

## 20.7.25 am

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Date: 20 July 2025

Preacher: Duncan MacPherson

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning everyone and welcome to our morning service. Special welcome to the visit of the Sunday. Just say that if you have any young children with you, you have a summer Sunday school for children of primary school age and they leave after the second singing. So if you wish to go out to him, you're welcome to do so.

The notices are fairly standard. I'll just highlight a couple of things in terms of the less regular meetings. The men's Bible study will be on again this Thursday at 7.30pm and the men's breakfast on Saturday morning is coming Saturday at 9am. So all men are welcome to that if you're a visitor. I'm like a bacon roll on Saturday morning, you're very welcome.

I'd like also that in the absence of the minister, Reverend Donald, Donald is happy to provide pastoral support and the future required. In particular, pastoral support needs to be one of the elders in the first instance.

Thank you.

We shall sing this psalm to God's praise.

[ 2 : 01 ] Thank you. Thank you.

To the plain, the tribes go up, the tribes of God go there.

To Israel's testimony there, to God's name plan to raise.

For thrones of judgment in the throne of heaven's house, the still.

Without Jerusalem may have his own felicity.

[ 4 : 08 ] Let them not love the unlife is, heart still prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still within thy wants reveal.

And never may thy father's cross-heading retain.

Now for my friends and present shares, peace be in thee, I'll stay.

And for the house of God our Lord, have steeped thy good away.

[ 5 : 41 ] Let us pray. Lord our God, we come in worship and in praise today.

And we echo the words of the psalmist in being able to say that we rejoice at coming into your presence. We thank you, Lord, that the thought of coming to worship is a joyful one.

Because we come into the presence of a great and a holy God. A God who is infinite and eternal.

And a God who is happy to have us come into his presence.

Because he has made all that possible. We thank you, Lord, that we come in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The man who is perfect in every way.

And the God who came down from heaven to meet us on the earth. And Lord, we praise you. That because of Christ's death and his atonement, we are able to come into your presence now.

[ 6 : 39 ] Boldly and confidently. Because, Lord, he has opened up the way. And, Lord, we thank you that as we come, we come into the presence of our loving Father. One who calls his children from the four ends of the earth to meet with him.

To praise his name and to delight in his presence. And, Lord, we pray that we would indeed delight and rejoice in your presence today.

And knowing the great love that you have for us. And knowing, Lord, the great majesty of your kingdom. The wonders of the kingdom of heaven.

And, Lord, as we meet, we pray that we truly would get a sense of what it is. And what it will be. To be in your presence in eternity.

Never separated from you by sin. And by our own rebellion. But always in your presence. And always able to look upon the face of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 7 : 42 ] Lord, we thank you for that privilege. And we pray, Lord, for your blessing upon your word. As it is shared today in our congregation in these islands.

And, indeed, throughout our country and the whole world. We thank you, Lord, that you have a people for yourself. That you have chosen in eternity. And that you are calling them in one by one. And, indeed, by the hundreds and the thousands. And even by the millions. As, Lord, your word goes out into the air. And we thank you, Lord, that wherever it is preached, your spirit is at work. Lord, our God, we pray that your spirit would be calling the lost into your kingdom today. We pray, Lord, that in our own congregation we would see those drawn to Christ. Who have been willfully rejecting your word. We pray, Lord, that you would call those who are asleep. [ 8 : 41 ] That, Lord, you would waken them up. And make them realize the greatness of the call. And the sheer duty that lies before each and every one.

To turn away from their sins. And to come to Christ. We pray, Lord, for your blessing upon your church. As the psalmist prayed for peace and security within her walls. And, Lord, as we look at the church in our own country today. We see it has fallen on hard times. The walls in many places are broken down. And, yet, Lord, we thank you that your church will never be destroyed.

For your spirit is within her. And we thank you, Lord, that though the enemies of the church would want to destroy her. Yet, Lord, you are the one who maintains her and builds her up. And we thank you, Lord, that there is a glorious future for the church as the bride of Christ. And we pray, Lord God, that we would look forward to that great and glorious day.

[ 9 : 45 ] When Christ returns and your church will be a fitting bride for her perfect husband. Lord, we pray for your blessing upon all those from our congregation who are in other churches today.

We pray, Lord, that your hand would be upon them. That, Lord, they would be fed from your word and would be strengthened in their faith. We pray, Lord, for the visitors among us and for their congregations.

And we pray, Lord, that your blessing would be upon them. And that, Lord, your word would be ever more precious to them. And that, Lord, their own congregations would be built up and strengthened in their faith.

And, Father, we pray once more that you would raise up more men to preach the gospel. To preach the wonderful and unsearchable riches of Christ.

And, Lord, we ask that you would bless the spread of the gospel throughout our nation and across the world once again. That, Lord, you would demonstrate to an unbelieving world that you are and you are the one who builds his church.

[ 10 : 52 ] And you are the one, Lord, with whom all men will have to give an account. Lord, these are wonderful and solemn thoughts. And we pray that you would give us that spirit of rejoicing.

A spirit of solemnity. And a spirit, Lord, that is teachable as we come and we spend time in your presence this day. All these things we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Okay, boys and girls, can I ask you to come up to the front? Be brave. I'll move this to the side a bit.

Yeah, lots of your friends are away on holiday at the moment. Have you guys been away on holiday yet? No? Yes? Yeah, we nod. Where did you go? Sorry? Tenerife.

Good one. Good one. Anybody know where I was on my holidays? Good. You're obviously not listening to the gossip. That's great. So I went off to Canada.

[ 12 : 04 ] And it's quite a long journey to go to Canada. And I left the house, I think it was a Wednesday, about two o'clock. And how far away do you think I was about the next day on the Thursday at two o'clock?

How far away do you think I was? How far away do you think I was from Harris? Anyone want to hazard a guess? Go on, Michael.

In miles would be fine, yeah. I was heading to Canada. To the far side of Canada. Where? Mm-hmm. From here.

From Stornoway. From Stornoway. From Stornoway. If you know the exact distance from Stornoway to Calgary, please tell me. Have a guess.

About 300 miles. About 300 miles. Probably even more. Probably even more. It wasn't that. I said, do you know how far I was after a whole day of travelling? I was about six miles away.

[ 13 : 07 ] Well, I'll tell you how that happened. So, we were booked to fly from Edinburgh, so we had to travel down overnight to Edinburgh. And the plane was due to leave Edinburgh at 11 o'clock

in the morning.

And then the day before we were due to travel, I got this email saying, sorry, due to unscheduled maintenance, your flight has been cancelled. And I thought, that's great. That means the plane's broken down.

And then an hour and a half later, they sent an email saying, we've re-booked you. So, now you need to fly BA from Edinburgh to London. And then you get on the WestJet flight, which I was to take from London.

And that will take you to Calgary. And so, we went through this rigmarole of flying down to London. And then we flew back up from London, kind of just past Edinburgh. And then more or less exactly a day after I'd left the house, we were flying right over the top of Harris.

And I thought, that is fabulous. I spent a whole day of my holiday. And we were flying at 31,000 feet at that point. And that is about six miles. So, there I was.

[14:08] I travelled a whole day and I was six miles away from my own house. And I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if you could just ask the plane to stop and pick you up on the way. But that kind of thing isn't possible.

But it was very frustrating because I ended up in Canada much later than what I would have done if I got my original flight. And I didn't even have the comfort as I was flying over Harris to get a nice view of Harris.

I was hoping I could maybe see our house or see the Harris Hills. But it was thick cloud that day and we were flying above the cloud and you couldn't see a thing. That's the joys of travel. But I thought, there's some good lessons I think we can learn from that when we think about the Christian life.

Because sometimes we tend to have this idea that the Christian life should all be dead easy. And once Christ has saved us, it's all about being with him and heading towards the greatness of heaven.

But the problem we find is actually the Bible describes our life as a pilgrimage. And often pilgrimages take a long, long way and they go by very winding and difficult routes.

[15:17] Abraham was the first one we can think of as being a pilgrim because God called him to go from his home and to travel down to the land of Israel.

Which was a long, long way away and it took him an awful long time. And he went through some very circuitous routes to get there. But his faith never failed.

Now, you know, if I had thought after a whole day I will only be six miles up in the air above Harris, it would have been very silly of me to think, I'm not going to bother going, I'll just wait the day and then I'll see if I can jump on the plane as it flies by.

And so it is with anyone who wants to be a follower of Christ. There will be challenges in their life. And sometimes it will be as if we've never travelled anywhere at all on that walk with Christ.

But the wonderful thing is that God has a plan for each and every one who trusts in Christ. And even though it might seem that we're making no progress, yet we are making a lot of progress as we travel, as we follow Christ and we look forward to being with him in eternity.

[16:29] So, perhaps you look at your parents' lives and you think, they're having a real challenge, real difficulties. Why are they still following Christ? It's because they know that though the journey is difficult, yet the destination is absolutely certain.

Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you that you are a wonderful God who cares for his children. And we pray, Lord God, that you bless each and every one of us, that we would have the grace to follow Christ through good times and through bad times, when we can see the way ahead and when we cannot see the way ahead.

And enable us, Lord, to trust in him at all times. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Okay. We shall now sing a hymn.

That's a hymn from the Red Book, hymn 32. Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light and accessible, hid from our eyes, most blessed, most glorious, the ancient of days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

A wonderful hymn of praise to God. So let's sing this hymn to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[18:47] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

23 verses 14 to 17, which speaks of three festivals that God set for the Israelites to follow.





So the first heading I think I'll use is the joy of the believer. We have here David as a believer with an infectious excitement about the very prospect of going up to worship God.

I rejoice with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. He has that delight at going with others. And there's a wonderful background to what is going on in the situation, as we read in Exodus, because God set before the Israelites these three festivals, and they were to come together at these three festivals to worship God.

And the background to that is they had been in the wilderness, and they would worship God regularly. They would be called together as that nation. But when they inherited the land of Israel, they were scattered throughout the land.

[ 33 : 38 ] And so God appointed three festivals for them to come together. as one people to worship the living God. And it would be quite a thought just to reflect upon that.

Just imagine three times a year, the Israelites had to come together. And so the people from the farthest corners of Israel would start traveling first.

And they would come to the neighboring village. And you can imagine them, if the folks in that village hadn't yet packed their bags, they would say something similar. For David was saying, let us go to the house of the Lord.

And it would be like a big wave coming and sweeping up everybody in their different villages and coming together to Jerusalem for this festival, for this time of worship.

There was a tremendous excitement and delight and joy at the prospect of going to God's house. And then in verse 2, we see the joy that there is in arriving in Jerusalem.

[ 34 : 47 ] Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem, David says. So we have that sense of entering into the gates, into the city itself.

And once you enter into the gates of a city, you're entering into the place of safety. You're no longer outside the city where there can be danger from bandits or danger from invading armies or whatever might have been around in those days.

And the gates of the city were also the place of judgment, the place where justice was dispensed as the elders met in the city gate.

So you can imagine the joy, the safety and the security that the people felt on entering into the city. And as we saw in that reading from Exodus, all of that was founded in statute.

Verse 4, David says, 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. God had written this down for them.

[ 35 : 55 ] He said that every man had to go three times each year to Jerusalem to worship him. That's quite a remarkable demand that God put upon the Israelites.

Because if you think about it, if every man leaves his home and heads to Israel, the whole country was absolutely defenseless at that point.

And as Alexander Stewart points out, he says, it wouldn't take very long for the neighboring Edomites and Moabites and Philistines and whoever else was around to realize that at the same time, every year, three times per year, the Israelites would go to Jerusalem and leave their villages empty.

That would be a great invitation to the outsiders to come in and ransack the countryside while the people were there worshiping with God.

But there was a further promise that God gave to the Israelites in Exodus 34 and verses 23 and 24. He says, three times a year, all your men are to appear before the sovereign Lord, the God of Israel.

[ 37 : 10 ] I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God.

And God demonstrated this sovereignty in that as long as they were in Israel and throughout the whole Old Testament period, no army ever invaded Israel during the time of these three festivals. Isn't that amazing? God says, I will make sure that no one will covet your land during that time. And we can see from the history of the Old Testament, there was plenty of coveting went on, raiding bands of Philistines in the days of the judges, in the days of the kings, you had the Arameans and the Babylonians and everyone else coveting what was present in Israel.

And yet God subdued, he took that covetousness away from the neighboring nations at those three times each year when they were to go up and worship the living God at the temple.

And you can imagine David writing at this time, he would be writing from the joy that comes from the faith that he had in God's word.

[ 38 : 26 ] God had promised no one was going to covet the land and God's word had been proven throughout the Old Testament so he could trust that he could go to Jerusalem and he could call the people to Jerusalem and they would be completely safe at that time.

He goes on to describe Jerusalem in verse 3 as like a city that is closely compacted together. One of the commentators pointed out that a lot of versions say Jerusalem is built like a city but it's actually better to use the term as a city that is closely compacted together.

Matthew Henry said that the wonderful thing about a compacted city is that the houses support one another and he described that as being a type or a picture of the church of Jesus Christ with each building supporting its neighbours.

And Jerusalem placed a safety it was surrounded by a wall and all cities had walls villages and rural farms did not.

They were vulnerable but the city itself was secure because it had its wall. And fathers could go and go up to Jerusalem with their children and they could tell the children of God's faithfulness of how as long as they would remain faithful to God he would remain faithful to them and the wall in Jerusalem would remain secure.

[ 39 : 58 ] And they could comment on the fact that when they were travelling through their lives that none of the Philistines none of the Canaanites the Midianites the Arameans whoever it happened to be had ever attacked Israel during the time of the three feasts that God had set before them.

What a wonderful thought that is for a nation to be able to come together to worship God without fear and to leave all their possessions behind knowing that God was keeping them safe.

And there's that wonderful element of everybody coming together verse 4 that is where the tribes go up the tribes of the Lord the representatives of every tribe were present in Jerusalem at that time.

A wonderful thought as everybody came together. That was in the Old Testament there for New Testament believers were very much entitled to take a spiritual view of these things as we read in Hebrews 11 and 22 where the writer says you have come to Mount Zion to the heavenly Jerusalem the city of the living God.

we are called into God's presence and each and every time that we come as the people of God we are to come into his presence into the heavenly Jerusalem because in the New Testament the wonderful thing is that the church is not confined to the temple as it was in the Old Testament and that was the one place where God would meet with his people in the temple but today the church is wherever Christ is because he is the one who fulfills the temple and everything that the temple stood for so wherever Christ is the church is so that can be one or two people in one location it can be a number like us today or it can be many thousands meeting together in a city church but wherever Christ is that wherever the church is that's where Christ is and wherever

[ 42 : 21 ] Christ is the church is it's a tremendous thought that should give us great joy the Bible knows nothing about the solitary believer worshipping God solely on his own the Bible always sees us as individuals coming together in community to worship and to enjoy God's presence that's the joy of the believer secondly if we look at the joy of the king as I've mentioned several times this psalm is a psalm of David and he is the one who brought the ark to Jerusalem first of all and he was the one who was to build who wanted to build the temple in Jerusalem until God came to him and said no you mustn't build the temple but you must prepare for it so that your son Solomon can build the temple and he had that great desire to see God worshipped in the way

God wanted the people to worship him he was also aware that he represented the people to God and he had that focus on the tribes because he wanted to see that all of his people were there in God's presence and he was aware too that there was something special about his own kingship speaking in verse 5 there the thrones for judgment stand the thrones of the house of David David had a promise that there would be another king coming in his line at some point in the future who wouldn't reign just for a mortal lifetime but one who would reign forever and David was able to look forward to that and delight in that Psalm 48 describes Jerusalem as being the city of the great king that may well have been written about David himself but it was very much looking forward to talking of Jerusalem as being the city of Jesus Christ the great king our warrior king our conqueror king the one to whom everyone owes allegiance and although

David himself was a great king yet at the same time he was very humble we just see that in these verses here because he was rejoicing with his subjects I rejoiced with those who said to me let us go to the house of the Lord and no doubt David remembered his humble beginnings the simple shepherd boy out in the hills and God had called him from that to be the greatest one in the whole of Israel and his desire was for the prosperity of the house of the Lord verse 9 for the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your prosperity he wanted his people to thrive in the land and in the inheritance that God had given to them so his joy was a great joy that he had and a joy that was very much fulfilled as he served God on this earth and finally

I think as we look at this psalm we want to look too at the joy of Jesus Christopher Ash makes the point in his commentary on the psalms that Jesus himself will have sung all of the psalms he used to sing them in the synagogues and Jesus would also very likely have sung this psalm as he himself approached Jerusalem you can imagine him coming to Jerusalem at the age of 12 with his parents and coming into the city singing this psalm and getting a sense or perhaps an increased sense of his own purpose and his own mission in life as the Messiah as he learned in his human faculties exactly the role that he was to play and there's that wonderful picture of how his parents leave Jerusalem and they've lost their son and they go back and they find

Jesus teaching in the temple courts but Jesus himself sung this psalm and he will only have sung this psalm if these words were words that he could truly speak and words which were going to be fulfilled in himself so we see in verse 1 there that Jesus rejoices with his people he delights at going at having his people in his house and being at worship and Jesus rejoices in all the tribes coming together to praise the Lord and what a wonderful thing it is today when the gospel of Jesus Christ is spread throughout the nations and every Lord's Day the nations of the world all the different families and tribes and tongues come together to praise the name of the living God that is like that picture that we have in this psalm of the Israelites the different tribes coming together to the temple to worship and praise God it's wonderful thought that Jesus can say

[ 48 : 04 ] Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together and there's that security in that city and there is safety for his people as the people come together and we know that the church of Jesus Christ cannot and will not be destroyed by an enemy Jesus prays for its peace and security in verses 6 and 7 may those who love you be secure may there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels what a lovely thought that is that Jesus his principal desire or one of his principal desires is for peace and security within the church as therefore a reminder to ourselves that we need to pray for peace and security within the church both within our local congregations and within the church more widely because the enemy always wishes to destroy peace he always wishes to make us feel insecure but we have

Jesus himself has prayed that there would be peace and security within the church Jesus also we see here the reference to in verse 8 to him being our brother for the sake of my brothers and friends I will say peace be within you we know from the New Testament that Jesus described in Colossians as the firstborn among many brothers and we are not only his brothers but we are his friends because when he died upon the cross he took away that enmity that lay between ourselves and God he dealt with it and therefore we can come into his presence today and every day and into his presence at any time without fear of being at enmity with God because Jesus has made us his friends and Jesus seeks the prosperity of the church itself for the sake of the house of the Lord our God

I will seek your prosperity he wants the church to prosper to grow and to be strong it's a truly wonderful thing and we can see the prosperity of the church coming to its final in full fruition in Revelation 21 in verses 2 to 5 where John describes the revelation that he saw and he said I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for a husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live 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 what a wonderful thought of the new Jerusalem coming down to earth there's that picture of God coming with his presence to meet with his people and to be permanently with them at all times that is the wonderful prospect that we have at the end of this age so what should our response be finally to these thoughts from Psalm 122

I think first of all each and every one of us who is a member of the church needs to remember very much that it is our duty to build up the holy city build up the church think back to the story of Nehemiah when he learned that the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down he was absolutely devastated it may well have been the fact that he was carted off to Babylon and he his four beds were carted off to Babylon and they had no idea of just what damage had been done to the city certainly the walls had been broken through but he received a report that the walls were in complete devastation there was therefore no safety in the holy city so the first job he did when he got back home was to seek to build up the walls of Jerusalem that the city might be secure once again and that is the job of every believer we are to build up the city the church if we see damage in church if we see a damaged wall or whatever then it's our role to build that up not just to complain about what has been broken down and we are to look forward to the consummation of the new Jerusalem that perfect church where all believers will come together no sin will be left and we will be in perfect and eternal relationship with God with no distractions nothing taking us away from the reality of that perfect and true fulfillment that is found in looking into the face of our Lord

Jesus Christ in heaven what a wonderful prospect that is for all believers and the challenge for everybody here today is to simply ask answer the question is do you believe God's promises are you like the Israelites of old who knew that God was faithful to his promises and therefore they were happy to go up to Jerusalem to worship knowing that everything that they had all their possessions their lives even were safe in God's hands or are you still refusing to believe and therefore refusing to come and worship him in spirit and in truth I pray for each and every one of us that we will be able to trust God trust his promises and trust supremely in the promise of forgiveness that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ and then each and every one of us will be able to meet together in that new Jerusalem when we can worship in complete fulfillment in complete prosperity in complete security and for the whole completeness of eternity let us pray

[ 54 : 56 ] Laura God we thank you once again for your word we thank you for the insights that you gave David and for the revelation that gives us of your church and of the Lord Jesus Christ Lord we thank you that you are the God who revealed yourself we thank you that you are the God who made heaven and earth and you are the God who will create the new heavens and the new earth we pray Lord that you give each of us a desire to worship you with your people here on earth and to look forward to the perfect worship in glory when the new creation is ushered in when the new heavens and the new earth become a reality and the new Jerusalem is the place of perfect and eternal worship these things we ask in Jesus name and for his sake amen our closing hymn is hymn 36 from the

Red Book the Lord is King the Lord is King lift up thy voice o earth and all ye heavens rejoice from world to world the joy shall ring the Lord omnipotent is King and this hymn speaks wonderfully about the power of God the one who guards and cares for his people the judge of all the earth and the one who has given us Christ and him crucified that we might come into his presence and enjoy him for eternity let's sing this hymn to God's praise Jesus the Lord is King lift up thy voice o earth and all ye heavens rejoice

From world to world a joy shall bring The Lord of living and his king The Lord his king who then shall take Elcios his will this crown his king For barbaric is wisely free, For doubt is royal prophecy. The Lord is King, child of the Lamb, The Judge of all the earth is just, Holy and true are all His ways, Let every creature speak His praise.

Unmade your wants, your burdens know, Thou might's will present them at the throne, For He is at the Father's side, The man of love, the crucified.

[ 58 : 34 ] One Lord, one empire, all secure, He reigns and life and death are new, Through earth and death one song shall bring, The Lord of the wicked is King.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.