

A Foretaste of Glory Divine

Psalm 122

Psalm 122 is our text tonight. It's the third in a series of 15 psalms that are linked together with a common inscription. They come in sequence in the canon, starting with Psalm 120, and concluding with Psalm 134. It's clear that these psalms go together by inspired design, because all 15 of them are labeled "**A Song of Ascents,**" or "**A Song of degrees.**" And these are the only fifteen psalms in the entire psalter that carry that label. It's clear that they go together. Most commentators believe this was a collection of short choruses that were sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. Both the style and the content of these psalms seem to support that theory. These are songs for pilgrims to sing along the way. Like the choruses we used to sing on the bus on the way to camp, they are all short and easy to memorize.

There are nine verses in our psalm (Psalm 122). Four of the fifteen pilgrim psalms expressly identify David as the author, and this is one of them.

Tonight I want to start with just a simple reading of the text. Psalm 122:

A Song of Ascents. Of David. I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

2 Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!

**3 Jerusalem--built as a city that is bound firmly together,
4 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.
5 There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.**

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! "May they be secure who love you!

7 Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!"

8 For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, "Peace be within you!"

9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

First of all, let's look a little more closely at that superscription: "**A Song of Ascents.**" The word "**ascents,**" we believe, refers to the upward journey every pilgrim had to make when traveling to Jerusalem from anywhere else in Israel. "Songs for an uphill journey."

Of these fifteen pilgrim psalms, only three (120, 127, 130) contain no reference to Zion, or the city of Jerusalem. This psalm zeroes in on Jerusalem in a particular way.

I mentioned that only four of the pilgrim psalms are attributed to David, and this is the first of those. In fact, the psalms of ascent appear to be ordered in two groups of

seven. Each group of seven contains two of David's psalms. And then dead in the center is Psalm 127, which is attributed to Solomon.

Now, the fact that this psalm was written by David is intriguing and unexpected. If all you had were the words of this psalm without a superscription, you would never think to attribute it to David, and I'll show you why in a few minutes.

First, let me say that the opening sentence of this psalm is the first Bible verse I ever memorized. I learned it when I was about 6 or 7 years old in a Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas during summer Vacation Bible School. (Here's an interesting point of trivia: Tom Patton went to that same church in Wichita. He was a few years behind me. But his dad was the Sunday School teacher in my parent's class. If his mom taught Vacation Bible School, I would have been one of the brats in her class, but I don't remember for sure.) That was 55 years ago. I may be the only person in this room who remembers *anything* that we learned in Vacation Bible School 55 years ago. But I do remember a few things clearly. We made little model church buildings out of wooden popsicle sticks, and we memorized this verse—and the theme of VBS that year was *Church*. We were taught the importance of weekly church attendance, and we were lectured on the importance of remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. (That was back in the day when there were

still a few Methodists who cared about keeping anything holy. Methodists like that are harder to find nowadays.) We were also told that the church *building* is God's house and told we need to respect it as a sacred place. (Today I might quibble with that, but those ladies meant well.)

Anyway we memorized this verse: "**I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.**"

And the Methodist VBS ladies said that's how David felt about going to church, and we should be glad, too—because Sunday School is a *glad* place, with *glad* stories to hear, and really cool flannel-board illustrations, and pictures to color, and little churches made of popsicle sticks—all to make us *glad*. And to this day when I hear this psalm, I think about vacation Bible School and how glad I was when we got out.

But I didn't really understand the gospel, and I didn't come to full faith in Christ, until I was 17 years old, about a month before I graduated from high school.

That was in 1971. It was four years after the Six-Day War, which took place in June of 1967. So four years before I was saved, the modern nation of Israel had gained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza strip, the West Bank, and (most important) the city of Jerusalem. The Middle East was in the news daily at the time, and evangelical Christians were obsessed with trying to interpret Bible prophecy in light of

current events. Hal Lindsey's book *The Late, Great Planet Earth* was a multi-million-copy best-seller.

That's what was happening when I became a Christian. And I sought and found (not far from my home) a fellowship of believers who loved the Word of God and affirmed the gospel, and I joined them and was baptized. (The interesting thing is that my new church's building was a very simple, plain structure, and it kind of reminded me of that little popsicle-stick model I made as a kindergartner.) But this was a Bible-believing congregation, a teaching church. No fun 'n' games, and no elaborate liturgies, but their Sunday services consisted of a few songs and a sermon.

As a teenager, I didn't really fit the demographic of that church, but I was hungry to learn and glad to go, and I loved the fellowship of other believers. And the opening words of this psalm took on new meaning for me. **"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'"**

The pastor and the people of that church helped get me established and learning as a new Christian, so I will forever be grateful for the encouragement I got there, and I hesitate to say anything critical about the ministry of that church. But one thing about the teaching I heard there was not as helpful to me as it might have been: the sermon every single week was a message on Bible prophecy and current events. That

was literally the only thing that pastor ever preached to us about.

And this psalm was often quoted—especially verse 6: **"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee."** My teachers in those days were all old-school Scofield dispensationalists who made such a hard-line dichotomy between Israel and the church that they ended up, in effect, acting as if large portions of Scripture simply don't pertain to Christians at all. (They seemed to simply write off much of the Old Testament, because they said it pertained to Israel, not the church.)

They pointed out that in this psalm David wasn't talking about going to church. This psalm is about *Jerusalem*. Furthermore, they said, the message of this psalm is prophetic. **"The house of the LORD"** in verse 1 is a reference to the Millennial Temple. They said the key to this psalm is verse 6, which encourages us to hope and pray for the triumph of modern Israel over their enemies. So the message of this psalm is political and prophetic, they said—relevant to us only because it sheds light on events in the middle east and tells us how to respond to the political situation there.

Now, I know that some of you guys who are seminary students will instantly see the problems with *that* interpretation. In some ways, that's even worse than the VBS ladies' interpretation.

Both interpretations are problematic for similar reasons: David isn't writing about the church; he didn't even know about the church, because according to Ephesians 3:1-11 and Colossians 1:26, the church was a mystery (a truth that was kept concealed) until the time of the apostles. Furthermore, this isn't about the modern state of Israel and the political problems in that city today, because David knew nothing about that, either—and there's no hint in the psalm itself that this is talking about the Millennial Kingdom.

So what is the alternative? I think some of our seminarians might look at this psalm and say: *You've got to be careful not to go beyond the surface of a literal interpretation. All that ultimately matters is the human author's intent and experience, so let's keep our understanding and application of the text within those limits.* And since David was writing about the city of Jerusalem in his own time, they might conclude that this psalm looks no deeper and no further ahead than that. It is a celebration of worship the way it was done in Old Testament Israel before the kingdom divided, and therefore it doesn't really pertain to the church or the kingdom.

In my judgment that interpretation may be the worst of the three, because it evacuates any meaningful application from this psalm for you and me. Since we *know* that "**All Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching, for reproof, for**

correction, and for training in righteousness . . . [to equip us] for every good work"—we have to read this with the understanding that it means to teach us some truth or principle that we can apply in the same way David did. If we treat this psalm as nothing more than a piece of historical trivia, I don't think we're doing justice to the Word of God.

In other words, I think all three of those interpretations miss the real point of this psalm. (The VBS ladies who said that this is all about the importance of church attendance; the old-school dispensationalists who said no, it's really talking about the Millennial kingdom; and the strict literalists who say it's only about David's personal experience as he went to the Tabernacle to worship. All of them miss the boat.)

Perhaps the way to say it is that all three are *partly* right but *mostly* wrong. This psalm is not a celebration of earthly Jerusalem, or the church, or the Millennial Kingdom *per se*. It is a celebration of worship—public worship, not one's own private meditations. David is writing about the gladness associated with worship when the people of God gather together to worship in unison. So the psalm teaches principles that apply to Old Testament Israel, the New Testament church, and the millennial kingdom alike.

Specifically, this is a psalm about the joys of worship, and its message is that the very essence of heaven is brought to earth when the people of God gather to worship Him with

their collective praise. The historical features of the text aren't nearly as significant as the eternal principles it celebrates.

But let's not skip over the historical context of this psalm to get to those principles. Here's a brief introduction to the history of this psalm:

I mentioned that it's a little surprising to read in the superscription that this is a psalm of David. Here's why: Three times in the psalm Jerusalem is mentioned by name (vv. 2, 3, and 6). In David's time, Jerusalem was still in its infancy as the heart and capital city of the nation, and it is usually referred to as "the city of David." The *location* is first mentioned all the way back in Genesis. Mt. Moriah (which is the place where the Temple was located) is where Abraham took Isaac to sacrifice him—and God intervened by supplying a substitute sacrifice. The town that existed at that location in those days was called "Salem," and that's where Abraham met Melchizedek in Genesis 14.

The first use of the name *Jerusalem* is found in the book of Joshua, where you find that name used about ten times, and most of them mention "**Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem.**" He was a Jebusite, and in Joshua 15:8, Jerusalem is referred to as "**the southern shoulder of the Jebusite.**" Then in Joshua 18:28, the city is called "*Jebus.*" Immediately the writer makes clear that he is talking about Jerusalem. Judges 19:10

uses the same expression: "**Jebus (that is, Jerusalem).**" So this town was home to the Jebusites, and they called it "Jebus."

Even though this city was part of the land allocated for the tribe of Benjamin, the Jebusites continued to live there and call the city *Jebus* right up through the time of David. Judges 1:21 says, "**The people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.**"

David finally conquered Jebus almost immediately after he was made king. He is finally installed as king in Saul's place in 1 Chronicles 11:3, and then two verses later he conquers Jebus.

It could not have been much of a battle. The whole thing is described in about three verses in 1 Chronicles 11:4-7: "**David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, that is, Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, 'You will not come in here.'** Nevertheless, **David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.**" So David took possession of that region, and the Jebusites more or less disappear from biblical history after that. I gather most of them became proselytes and intermarried with the Israelites.

In any case, Jerusalem still did not take on its full significance until David had the ark of the covenant brought there, and that became the permanent resting-place of the ark.

Remember the disastrous history of the ark. At the end of Joshua's conquests, the Tabernacle was permanently erected at Shiloh, and the ark was kept there. But then on that final, disastrous day of Eli's life, someone got the bright idea of taking the ark into battle against the Philistines—as if the ark were some kind of good-luck charm. The Philistines won that battle and captured the ark. But they couldn't handle the plagues the ark brought them, so they sent it back to Israel, and it rested at Kiriath-jearim for all of king Saul's reign. In all it was there for a century or more, and then David decided to bring it to Mt. Zion. Zion, of course, is one of the chief hills in Jerusalem. And sometimes in Scripture, the city is referred to by that name: *Zion*.

But in those days it was generally known as "the city of David." The name *Jerusalem* wasn't widely used until after Solomon built the city into one of the true wonders of the world.

But remember: throughout David's lifetime, there was no permanent Temple. Second Samuel 7:1-2: **"Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.'" He wanted to build a permanent Temple, but the Lord said no, and the ark remained in that tent on Mount Moriah until Solomon built the first Jewish Temple after David died.**

So that's why it's surprising to learn that this psalm was written by David. When he refers to **"the house of the LORD"** in the first and last verses of this psalm, he is not talking about an ornate Temple, but a makeshift tabernacle. And when he refers to Jerusalem (v. 2) **"built as a city that is bound firmly together,"** he is envisioning the city not as it was then but as it would be eventually. He is looking past the present realities and describing a more perfect ideal.

And that is consistent with how Scripture speaks of Jerusalem. The true ideal is not a dusty city on a rocky ridge. In fact, the ultimate biblical ideal represented by the city of Jerusalem is never fully described until Revelation 21:2, which speaks of **"the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."**

That, of course, speaks of an eternal reality—**"the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."** That's what Hebrews 11:10 says Abraham looked forward to by faith. And I'm convinced David (together with you and me and every redeemed person of all ages) likewise has looked forward by faith toward that great, glorified, heavenly city. It represents the central district and in essence the capital city of heaven. **"The holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven."** It will stand at the very nexus of the new heaven and new earth. It is the place where we will spend eternity.

That's what the earthly city of Jerusalem symbolized to David. It's what the church represents for you and me. And the millennial kingdom will be the finest earthly symbol of that same eternal reality. Heaven.

Do you get that? *What Jerusalem was to David, the church is to you and me.* It is the dwelling-place of God. It is a living, breathing, holy convocation of God's people, who gather to worship Him in unison. It is the very same fellowship of saints that will one day culminate in a heavenly convocation. It is a place of safety from the evils of a decadent world. It is a place where God's authority is acknowledged and submitted to with gladness. It is an oasis of divine grace in a desert of corruption. It is quite literally a foretaste of glory divine.

That's what the church is to you and me. Jerusalem—especially the Temple worship—had a similar meaning to David, and to every other Old Testament saint who came after David.

So the divinely-ordained point of this psalm is not so much about the geographical location (Jerusalem). It's about the *worship* that drew these pilgrims to Jerusalem in the first place. And that's what makes this psalm significant to us.

Here's what I believe this psalm is about: David is saying that public worship with the people of God is a living, breathing sample of the best delights of heaven and the New

Jerusalem. When we gather for worship, we ought to sense the glory and gladness of heaven. And if you don't, you need to reorient your heart to worship in spirit and in truth.

Here, from our psalm, are five blessings of heaven's glory that we can enjoy on earth whenever we worship in company with God's people:

1. THE PRAISE OF GOD

Verse 1: **"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'"** What is David going to the house of the Lord for? Verse 4: **"to give thanks to the name of the LORD."** See: the point he is making is about the *worship*, not the *location*. **"The house of the LORD"** in Jerusalem at that point was just a tent. That's where the ark was kept. But we know, of course, that God is omnipresent. He doesn't physically "dwell" in any one place. The ark was merely a holy symbol of the Lord's presence. So the tabernacle was in that sense the special habitation of God's glory.

In a similar way, the church—not the building, but the assembly of saints—is where God dwells today, in the Person of the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 3:16: **"Do you not know that you [collectively; the pronoun is plural: you the church] are God's temple and . . . God's Spirit dwells in you."** In Matthew 18:20 Jesus said, **"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."** (I realize the context has to

do with church discipline and that's the primary application, but the principle applies to worship as well.)

Psalm 22:3 says God "**inhabit[s] the praises of**" His people. Or as it is translated in most modern versions, He is "**holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.**"

So when we come together to worship as a body, we are coming to the place where God is enthroned. And if (like David) we are men and women after God's own heart, the very thought of offering praise to God should make us glad.

Praise will be our primary activity and chief source of delight in heaven. If you think the happiness of heaven is grounded in an endless game of golf or some kind of angelic amusement-park atmosphere, you need to mature in your understanding of heaven. The greatest joy in heaven—the centerpiece of it all—will be the unspeakable glory of God. God's full glory will be on permanent display, and you will be able to see it with an unhindered view: examine it, and bask in it, and reflect it in all its perfection. You will be able to stand in the resplendence of that glory without any sense of guilt or shame. You will have a pure love for God that exceeds any love you have ever known. And the natural, inevitable, joyous response of your heart will be pure worship. And everything else that you think brings you delight now will suddenly seem very dull and

commonplace—because (after all) worship is the thing you were created for in the first place.

What is the chief end of man? *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.* And trust me: when you are finally able to do that with a glorified mind and a pure heart, completely free from the guilt and corruption of sin, that will be the purest delight you have ever known.

And for the believer, we have an opportunity to taste that delight—a kind of preview of heaven—every time we gather for public worship. The difference between David and most of us is that he had trained his heart to relish that privilege—and to him, worship was a pure delight. That's why David was truly "**a man after [God's] own heart.**"

The psalms are filled with expressions of David's praise. All you have to do to see what a high value David placed on praise is read the psalms. He wrote psalms from the time he was an adolescent herding sheep on the hillsides until he was infirm and incapacitated by old age. Praise was his highest honor and his favorite pastime.

We simply don't cultivate that perspective, and that is one of the reasons the testimony of the church today is so weak. When believers gather these days, too often it is not really to worship God but merely to entertain one another. That's why you have a proliferation of churches nowadays that play

secular rock songs for the offertory and feature self-help lectures instead of the preaching of God's Word.

Christians *talk* a lot about worship. There are more "worship leaders" and "praise bands" in the evangelical community today than there are men who are qualified to preach God's Word with authority.

We tend to separate preaching from worship as if those are two distinct activities. But true worship is the response of an obedient heart to the truth of God and the holiness of His nature. Worship is *not* that vibration that goes down your spine when the guitar player does a really cool riff on the praise tune, or that tingly feeling you get when a large roomful of people are waving their arms and swaying to music.

Worship is praise offered to God for who He is. It starts with a recognition of His holiness and a glimpse of His glory. It is a response to *truth*—not an ethereal feeling of some irrational emotion. It is a deeper, more lasting gladness than any artificially-stimulated thrill that depends on the crescendo of music or the mindless excitement of some charismatic mass hysteria. Those things are not really authentic worship at all.

Now, that's not to diminish the unique power of praise when it is offered in unison in a holy convocation of God's people. In fact, I think that's one of the key points David is

making here: There is a particular gladness that comes when we participate in true praise together. This is why we gather as a congregation every week. It's not just to be taught. If that were the point, we could listen to recorded lectures independently of one another. But our combined voices of praise when we assemble for worship is the very thing that makes our public worship so heavenly. There is nothing on earth that more resembles heaven than the gathering of faithful people to unite their hearts and voices in unison for worship.

And this is the point number two in our outline—another heavenly blessing that David celebrates in this psalm:

2. The
people
of God

2. THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Notice the plural pronouns in the first two verses: "**I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Our feet are standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem.**" One of the distinctive joys David is writing about here is the corporate nature of this worship experience. He had spent much of his youth alone on the hills tending sheep and meditating on the truth of God in solitude—and that's certainly a good and valid exercise. But it cannot take the place of fellowship and public worship with the multitude of God's people. That is why the feasts were so important in Israel. Verse 4: "**The tribes go up, even the tribes of the LORD--An ordinance for Israel--To give thanks to the name of the LORD.**"

This is a fitting psalm to be included in this collection.

Remember these are psalms sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the feast

this one seems

Suited for that time after

the pilgrims have entered the city gates, but before they arrive at the Temple. "**Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!**" *Let's go to the house of the Lord.* You may be very near the end of a long, tiring journey, but for any believer, the prospect of going to the Lord's house with God's people will bring gladness. Again, it's the closest thing to heaven on earth.

Heaven will be full of *people*—"a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" These are people who will share our passion for God, our confidence in His Word, our delight in His glory, and our love for one another.

By the way, love for one another is one of the distinctive characteristics of a true believer: "**We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.**" That's 1 John 3:14. The apostle goes on to say, "**everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**"

The people of God are bound together by the love of God in a mysterious way that unbelievers can never understand or appreciate. And when someone lacks that love for the brethren, Scripture says that's a sign they aren't truly Christians at all. I've thought of that a lot in recent years, because there has been a proliferation of blogs and books by people who call themselves "Christ-followers," but they can't seem to stand the church. (And frankly, they don't seem to follow Christ in any meaningful sense.) Other Christians embarrass them: the church isn't cool enough, or forward-thinking enough, or sophisticated enough. They

constantly belittle believers whose faith is simple and childlike.

Now, on the one hand, it's true that Bible-believing Christians can be a fairly unimpressive lot. Look around, and **"consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."**

But **"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."** We enjoy the fellowship of the saints. Worshiping God together is a delight, even though none of us is glorified yet.

I'm always wary of people who profess to be Christians but don't go to church. Spurgeon called them "religious gypsies." Churchless people. David, who before reaching adulthood probably spent more time alone with God in quiet meditation than most of us do in a lifetime, nevertheless loved public worship and fellowship with the people of God. It was a foretaste of heaven for him.

Here's a third feature of heaven we enjoy whenever we gather with the people of God on earth:

3. THE PROTECTION OF GOD

Verse 3: "**Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together.**" The city of David was well-ordered and secure. It had a perpetual spring that supplied sufficient water; the lower city (where most of the people lived) was joined with the upper city (where the tabernacle was situated). It was encircled with hills that made it fairly easy to defend. Psalm 125, which we'll study in a few weeks, is all about this feature of Jerusalem, and verse 2 of that psalm makes the appropriate comparison: "**As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people.**" The safety of the city was a fitting picture of the even greater spiritual security enjoyed by God's people.

That, again, is one of the benefits of our corporate worship. There's a sanctifying influence in the gathering of believers that you will not benefit from if you think watching a church service on TV or streaming church on the Internet is a valid substitute for real live participation in the public worship of God's people. Hebrews 10:24-25: "**Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**"

One of the great hedges of protection the Lord places around us is the encouragement and accountability we get from meeting regularly with God's people. Immediately after

Hebrews 10 gives us that admonition ("**Not [to forsake] the assembling of ourselves together**"), the very next verse is a threat of judgment against those who sin willfully. Verse 26: "**For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.**" It seems to me that whatever deliberate sin the writer has in mind there at least in part involves the sin of forsaking the assembly. And that has been the pattern I have observed in the church. Those who abandon the fellowship usually abandon the faith.

And so the fellowship and encouragement and worship together with other saints offer spiritual protection. Those are means by which the Lord keeps us firm in the faith, and that's why the corporate assembly is an emblem of God's perfect protection. By those means He keeps us spiritually secure both on the way to glory, and throughout an eternity of blessedness there.

The praise of God, the people of God, the protection of God. Here's a fourth hallmark of heaven that we can enjoy in the gathering of saints to worship:

4. THE POWER OF GOD

Verse 5 (speaking, still of the city of Jerusalem): "**There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.**" When David brought the Ark to Jerusalem, for the first time in Israel's history, the king's throne and the priesthood were brought together permanently in one city. Civil and spiritual authority were now centrally located side by side. Kings and priests both dwelt in the same city.

Both the kingly and the priestly authority ruled as delegates of God's own power. It is the precise power that is embodied in the person of Christ, who is our Prophet, Priest, and King. And believers under the New Covenant are all his delegates in a royal priesthood. Listen to how Revelation 1:5-6 describes the benefits of our salvation. It says Christ "**loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.**"

So Christ, through His sacrifice, not only redeemed us from the guilt and condemnation of our sin—washing us clean from our sins. But he also has made us joint heirs with Him and co-regents with Him in heaven—partakers of immense spiritual blessings, including His authority as both King and Priest. He has delegated power to us to function as kings and priests. And therefore when our corporate worship functions as God designed it—when we proclaim the truth of God; sing His praises together; and minister to one another

through service and encouragement—God's power is channeled through. us and our praise is thereby magnified accordingly. In other words, the very power of heaven flows through the church and energizes the praise we offer God.

Furthermore, our worship itself is innately an expression of *our* submission to God's power. To worship God as God is to acknowledge Him as the source of all true authority, Lord of the church, Judge of all the earth, and Sovereign over all creation.

God's praise, His people, His protection, His power.
Here's the fifth and final feature of heaven that is expressed in the collective worship of the saints—and this is the key word in this whole psalm: *peace*.

5. THE PEACE OF GOD

Starting in verse 6, three successive verses employ the word *peace*. And it's married to the word *security*, which we have already talked about. *Peace and protection*. Verse 6: **"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! "May they be secure who love you!"** Verse 7: **"Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!"** Verse 8: **"For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, "Peace be within you!"**

Now, obviously David had a keen interest in the peace and safety of geo-political Jerusalem. Still, I think he is looking beyond the issue of earthly, political, and civic

peace. He is talking about a much deeper and more spiritual brand of peace. And you see that in the final verse, where he actually echoes the words of the first verse: "**For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.**"

That repeated phrase "**the house of the LORD**" becomes like a set of parentheses that brackets the whole psalm and put it in a clear context. That's a poetic device known as *inclusio*, and it is a way of underlining the big-picture theme of the psalm. It's one of the key signals that helps keep the focus of this psalm as clear and precise as possible. This is not merely about the city of Jerusalem *per se*, but the focus is "**the house of the LORD**" in particular. This is one last reminder of the central theme of the psalm. It's not a song about the pilgrimage that brought us here. It's not about the destination, either. Again: the governing theme of this psalm is the collective worship of God's people. And therefore its truth applies to us in the church age, and it will apply to those in the kingdom age—and it will apply to the saints in eternity just as much and in the very same sense as David applied it to himself. It's a celebration of worship as the means by which we partake of heaven's finest delights.

And if you put them all together: The gladness and glory we enjoy when we participate in God's praise; the joy that goes hand in hand with our love for God's people; the security we derive from God's protection; and the

blessedness of yielding to God's power—all those things add up to deep, authentic, lasting peace. And that is practically the sum of all heavenly blessings.

Look once more at verse 6: "**Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.**" I've said already that I don't think that's a warrant to pray for political peace in the modern state of Israel. David is not expressing a wish for the leaders of the Knesset to triumph over the Palestinians.

How should we pray for the peace of Jerusalem? What is the significance of this prayer for us? Bear in mind that for believers in David's generation, Jerusalem was the designated place for sacrifices and offerings, the annual feast-day gatherings, and the public worship of God's people when the mass of believing Israelites came together in a holy convocation. David was praying that God would safeguard the city and the people so that their worship could take place unhindered.

But the earthly city of Jerusalem doesn't have that significance today. In fact, the worship that occurs there today is all *false* worship. As Jesus told the woman at the well: "**Believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.**"

So you can look at it like this: This was an Old-Covenant equivalent of the same prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray: **"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."** God's will is never more accomplished in heavenly fashion than in the corporate gatherings of His people when they offer Him true worship. And wherever that occurs, it is fitting to pray for peace and the blessings of heaven.

You want one more proof that this is the proper understanding of this psalm? Listen to how the writer of Hebrews characterizes our worship in the New Covenant era. Hebrews 12:22-24: **"You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."** Our worship on earth is a foretaste of heaven

Let me close with this: If worshiping with the people of God is a drudgery or a burden to you—if you have no earthly idea *why* these are the very best features of heaven—then your heart is cold and need to examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith. If you are a believer who once delighted in worshiping with the company of the faithful, but now you find it wearisome or tedious, you have left your first love and you need to **"Remember . . . from where you**

have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." Christ died to atone for cold-hearted people who don't love God as they should. He renews the hearts of the faithful, and if your heart has been renewed in that fashion, you should know the gladness David was writing about in this psalm.

All the best blessings of heaven are there when we gather to offer worship: the praise of God, the people of God, the protection of God, the power of God, and above all the peace of God. May that peace be yours throughout this week.