God's glory appeared and told Moses and Aaron to step away so He could consume them.

Now Moses tried to intercede for them. But God relented and brought on His wrath. The earth was opened up and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, Abiram alive, and they went into the grave. Fire came down from heaven and consumed all those that were with them on their side. There was 250 of those leaders that supported Korah.

I want to go to Numbers 26, verses 10 and 11. It is pretty much the same story, but verse 11 is important.

Numbers 26:10-11 And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when the company died, when the fire devoured the two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.

I find it interesting that these other families that stood with Korah, their wives and their children, they stood with him and they all died together. But the irony is that the children of Korah did not stand with Korah. They stood with Moses. And by doing so, it shows us that they had faith and they believed. They did not necessarily follow their father like the others did, going directly against God through Moses. We see that pride, we see that self-importance of Korah. It destroyed any obedience, humility that he had.

Now, the Scriptures do not tell us specifically that David and Samuel chose the sons of Korah for any specific reason. But I believe it is that God inspired David to choose this family to be an example of what the sons of Korah could really be. Because it was clear that the sons of Korah had a zeal, like Phinehas, to honor God. And we do not see any pride or self-importance. It is just the opposite. They understood that the most humble place that they could be is in the presence of the Almighty God.

Knowing this, I am going to go back to Psalm 84, and I like to read it knowing now who wrote this and what their relationship was with Korah. I think it is just outstanding.

Psalm 84:1-12 To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young—even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You. Selah.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a

spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah.

O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed. For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!

I just think it is an amazing chapter especially when you know the history of this family. It is very inspiring. I will probably never sing this song, How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings, the same way without thinking about this chapter.

The sons of Korah broke that chain of rebellion. Now they did not change their identity, but *they changed what their identity meant*. They took the name Korah and stripped it from its shame by serving God with passion.

The temptations of Korah were jealousy, pride, seeking higher position. But the sons of Korah countered it by displaying complete humility because they did not focus on position. They focused on service.

And in our lives we often struggle in our place. We want recognition, the honor, the title. But the sons of Korah teach us that the greatest title is simply "child of God," serving in any capacity that keeps us close to Him.

Today in the New Testament, it says that the Temple of God is no longer a building. It is you. And I Corinthians chapter 3, verse 16, says,

I Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple are you.

The apostle Paul tells us that our bodies are the Temple of God through His Holy Spirit.

Now there is only one perfect doorkeeper. There is only one perfect gatekeeper and He loves us dearly. And that is Jesus Christ, because He laid down His life for us. Turn to John chapter 10, please. Verse 11 says,

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

Now back to verse 3.

John 10:3 "To Him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear His voice; and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out."

John 10:9 But Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."

Jesus Christ is the legitimate gate into God's presence. And He is a gatekeeper that will not allow any unclean thing. And it is by His sacrifice, by the shedding of His blood, that we even have the opportunity to come into God's presence.

But every one of you is a spiritual gatekeeper. You should be on guard against the wickedness that we deal with on a daily basis. Through the Holy Spirit, you have been given discernment, the ability to recognize what comes from God and what comes from Satan. And we must have the courage to slam the door on what comes from Satan.

You know, I read something interesting. It is from John Bunyan. It is an allegory, written in 1682. It is called The Holy War. Here, the human soul is depicted as a town of Mansoul, a fortress with five impregnable gates. I thought this was interesting. And the five gates were that he describes here is the Eye Gate, which is our sight; the Ear Gate, which is our hearing; the Mouth Gate, this is our speech and taste; the Nose Gate, which is our smell; and the Feel Gate, which is our emotions and touch.

You see, Satan is working continually to capture us, to get in the gate and to corrupt us by attacking our senses to get into our heart, and he will use every tool he has to break through our will and break our relationship with God.

Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23 says,

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

Here, again, we have that word keep, and also it means, again, to protect and to watch over your heart with diligence.

Psalms 141:3 Set a guard [set a doorkeeper], O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

One of my very favorite psalms is Psalm 121. And I find it very interesting here that God shows us that He is our guard and protector. Through this chapter six times He uses the word keep or preserve, and it is that verb again for *shamar*, meaning to guard, to keep, watch over, preserve.

And so I want to read my favorite psalm, Psalm 121. But I am going to insert the *shamar*.

Psalm 121:1-8 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps [and guards] you will not slumber. Behold, He who [guards and watches over] you [or over Israel] shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your [guard and protector]; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall [guard and protect] you from all evil; He shall [guard and watch over] your soul. The Lord shall [guard and protect] your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

We have a God that loves us so much, and it is beyond all human understanding. But we have a part to play. We must be active doorkeepers of our hearts. We must fight against the characteristics of people like Korah.

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We must be on guard against envy and pride and always be more concerned about others than ourselves. And if we see these traits in ourselves, it should be a warning sign to you and should not be left unchecked.

How often do we grumble about our position in the world or our lives and we overlook the great blessings that we have been given? And grumbling will lead to destruction if we only see the harm it does because it destroys order, unity, and peace.

The sons of Korah learned that true honor is not fighting for the spotlight but in guarding the house, guarding the doors of God's presence. They proved that any position given by God is a position to be honored and cherished because we are all being brought to glory by our Most High God. We need to be humble, grateful like the sons of Korah, brethren.

We have been given a place of higher status, favor, grace, power. And this has all been given to us by our loving God. Having been saved through His death, we are washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ. We can sing loud and free that yes, better is a day in the courts of my God than a thousand anywhere else, as His coming Kingdom will prove.

Will you stand watch? The role of gatekeeper for some it may not be substantial, but it is all about faithfulness.

In Mark 13:34, it says that we are to be like gatekeepers who keep watch because we do not know when the master of the house is coming. Will you be found sleeping at your post? Or will you be standing at the gate ready when He knocks?