

Psalm 122

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Date: 10 May 2020

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening.

Those who are watching online and those who are listening in on the telephone, it's good for us to be able to come together and worship as we've got accustomed to doing so in this way over these past few weeks.

We're going to begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise from Psalm 122. Psalm 122, we'll sing the whole of the psalm.

I joyed when to the house of God, go up, they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates, our feet shall standing be. Jerusalem as a city is compactly built together and to that place the tribes go up, the tribes of God go further.

Then to the end of the psalm, we sing to God's praise. I joyed when to the house of God, go up, they said to me, Jerusalem within thy gates, our feet shall standing be.

[1 : 35] Jerusalem as a city is compactly built together.

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[3 : 36] Jerusalem as a city Izal Bertone in all. Jerusalem as a city is compactly built together and to that place the Kelvin poner and to that place thegran 720p of God. Jerusalem as a city is compactly built together and to the fire of God. Now for my friends and brethren's sakes.

Peace be in thee, I'll say. And for the health of God, our Lord, I'll seek thy good away.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer now. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this evening. We thank you that towards the close of the day we're able to come into your presence.

We're able to unite our voices and our hearts in praise and in worship of you. And we're able to draw near to you in prayer. We do so, Lord, in Jesus' name. Our gathering together is in Jesus' name.

Our prayers are offered in Jesus' name. We come not in our own name. We come not on the basis of who we are or who we are trying to be. But we come on the basis of who Jesus is and all that he has done on our behalf.

[5 : 02] We thank you that we can make our approach to the throne of grace with reverence, remembering always that we come to the holy God, the awesome God of heaven and earth.

And yet we come with that boldness because our faith is in Jesus. And we believe that all that he did, he did for us.

And we believe that although we are sinners, as we confess our sin, you are the God who forgives us our sin, who purifies us from all unrighteousness, and even more than that, gives to us the righteousness of Christ, so that as we come, you look upon us and see not our sin-stained lives, but the perfect life of Jesus.

And we thank you, Lord, for that. We thank you for the gospel message which we cling on to and which all our hope is in. The life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus.

We thank you for the salvation that is offered to us and is something that can be never taken from us when we take hold of it by the faith that you give to us.

[6 : 15] And so we thank you that at the end of this day, our focus is on Christ. And we thank you that with the psalmist, we are able to say that as we come in worship, we do so with joy in our hearts.

So meet with us, Lord, we pray, in this time of worship. Open your word to us, we ask. We need the help of the Holy Spirit.

And so every time we open your word to sing it, to read it, and to meditate upon it, we do so seeking that the Holy Spirit himself would be our teacher and that our minds would be directed to things above.

Take our minds away from the distractions of things below, the things of this world that so often fill our eyes and so often cause us to be anxious and cause us to be preoccupied.

You pray that for this hour, Lord, you would sweep these things aside and that we would share something of the awe of the psalmist, that we are standing in the place where you have promised to meet with us.

[7 : 24] And we thank you, Lord, that you are the God who is everywhere. If you were the God who was restricted to buildings, church buildings, we would struggle at this time.

But we thank you that you are the God who is everywhere and you have promised that as we seek to draw near to you, you will draw near to us. You are the one who has promised that you will never leave us nor forsake us, but you are with us always to the very end of time.

So help us, Lord, we pray in this hour. We pray for those who meet afterwards as well. We thank you for our young people and for the youth fellowship and those who lead them this evening.

We pray that as they open your word, that they may know the same help of the Holy Spirit. We pray that they may understand the gospel message in its simplicity and yet in its power.

The gospel message is such depth and yet it is simple enough for a child to take hold of and to be saved through. And we pray for the young people and for the children of the congregation here and all congregations that we may be connected to.

[8 : 39] Be at work, Lord, we pray. And may many of the young people whom we bring to you, even in our minds eye just now, may they remember you and trust you in the days of their youth.

And as we pray for the young, we pray again for the old, for those who are infirm, for those who are housebound, for those who feel vulnerable, for those who feel lonely.

Draw near to them, we ask, and minister to them in the power of your spirit. So hear our prayers.

Guide us in worship.

Take away our sin. Fill us with the Holy Spirit. Fix our eyes upon Christ. For we pray these things in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. We will turn now to the psalm that we sang.

And we'll read this fairly short psalm. Psalm 122. And we'll read the whole of the psalm. A Song of Ascents of David.

[9 : 41] I rejoiced with those who said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

That is where the tribes go up. The tribes of the Lord to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. There the thrones for judgment stand.

The thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls. And security within your citadels.

For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, Peace be within you. For the sake of the house of the Lord, Our God, I will seek your prosperity.

Amen. May God bless that reading of his word to us and give us understanding as we come to it.

Now, people who travel a lot, you'll often see them with not just an ordinary watch on the wrist, but they have these fancy watches that have various dials on the face.

[10 : 54] And when you get a closer look at these watches, you see that they tell them the time, not just in the UK in this time zone, but they give information on the time in various different places.

And even in this room here, in the prayer meeting room, for those who can visualize it, I can see different time zones ahead of me. I can see the clock which keeps me in check.

And that's in the UK time or local time. But just to my right, I can see another clock which tells me the time in East Asia, a part of the world where a couple in the congregation often go.

to serve God. So there's different time zones. We're aware of that. And as we open this psalm, it's helpful for us to know, I think, just in our understanding of this psalm, that this is a psalm that works in different time zones.

It works in the past tense. That's when it was first penned. It's a psalm that takes us back in time, many, many thousands of years. It takes us back into a context where God's people traveled each

year up to Jerusalem to attend various religious festivals.

[12:12] And we touched on that in past weeks. One commentator, Paul Tripp, says, Jerusalem was the center of the worship of God in the Old Testament.

It was where the tabernacle was. It was where sacrifices were made. It was where the Holy of Holies was, where the presence of God dwelt.

And so we read in this psalm, and we read in many of the psalms, the importance of Jerusalem in the life of the believer. And this psalm, as we see in the title, it's a song of ascents.

It's part of a pack of psalms of ascent that go from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134. And it was thought that these psalms were sung by believers en route to Jerusalem as they traveled up to that place, as they ascended to that place.

To worship. And we see that even in the first two verses. We sense in verse one that the joy of setting out on that journey. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

[13:18] And then we sense also the thrill of arriving in that place of worship in Jerusalem. Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. So this is a psalm that was penned in the past tense originally.

It takes us back into the past. Many thousands of years into the past. But it's also a psalm that speaks to us in the present tense. There's the past tense in times of a time zone.

But there's also the present tense. It's about the church of today. The key text that unlocks that for us is Hebrews 12, 22 to 24.

You can study it yourselves at your own convenience. But it says in verse 22, but you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the city of the living God.

And that's one of many texts that we could go to that underline for us the fact that we don't need to go to Jerusalem anymore to worship. We don't need to make long pilgrimages to Mount Zion, to worship God.

[14:22] We come together as God's people, as the church of Christ, and we have the promise that whenever we seek to draw near to him, wherever we are, he's the God who will draw near to us.

And so this psalm, it speaks to us today as God's people, as the church, the New Jerusalem in that sense. So it speaks about the past tense.

It speaks about the present tense. But also it points us to the future. It has a future tense. It's a psalm that finds its ultimate fulfillment in heaven, and that's the New Jerusalem.

We could go to Revelation 21 and Revelation 22, and we see there this vision of the New Jerusalem. And if we are believers in Jesus, if we are Christian pilgrims, that's our final destination, the New Jerusalem.

We have no continuing city here, but we seek one to come. We are aliens. We are strangers in this world. So this psalm of ascents speaks to us about the place that we are ascending to, ultimately, if we are Christians, and that is heaven.

[15:39] So by way of introduction, it's helpful for us to see that this is a psalm. It has these three tenses. It works in these different time zones. But the common thread in each time zone is the thread of worship.

So this is a psalm that calls us to, and it teaches us about, the worship of God. And it really fits into three sections, three paragraphs, three stanzas.

You can see that in the Bible here, as the psalm is broken up. There's verses one and two, that's the first stanza. And then there's verses three to five, which is the second stanza.

And then there's verses six to nine, which is the third stanza. And I want to look at the psalm, just in these three sections, and we'll pause at the end of each section.

So first of all, we look at verses one and two. So we'll read these again. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

[16:50] And there's two things that we can note from these opening two verses. There's two points that we can consider under this first stanza. And the first point is that we see that David, that the psalmist and those with him, they rejoice in worship.

As they're going to worship, they have joy in their hearts. They rejoice to worship. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

That's the psalmist's testament. His heart was filled with joy as he came to the house of the Lord. Now, on this journey, was this an easy journey?

Was this a walk in the park? Well, we know it wasn't. We've seen that in past weeks. The journey as they ascended to that place of worship was treacherous.

It was dangerous. It was tiring. It was a journey, even as we look back to Psalm 121, that they needed God's help to be able to progress it. But this journey brought such joy to the heart of David, to go to Jerusalem, to be with God's people, to be in the place where God's name was lifted high.

[18:10] As David journeyed in that direction, his heart was filled with joy. Warren Weerspe, the commentator, says, As the pilgrim coming from a distance, would not complain about the journey, for his heart was set on the Lord.

Love makes burdens lighter and distances shorter. And that was true of David. As he's going up to that place of worship, he's not dragging his feet.

He's one who has a spring and a step as he goes to worship God. Another commentator, Eveson, says, While our individual lives should be expressing daily our worship of God, we are urged to gather for communal worship.

And it should gladden our hearts that we can come together as God's people to sing, pray, and hear God's word read and preached.

Now, you've all heard the phrase absence. We're in a period just now of absence in that respect.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder or the mind wander.

[19:25] And for many of us, I think that the absence of being able to come together physically in worship as we've been in the habit of doing, it's made our hearts long for the day when we can come back together physically in worship again.

There's such joy. There's such a sense of thrill in knowing and in worshipping God. And that's the truth that the devil wants us to forget.

He wants us to believe that worship is drudgery. It's cold, hard ritual. He wants us to believe that when we come together and worship to church or even as we come together in this way just now, the devil sows these seeds in our minds that we're missing out on so much when we're making this decision to come in worship.

But actually, the opposite is true. The only place where we find true and deep joy is when our lives are devoted to worship of God.

we read the text in the morning with the children from Psalm 34. We sang it. Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed, or happy, is the man who takes refuge in them.

[20:56] There's joy in worship. Remember when Jesus appeared to the two on the Emmaus Road after he died and was resurrected, they didn't know of the resurrection.

But Jesus, in that state of mourning in their own hearts, Jesus comes alongside them. He opens the scriptures to them. He reveals himself to them. And what did they say?

Well, they said in Luke 24, 32, Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us.

There's joy, there's a thrill in worship as the scriptures are opened, as Jesus comes close, there is a joy like we will find nowhere else in this world.

Sometimes you can watch somebody as you're looking out your window and you can see people occasionally on the road running. Some people, the reality is some people are made for running.

[22:00] And for other people like me, we're not made for running. And if you watch people like me, it appears to be, and it is, it's drudgery.

It's difficult. It's a trial. But when you watch an athlete run, when you watch a true runner run, there's such joy in even watching them running.

Eric Liddell in the film Chariots of Fire, there's that famous quote, God made me fast, says Liddell, and when I run, I feel his pleasure.

And God made us, didn't make us all runners, but he made us all for his worship. He made us all to worship him.

And when we worship him, when we, especially when we come together in worship, we feel his joy within us. The shorter catechism, the first catechism, what is man's chief end?

[23:09] What is man's primary purpose? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. So that's the first thing we see here.

As David the Psalmist sets off, there is a rejoicing in his heart. He rejoices in worship. The second thing we see here is that there is a resolve to worship.

I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. Now that's the translation in the NIV, let us go. In the original, it's actually stronger.

We will go is a better translation. There's an engagement of the world as they set off in worship.

They had and they needed a resolve to be able to set off on this dangerous, treacherous journey in order to worship God.

And that speaks immediately into the environment of this world. There is opposition to worship of God in this fallen world.

[24 : 19] The flow of the world takes us away from the worship of God. It takes us down a stream of worshipping other created things.

It takes us down a stream of worshipping ourselves. So there's a spiritual battle that rages around us in the environment of this world and there's a spiritual battle that rages within us.

We have an enemy that will do anything to take us away from the place of worship and to take us away from the posture of worship so we need resolve in order to worship God.

Remember Daniel when he was captured and he was taken to Babylon a place where everything was designed to draw him away from the worship of the one true God.

Daniel it says in Daniel chapter 1 verse 9 Daniel resolved not to defile himself. He resolved that in the time that he was in this place antagonistic as it was towards the God that he worshipped Daniel resolved that notwithstanding all of that he would worship God.

[25 : 37] and here David he resolved to go to that place of worship and he encouraged others around him to resolve to come with them to that place of worship and so we find them at the beginning of this psalm and they're setting off on that journey and soon any sense of reluctance that may have been in the hearts of some was gone and as they arrive in Jerusalem they're able to say in verse 2 our feet are standing in your gates so Jerusalem the commentator Lane says fear of the hazards of the journey has given way to a sense of wonder at being in such a place as Jerusalem David catches the sense of wonder in verse 2 and now we are actually standing inside the gates of Jerusalem that's one of the translations so there's a resolve to worship sometimes we need that steely resolve in order that we will come to God and worship sometimes it's with a sense of rejoicing that we come in worship but the important thing is that we come that we come to

God in worship so that's the first stanza the first section there's that rejoicing in worship and there's that resolve to worship now we'll look at the second stanza the second section which goes from verses 3 to verse 5 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together that's where the tribes go up the tribes of the Lord to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel they are the thrones for judgment stand the thrones of the house of David there's two more points to see in this next stanza and the first of these points the third point we come to within the overall psalmist we see here that there is a responsibility to worship and that connects us with the last point we might ask the question of the psalmist why is it that he resolves to worship or why is it that those that he's speaking to in the psalm why is it that he's trying to encourage them to resolve to worship why is it that so many times in the psalms we find the psalmist saying

I will worship not I feel like it but even though I'm in difficult situations and even though there is much in the way of turmoil in the circumstance we find him saying over and over again I will worship I mean if he doesn't feel like it we're sometimes inclined to say why not just leave it for now you know if the psalmist if he's had a bad day if he's distracted if he's just not feeling in a worshipful frame of mind why not just leave it for today like we so often do and say within ourselves well there's no point in me coming out to church there's no point in me coming to the place of worship when I feel like this today now David on many occasions likely did not feel an inclination to worship when he was under such attack but he never lost sight of the responsibility that he had to worship God so we see in verse 4 that he was going to the place of worship to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel Tripp the commentator says worship is not just an expression of heartfelt joy true worship is a recognition of duty it was important says Tripp that the Israelite would recognize that they had been redeemed from slavery by the Lord that their lives were no longer their own that there was an obligation to offer to God the worship that was due his name this was his decree this was the statute that was given to Israel so David is going to that place of worship to praise the name of the Lord remembering always that this was the statute this was his responsibility this was the right thing to do and for us it's important for us that we recognize that we have been redeemed not from the slavery of Egypt but we have been redeemed from the slavery of sin it's important for us that we recognize that we are no longer our own we have been

bought at a price and that price is the precious blood of Christ and we're not going to recognize these great truths by going on our phones and scanning through social media we're not going to recognize these great truths by tuning in to Britain's

Got Talent we only recognize and remind ourselves of these great truths as we come to God and worship and so we have a duty we have a responsibility to worship God to day by day offer our lives up to and not waste our lives living for ourselves or for the idols that this world throws in our direction and as we think verse five here about that phrase the thrones of judgment our minds are directed to that day when we will stand before the Lord now how will our lives be judged on the day that we stand before the Lord what will the criterion be for determining whether we are heaven bound or hell bound well it will be dependent not on the merits and the demerits of our lives but it will depend on whether or not we have turned from the idols of self and sin and turned in faith to worship the Lord

[32 : 05] Jesus so there's a responsibility to worship the fourth thing here the next point in this stanza is that there's a rapport in worship or there's a unity in worship get verse three going into verse four Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together that is where the tribes go up the tribes of the Lord now Calvin in his commentary says the words bind firmly together we have it translated closely compacted together speak metaphorically of the peaceable state of the city the gracious buildings depicting the people's beautiful harmony and so in Jerusalem in terms of the architecture there was closely compacted together buildings the people with their businesses and their homes they wanted to be close to the place of worship and so there was compacted buildings all around that center of worship but this here depicts not just the architecture and the buildings but this is a picture of the people this is a picture of the tribes these twelve tribes of

Israel plus the tribe of Levi and they're all participating in the same worship in the same holy city Jerusalem under the same divine laws and it's a picture of the church as it should be it's a blueprint for the church of Jesus Christ different people different tribes and tongues and nations different ages different personalities and yet we're all brought together in that unity in that rapport as we come in worship and faith to the Lord Jesus there's a unity there is a rapport in worship and I think we experience that when we think even about our own congregation such a diverse group of people we are so different in so many ways but the one who unites us is Christ the person of Christ the work of Christ the word of Christ that's where we find unity the key to unity the key to that deep rapport that we find in this psalm is Christ

Jesus now for unity to be real and biblical and worshipful Jesus needs to be supreme his word must be authoritative without that the unity that we have is no more supernatural or biblical than the unity of the social club or the local pub and that's the picture that we see here the beauty and the rapport of verses 3 and 4a if you have your bibles open in front of you it is very much connected to the statutes of God the word of God in verse 4b into 5 Wilcock the commentator says God's statutes and judgments his laws two of the eight nouns of Psalm 119 are central to the city's structure or rather fundamental to it they expect

God's direction of his people through the word of his appointed ruler to be accepted they expect his people's response to him to be one of obedience and praise that his word tells us is what Jerusalem is for so this unity this rapport it doesn't come at the cost of forsaking the word of God but it's actually the product of holding onto and coming under the authority of the word of God and we see these two things closely connected in the psalm there's never a choice for us as God's people between maintaining unity and holding onto God's word these things go hand in hand together it's God's word that actually gives us the unity that we need so we see this unity we see this rapport in worship and the next thing we see as we move from the second stanza to the final stanza is we see the or we hear the request of the worshippers because in this next section they're praying and what do they pray for well they pray for two things they pray for peace and they pray for prosperity look at verses six to eight pray for the peace of Jerusalem may those who love you be secure pray that there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels pray for the sake of my brothers and friends

I will say peace you within so this is a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem it's a prayer for peace and protection from outside attack but not only that you can see here that three times in these verses the word within is used we see in verse six we see in verse seven we see in verse eight so as one of the commentators notes as well as peace preserved by her walls from outside attack he sees the need for peace fostered within them and that's the prayer a prayer for peace now we think about

this for a moment is Jerusalem a place of peace has it in past years and decades in our living memory has it been a place of peace no it hasn't it's never out of the of the headlines it's a place of constant conflict and now if we think about the present tense and we we take this in relation to the church is the is the church a place of peace well sadly often the answer is no the devil is always seeking to bring conflict between churches within churches so this prayer that was prayed by the psalmist all these thousands of years ago is a prayer that we need to keep on praying prayer for peace the second aspect of this is there's a prayer for prosperity for the sake verse 9 of the house of our

[39 : 11] God I will seek your prosperity now again let's ask the question does does the church know the reality of this do we know as God's people peace and prosperity in this world well you know the answer to that the answer is no we may know a measure of it in some short seasons but it's certainly not a constant state we just need to glance into the next psalm psalm 123 and is that a psalm where the psalmist is speaking as one of God's people about enjoying constant peace and prosperity no it's not the psalmist writes of enduring contempt and ridicule from the from the proud and the arrogant so so when we think about this prayer a prayer for peace and a prayer for prosperity when we think about the request of these worshippers what actually is this prayer for what is the where will the answer to this prayer be found where and when will there be this peace and this prosperity and this eternal security that the psalmist longs for when will that be enjoyed by God's people well that takes us to our final point it will be enjoyed only in and through the return of Jesus we seem wherever we are in the Bible at present we seem to be taken back time and time again to this to the return of Jesus and that is the answer ultimately that we are directed to in this psalm Warren Wearsby says when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem we are actually praying thy kingdom come Matthew 6 10 and even so come Lord Jesus Revelation 22 20 and that as we think about the future tense that will be where there will be peace that's ultimately when we will enjoy peace true eternal peace a peace between man and God peace in ourselves as God's people when Christ returns when we come to that final day when the devil is banished and sin the presence of sin is gone then no longer will we have the battle of Romans 7 when that indwelling sin is at war within us there will be peace peace peace between man and God peace within ourselves peace between believers constantly and it will be at that point that the prosperity of the people of God will be enjoyed this is heaven's peace that we're being pointed to this is heaven's prosperity that we are looking forward to and that will be realized not in this world as we know it we can strive for it we can long for it we can work towards it but it will not be realized ultimately until the return of

Jesus and that's where this psalm is pointing us to the return of Jesus the request of the worshippers in the last stanza is a request that will be granted ultimately in the return of Jesus I got this quote this morning and maybe I'll just finish with this quote that was passed to me from someone it says in the Bible God calls us to work for peace and pray for peace but he also warns us that conflicts and wars will always be part of human society until Jesus comes at the end of history to set up his kingdom of peace and justice in that day all evil will be eliminated and perfect peace will reign upon the earth so let us be encouraged if we are God's people as we look forward to that day and if we are not

God's people let us be encouraged to turn to Christ to turn from sin and to take hold of the peace and the eternal prosperity that is promised to those who put their faith in him we'll pray our heavenly father we ask that you would help us as we go from this place to take the words of this psalm with us and we pray that you would help us if we are your people to be those who are truly worshipping you and we pray that you would help us to have our eyes always looking for that great day when Christ will return peace and prosperity for the gospel for your kingdom will reign and we pray these things in Jesus name and for Jesus sake amen we'll sing to finish the words of the hymn there is a higher throne it's a hymn that points us to that ultimate time when

[45 : 18] Christ comes back and we are taken to this place of peace there is a higher throne and all this world is known where faithful ones from every tongue will one day come before the sun will stand made faultless to the land believing hearts find promised grace salvation comes we'll sing the whole of this hymn through God's praise there is a higher throne than all this world has known where faithful ones from every tongue will one day come before the sun will stand made faultless through the lamb believing hearts find honest grace salvation comes hear heaven's voices sing their thunderous anthem rings through every cold and sapphire skies their praises rise all glory

wisdom power strength thanks and honour are to God our King who reigns on high forever more
and there we'll find our home our life before the throne we'll honour him in perfect song where we
belong he'll bite each his day he'll stay high as first and hundred die the Lamb becomes our
shepherd king with reign hear hear heaven's voices sing their thunderous anthem wings through
emerald colds and sapphire skies their praises rise eyes through glory wisdom power strength
thanks and honour are to God our King who reigns on high forever more hear heaven's voices sing
their thunderous anthem rings through emerald colds and sapphire skies their praises rise all glory
wisdom power strength thanks and honour are to God our King who reigns on high forever born and
I may the grace of

our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be
with us all both now and forever more Amen if