

Gladness in the House of the Lord, Part 1

Psalm 122:1-9

Psalm 122 and we'll get right into this text of this marvelous, marvelous psalm. Psalm 122 starts with a title, a song of ascents, of David. And then David writes this, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!' Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem - built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. There thrones for judgement were set, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! 'May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers! For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.'"

You get a sense from David of his feeling in this psalm, a feeling of joy and yet it's a joy that is emerging from a season of difficulty, of sorrow, of separation from worship. He longs

to be back, he anticipates being back in the house of the Lord. And now he is back. For David, the city of Jerusalem is a visible symbol of spiritual blessing, of God's favor, of divine privilege that rests upon that city. Jerusalem, positioned by God to be a tower of refuge for his people. It was set up to be like a beacon of hope for all believers in God. And as David looks up at the city of Jerusalem. The city, by the way, Jerusalem, has peace as its namesake, the word Shalom, as many of you know, is embedded in the name. In fact, many say the name Jerusalem means, foundation of peace.

So as David looks up at this city, his city, his eyes turn away from the surrounding world, from the surrounding chaos in the world, and he is relieved to escape that, to turn away from that for a time, from this world flooded with sin. A world saturated in the self; a world propelled by the ambitions of sinful people. Literally drowning in the terrible consequence of sin, which is death. He turns away from that, and he turns his eyes to where his hope is embedded in the heart of Jerusalem, in the temple itself.

The church is like that, isn't it? For all true believers, we feel that way about the local church, about the church we attend. There are times we live through like this current season

of social, terrible social unrest in many cities in our country. And the church of Jesus Christ is in the midst of all those cities as a haven of rest for the weary. A blessed refuge of hope for all who look to God in faith. And the fellowship of believers, gathered together to worship our God, to proclaim his name, to sing his praises, to give thanks to him, to pray to him, to hear his word read, explained, taught.

Beloved, this is the privilege we have together, as Christians, as believers, this is the privilege we have that lifts us out of this sin saturated world that we live in, and we can give our attention to the hope of God and the Gospel. This is what we long for, this is what we give thanks for, and this is what we pray for.

Longing, thanksgiving, prayer, those are the three points that we'll structure this psalm around as we go through this. And I just want to take this time to enjoy what's written here, so your joy may be strengthened. And to encourage your worship and praise with fellow, like-minded believers. And we just want to take a closer look here at the gladness of David, in this text, to be in the fellowship of the saints in the house of the Lord. The sweet psalmist of Israel is going to lead us now

through corporate praise and worship as we follow his thoughts through this psalm.

So let me give you a first point for your notes, if you're taking notes. Number one, it's very simple, we long for the fellowship of believers. And we'll read through those first two verses again, including the title, which is important. It's called a song of ascents, it's of David and then this, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!' Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!"

Now I want to look at the title, and not get too technical here. But it is important to say just a few words about the title to help you appreciate what follows the title, what comes after it. There are two parts in the title, one part tells us what kind of psalm this is and the other part tells us who the author is.

So let's start with what kind of psalm this is. This is a song of ascents, literally it's a song of steps. If we translated that literally, it's a song of steps. Like the steps of stairs, stairs that ascend, that's where ascension comes from. And there are a couple ways to look at that, song of steps. Refers to maybe the step like structure of the psalm itself, or it could refer to the setting of the psalm or even

the occasion of the psalm. The occasion would be, when it was used in Israel's worship. But first let's consider that issue of the structure, step-like structure of the psalm.

In these songs of ascents, fifteen of them are collected together in the psalter. Psalms 120 through 134, and in those fifteen songs of ascents, the authors set aside those typical structures and features of Hebrew poetry, and these verses actually sound a bit more like English poetry to the ear, when spoken out loud. They have rhythm and rhyme and meter.

One example comes there in verse 6, where it says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!" You can almost hear the rhythm, the sound, even in English. But in Hebrew it's *sha'alu sh'lom Yerushalayim*. You can almost hear the sound of that one; man describes this sound as almost a climbing movement of the thoughts. As each thought plants upon a preceding word and thus carries itself forward. So when it's read out loud, when it's spoken out loud, it actually sounds like climbing. It sounds like steps, almost like a cadence as it moves upward to the summit.

Which is why it is believed, this group of psalms, psalms 120 to 134, was used by Jewish pilgrims as they traveled from different parts of the world to come and gather together in

Jerusalem for the three great feasts. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which includes the Passover, Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost, and then the Feast of Booths, which is called Tabernacles or Ingathering.

So those three feasts, the Jews would travel in caravans, groups of families coming together to travel from the tribal territories that they were given as a possession, back in Joshua's day. Coming out of the different parts of Israel, they came from lower elevations throughout the land of Israel and made their ascent up to Jerusalem, standing at a higher elevation, the capital city. And as they traveled, they would recite, or chant, sing, one or all of these songs of ascent.

Even in the arrangement of the fifteen psalms shows a progression from Psalm 120 through Psalm 134. Going from places far away from Jerusalem to a place very near to the heart of worship within the temple. They begin with the author lamenting, Psalm 120:5, "Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" Meshech refers to Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. Kedar refers to Arabia, this is now modern day Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen.

So these songs of ascent move from the outward regions of the land, where the people of God were scattered and they move

progressively toward Jerusalem. They even culminate in a call to worship in Psalm 134, you can turn over to it there, verses 1 and 2. "Come, praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who serve by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the sanctuary and praise the Lord!"

The songs of ascent then are composed and structured, and even ordered and arranged in such a way that they became the pilgrim songs; chanted by worshippers of Yahweh, making their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate the three feasts of the Lord their God. Even the content of these Psalms, if you go through psalm by psalm, you can see that the content of your moving and your anticipating worship in the heart of Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, looking to the sanctuary itself. The content of the psalms prepares the heart for worship. It gets them ready, it builds anticipation, builds excitement with every step. It reaches its climax in the city of Jerusalem, in the company of worshippers.

Also if you go back to Psalm 122, the title there, it attributes the authorship of the psalm to David. In light of clues in the psalm itself, and this title, Davidic authorship may reveal something more specific about the setting of the psalm. Often escapes our memory that the first home of the Ark

of the Covenant was not Jerusalem but it was Shiloh. Shiloh, about fifty miles north of Jerusalem. And it stayed there, the Ark of the Covenant stayed in Shiloh for about three hundred years.

When David became king, he took great pains to bring the Ark of the Lord near to him. A very significant move for a king, to move the Ark of the Covenant near to himself. He gathered thirty thousand troops, in 2 Samuel 6:2 tells us, they set out to bring the Ark of God from Baal-Judah, which is, the Ark is called by the name of the Yahweh of Hosts who dwells between the cherubim. And that is the name, by the way, that David refers to in Psalm 122:4, "the name of the LORD" Capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. That is the divine name, Yahweh. It's a name that signifies the very essence of God. It encompasses all of his attributes, and it is impossible to state how significant that this is.

That David wants the Ark of the Lord called by the name in the very heart of the city. David, now established as king over a united Israel, now located in the citadel of Jerusalem, David sees it as a matter of national significance to bring the Ark of the LORD to himself. The Ark, called by the name of Yahweh, it signifies the very presence of God. Along with, for the nation,



God's favor, God's blessing, peace, prosperity for the people, wellbeing to the people. Wherever the Ark of the LORD is, worship is.

And David knows that the place of worship of the Lord their God, that place of worship will draw worshippers. So David wants to be as closely associated with the place of worship as possible. Why? Because worshippers will come there to worship Yahweh. Listen, believers are drawn to the place of worship. They are compelled to come near to pray, to offer sacrifice, to sing praises to God, to hear the word of God proclaimed and explained. These are David's people. They are his people, closer than family, he wants them near.

David wants worshippers to worship together with him, to enjoy the fellowship of the faith, to be fellow partakers of divine grace as they come together to pray for the peace of the nation. That's why he says, "I was glad when they," other people, said to me, it's not just coming from himself, its coming from others to his own ears. He is so glad, rejoicing when they said, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" He longs for the fellowship with other believers, with hearts of worship and he loves to hear the fact that they want to be there with him.

It wasn't always so in David's life, there were times when he was forced to be away from the Ark. Forced to be away from the place of worship, these were times of deep, deep sorrow and sadness for David. Most notable separation from the house of the Lord was during that coup attempt at the end of his life. He was an older man, having fought so many wars, his own son Absalom won the hearts of the people, turned them against him. David had to evacuate the city of Jerusalem, the city he loved. Along with of all his loyal company of men, he left.

You may remember, that as David was leaving Jerusalem, there was a Zadok, the priest, along with the Levites and they came to him, and they carried the Ark of the Covenant with them and they intended to accompany David, as he escaped, as he left Jerusalem. David told them though in 2 Samuel 15:25, he said, Zadok, appreciate what you're doing, carry the Ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and he'll let me see both it and its dwelling place.

It wasn't certain that David was going to be able to return, that he would be restored. It wasn't certain that this coup attempt, which had won the hearts of so many in Israel. It was not certain that that wouldn't be successful. Especially

when you consider David's age, when you consider the popularity of Absalom when you consider the injustices done to Absalom.

Many reasons why this was an uncertain prospect, but David did eventually find favor in the eyes of the Lord. God did bring him back into the city. And so he says in Psalm 122 verse 2, "Our feet," he looks down and he says, "Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!" You can imagine that David's first stop was at the tabernacle, to see the dwelling place of the Lord and to worship in the Lord's presence.

So now in this psalm, in a retrospective reflection, David writes this psalm of corporate celebration. Of joy in the assembly of the saints, and notice as I said this is not individualistic, this is corporate, this is a rejoicing in the assembly because of the assembly, because of others, you can see it in the plural there. "I was glad when they," others, plural, "said to me," individually. "Let us, all of us, go to the house of the Lord, our feet," our feet collectively, "have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem."

Listen, beloved, is this your attitude? Is this your heart toward the fellowship of believers? Is this your sentiment about the church, about attending church, and participating in its worship and being with its blood-bought redeemed people? You

rejoice! Not only that you have a heart for corporate worship and fellowship of believers, but that others share the same heart. Does it sadden you when they don't? Does it worry you when your own heart can grow cold? Complaining even about the church?

I love how Charles Spurgeon expresses the thought. It says, "David's heart was in the worship of God and he was delighted when he found others inviting him to go where his desires had already gone. It helps the ardor of the most ardent to hear others inviting him to a holy duty. The word was not go, but let us go. Hence the ear of the psalmist found a double joy in it. He was glad for the sake of others, glad that they wished to go themselves, glad that they had the courage and liberality to invite others. He knew that it would do them good. Nothing better can happen to men and their friends than to love the place where God's honor dwelleth. That David was glad for his own sake. He loved the invitation of the holy place. He delighted in being called to go and worship in company and moreover, he rejoiced that good people thought enough of him to extend their invitation to him." End quote.

And we too, like them, stand in the fellowship of believers. We stand before the Lord because God has made us to

stand and our hearts are glad. Like David, like the visitors to the feasts, our feet have come to a standstill. And when we think about how we got here, we just wonder. How is it that me, a despicable sinner, filled with sin, can stand in this place? Is God that good and gracious that such a one as I can be before him? The answer is yes, he is. The manifestation of his goodness and his grace, we're at the same time, humbled by that and lifted up, that turns our heart to gratitude, doesn't it?

It turns our heart to gratitude and a second point for this morning. We give thanks for the fellowship of believers. So we long for the fellowship of believers, and as that's culminating, we give thanks for the fellowship of believers. As I mentioned earlier, we can hear the transition from verse two to verse three. In a stutter step, you might say it, the mention of Jerusalem. A name that means foundation of peace, and so David looks up. His eyes look, the visible concrete characteristics of the city of Jerusalem and his mind reflects on what those physical realities represent. What is symbolized by this place.

Talks about Jerusalem and then he says it again in verse 3, Jerusalem, "Built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed

for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. There thrones of judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.” In this section, verses 3-5, David is reflecting on the reasons that he has for giving thanks. In fact, this is highlighted as the central purpose of these verses. In verse 4 there, it’s highlighted as “to give thanks,” it is the verb *yadah*, which means to confess or give voice to, To verbalize, praise, and thanksgiving. So the verb here is in the form of a purpose clause and so everything around this purpose clause of giving thanks become reasons for giving thanks. Reasons for expressing gratitude.

I’ll just mention four reasons and unpack each one of those four to point out the fulfillment we find in Christ. Four reasons for giving thanks. First reason for giving thanks. We belong to a city, which stands on a foundation of gospel peace. And starts right there with the name Jerusalem, then the phrase, built, past participle, built as a city. An actual city not the tents of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob living as nomads. Jerusalem is a city, it’s not the hobbles and the shacks that they lived in as slaves in Egypt, grinding away under the oppression and tyranny of their slave masters.

It's a city, it's not a military encampment in the wilderness, always ready to be on the march, always ready to get up and go at a moment's notice. Disciplined, ready for war. No, this is a city. It's a city with its law and order. It's a city with its courts that execute a divinely revealed system of justice and righteousness. Built on the truth of God himself that never changes. It's a city that's soundly built by wise architects and beautified by skillful artisans. It's a city that's generously supported by wealthy patrons. It's defended by its high walls and ramparts and skilled warriors. It's a city that's wisely governed by its judges and its elders and its king. It's supported by its industry. It's perpetuated by its productivity. It's a city. Is it any wonder then that we learn that the eternal state is portrayed as a beautiful city in Revelation 21?

John saw, it says in Revelation 21, "The holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Arrayed with the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." The holy city, the new Jerusalem, pictured in Revelation 21 with its walls and its gates and its foundations. An incredible amount of space for its believing inhabitants. And the city's energy, the city's light is provided by the glory of

God himself. No sun needed to energize and to give heat and light to that city. The glory of God is there. Its lamps are lit by the light of Christ.

But John tells us in Revelation 21:27, at the end of the chapter, "Nothing unclean will ever enter that city." Nothing unclean, "nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." As the name, Jerusalem, reminds us, this city is built on a foundation, not merely of solid bedrock or quarried, cut, finished stones from a stone mason. The walls of this new city have twelve foundations.

Revelation 21:14 says, "And on those foundations are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." And the foundation of this city, where we are citizens, is a foundation of gospel peace. That's what's proclaimed by the apostles. That's the foundation we rest upon, is their gospel proclamation, with Jesus Christ himself as their chief cornerstone. This name, Jerusalem, refers to a peace that has been won. Bought and paid for, a peace that has been secured by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. It's a foundation of gospel peace, and only those who believe and obey the gospel live in that city.