

FBC Service Sunday July 11 2021 Psalm 122 The Benefits of Gathered Worship

If you've ever gone on a long road trip with kids, then you've heard these words before, **"Are we there yet?"** Whatever answer you gave them, an hour later they would ask the same question and get the same answer.

We were asking this question many times over the last sixteen months about when we would be arriving back in church, **"Are we there yet?" Well, today's the day!**

When you get to church on Sunday morning, it should feel like arriving at your destination after a long trip. It's like seeing the Disney sign when you get to Disney and the kids get all excited and cry out, "We're here! We're finally here!" **Well, we're finally here!**

Psalm 122 is a song of arrival. It's the song of someone who has been looking forward to that arrival for some time. And it's also a song about going to church, about gathering with God's people for worship each week. It's our Psalm of arrival this morning as we arrive back at FBC. **Quote Verse 2**

As a country boy I remember my first visit to London England. Broaden.

In our text, the psalmist finds himself in Jerusalem – this magnificent city with all of its history, with all of its significance – **and he pauses at the entrance to the city.** Perhaps it's one of the gates around the city walls of Jerusalem, and he pauses in awe to take in the fact that he's standing in this great city: this city which has for the worshipper, the significance that God is to be found here.

It's the only city in the world where God was to be found. This is where the temple was, this is where the sacrifices were offered, this is where the 20,000 or so Levitical priests did their work; and on a time of celebration like Passover, the population of the city would quadruple—bustling with people.

The travellers are so full of anticipation that they probably pause for a moment before entering just to take it all in. What do you do when you climb a mountain – do you immediately turn around and go back down? **No, you pause and enjoy the view. It's why you came.** Here in our sanctuary, we pause for a moment in anticipation of worshipping God together.

I was glad when they said to me, let's go to Jerusalem! Let's go to the house of the Lord. Let's go to the temple. Let's go to one of these great festivals! There's a sense of great pleasure, there's a sense of great joy, there's a sense of great delight at being present in Jerusalem. It's the sense of joy felt at being in the house of God.

You see, the Psalm is saying something to us about something that ought to be ours every time we gather together – on a Tuesday evening, or a Sunday morning. There's a sense of joy and celebration! We're in God's house! We're part of God's covenant people!

And I wonder when we come to church on Sunday, and when we come to the prayer meeting...we gather together with the Lord's people, which constitute the church and the body of Christ, and when we think of that body of Christ in relationship to the wider community of God's people, both alive and

those who have gone to the other side...**I wonder, is there a spring in our step, and a sense of anticipation?**

“I was glad,” the psalmist said. There was a sense of joy.

We can approach our worship services, can't we, with so much of a spirit of detachment and professionalism, and hum-drum, 'We've been here before, it's something we do every week.' It's almost automatic.

Remember when you were younger, perhaps, and you'd just been converted? What a thrill there was about reading the Scriptures, and about coming together with God's people to pray and exalt Him.

O Lord, let us never lose our sense of joy, that sense of gladness, that sense of anticipation to enter your gates with thanksgiving and into your courts with praise.

“I was glad...” the psalmist says. And he finds himself in this big city, with all of its history and all of its significance, and it spoke to him of the presence of God. And I wonder what it says to us this morning about the privileges that we have to gather together.

I can only imagine what this big city would have looked like to the country boys coming from villages and hamlets to this great stone city – with its massive fortress-like structures, especially that of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

Can you see the psalmist beginning to walk around the city? And he sees all the buildings and the houses, and the administrative buildings, and it's all so very magnificent. There's something great about it, something solid about it, something significant about it.

You see, the church isn't some weak, trivial, peripheral thing. That's what the world thinks of the church, isn't it? That's the agenda CTV and CBC would give to the church, they wouldn't give 5 minutes to the church—because to them it's insignificant; it's not important. **But for the psalmist, it was the most magnificent thing that he'd ever seen.**

The church may seem at times a shabby little thing in comparison to the world. If you've ever been in a small struggling, country church that struggles to find a ministry on the Lord's Day, and struggles to pay the bills for the air conditioning, you can imagine that perspective of someone coming to a big megachurch, and being reminded again, 'You know, the church isn't some weak and shabby thing.'

There's something magnificent about a church, whatever its size. There's something about the church of God, because it's built upon a Rock, and it's built upon Jesus Christ, and it's built upon mighty solid foundations, and solid walls, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

There's a wonderful story told about John Knox, when, just before his death in 1562, a friar had accused the Church of Scotland as being a **“new” thing**. It was eight years old at the time. And he mocked the Church of Scotland as being an altogether “new” thing.

John Knox turned to him and said, “The Church of Scotland is the church of our fathers, and the church of the apostles, and the church of the prophets, and the church of Moses, and the church of

Abraham." **You could have heard a pin drop when John Knox said that.** The solidity, and the significance, and the majesty of the church.

Is there a prayer more excellent and more exalted that you can pray, than that God would be honoured and glorified and set apart within His body and within His church, and within His people, for the sake of Christ, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Calvary, for the sake of the death of His own Son

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

The word "glad" means "to brighten up one's countenance." In others words, the house of God or the place of worship made David smile. This would have been an involuntary smile to be sure. There's a huge difference between a voluntary smile and an involuntary smile. A voluntary smile is a fake smile. We smile because someone tells us to - **like when we take a photograph.** An involuntary smile is a genuine smile - like when something so good happens that we just can't stop smiling.

We have enough things in this world that makes us frown involuntarily. We need something to balance out all the sadness and disappointment this world has to offer. **God's house can do that for us if our hearts are right.** If our hearts are not right with our Saviour then we'll just keep right on trying to fill them with the stuff of this world that will never satisfy.

God's house made David's heart glad because he knew that when he got there the Lord would always be at home.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

As the pilgrims went up to the Temple, their faces would break out into an involuntary grin, because they knew what would take place when they got there. Upon arriving at the Temple they would worship the Lord. It's sort of like going to a baseball stadium. It's not the stadium itself that makes us happy - it's knowing what's going to happen in that stadium in just a few minutes. We're going to see our favourite team play.

So why is going to church so often thought of as a boring affair? How come we occasionally wake up on Sunday morning and have to make ourselves go to church? Could it be because of our attitude toward God during the week? If we're not thinking about the Lord and living for Him during the week, then we're not going to be too excited about visiting with Him on the Lord's Day.

When the people of God went to the Temple, they experienced an invaluable time of spiritual communion with the Lord. This experience refreshed them and rekindled a flame inside of them that the world tends to put out.

Lord, let us have an experience like that this morning? Open our hearts in worship and put a smile on every face. Drive out any coldness or deadness, or lethargy and revive us again.

There's a sense of wonder and delight for the traveller as he stands at the gates of Jerusalem, about to enter the holy city.

Psalm 100:4 says: *“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.”* How you enter worship matters. It shows your attitude towards God and his people. When you’ve been looking forward to worship all week long, you’ll enter worship with anticipation and joy.

That’s the first thing we learn from this psalm. **Look forward to the benefits you reap from gathered worship each week.**

The benefit of enjoying the closeness of Christian fellowship.

The psalmist writes: *“Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.”* Here the psalmist is talking about the physical architecture of the city. Jerusalem was a walled city on a hill. There was limited space with little room for expansion. The houses were all joined together, everything was close and compact.

But he’s not just talking about architecture. **He’s talking about the people.** The psalmist has travelled to Jerusalem for one of the three great feasts, and there are many others there with him. A large crowd has assembled for the feast, and there’s a great excitement in the people coming together.

Remember, the church is not the building. It’s the people. And one of the benefits you reap from weekly gathered worship, is enjoying the closeness of Christian fellowship. As we read in Psalm 133:1: *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”*

One of the things this verse is saying is that there’s a closeness, there’s a sweetness in Christian fellowship that you can’t get anywhere else. That’s one of the first benefits you reap from weekly gathered worship. **Enjoy the closeness of Christian fellowship.**

And then experience the unity that comes from praising God together. Look at verse 4: *“All the tribes of Israel—the Lord’s people—make their pilgrimage here.”* When the psalmist got to Jerusalem, he was joined by people from different tribes, different locations, different backgrounds, different places, different situations – but they all had one unity of purpose. **They’d all gathered together to praise the name of the Lord!**

And it’s the same for us today. We all come from different backgrounds, places and situations, but we have a unity because we’re all members of the one body of Christ. We’re not merely members of a church, **we belong to the family of God!**

At church we all learn to get along with each other despite our differences. As long as we keep the main thing the main thing, we’ll get along just fine. And what’s the main thing? Worship. Praise. Christ. God. That’s the second benefit you reap from gathered weekly worship - **experiencing the unity that comes from praising God together.**

Enjoy the closeness of Christian fellowship. Experience the unity that comes from praising God together. **And then receive direction from God’s word.**

This is another of the great benefits we reap from weekly gathered worship. It's in our Bibles; it's in our songs; it's in our prayers; it's in our preaching and teaching.

Colossians 3:16 gives the following instruction to churches gathering for weekly worship: *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

Each week as we sit under the authority of God's word, we learn more of His will and His ways. Each week we receive direction from God's word to help us in our lives. We confess our sin, and we renew our commitment to walk in the right way as revealed by God in His word.

These are the many benefits we reap from weekly gathered worship. We enjoy the closeness of Christian fellowship. We experience the unity that comes from praising God together. We receive direction from God's word.

Psalm 122 teaches us to look forward to gathered worship each week. It motivates us to reap the benefits of gathered worship each week. And then finally it encourages us to pray for God's people regularly. **Look at verses 6-9;**

"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."

In other words, gathered worship will have a tremendous effect on our prayer life throughout the week. **Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray for the peace of the church, and then thirdly **pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.** Look at verse 8: *"For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you.'"*

As Christians we're family. We're brothers and sisters, we're family and friends. And so in praying for God's peace upon Jerusalem and the church, you're really praying for your brothers and sisters in Christ. You're praying a prayer of blessing, peace and safety for the people of God. As Ephesians 6:18 tell us: "With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray for the peace of the church, pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ, and then finally seek the well-being of your church. Look at verse 9: *"For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity."*

Pray for the church daily. Serve the church with your time and talents. Support the church with your finances. Attend the services faithfully. As Charles Spurgeon writes: "First we love the church, and then we labour for it. We see it's good, and then seek its good."

Conclusion: It's sad, but too many people make weekly worship an optional part of their lives rather than a non-negotiable. They don't think about it during the week, they don't look forward to it or

anticipate it. When they do come they treat it more as a duty rather than a delight. As a result they miss out on the many benefits of gathering weekly with God's people.

The bottom line is this: if you love God, you will love God's people. And if you love God's people, you will love gathering with God's people to worship God. We need each other for the journey.

What a privilege we have every week to gather with God's people, to set all our differences aside, and to worship our great God and Saviour!

I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'

Let's Pray:

Our God and our Father, we do thank You for these beautiful Psalms, written so many centuries ago and yet so powerful and so meaningful to our very lives today. Help us Lord, to feel a sense of joy and gladness whenever You call us together as Your covenant people.

Thank You for David the psalmist of Israel. Thank You that You, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called upon him to write down this song that was sung over countless years at the worship of the temple in Jerusalem and then came down to believers and was used in their praise in the earliest days of the church and to us.

Let us ever have the joy and anticipation they had as they went to the house of the Lord.

Father, as we move to celebrating Communion, after these many months apart, may it be rich in meaning and blessing to us each one of us.

For we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.