

Standing in Jerusalem
Psalm 122
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*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 judgment 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. – Psalm 122, ESV*

Introduction: Stage 3 of the Journey – Arrival!

“Are we almost there yet?” “How much longer?” I honestly have to tell you, as Dad and driver for our long family road trips, I hate those questions. But as we do get closer to our destination, the whining and complaining are replaced by excitement and anticipation.

Every journey can be broken down into three stages: the departure, the journey, and the arrival. First, you have to get up and set out, and that was covered in Psalm 120. Then, you have to make your way along the road. In this case, it’s an uphill journey, which was covered in Psalm 121. Finally, after the travel, however long, you arrive at your destination. With Psalm 122, we’ve come to the arrival.

Psalm 120 was a heavy sign of frustration, providing motivation to leave. Psalm 121 was longing, desire, and trust, looking ahead to the destination and trusting God to protect along the journey. Now, Psalm 122 is joy and gratitude, finally arriving at the long-desired destination.

A. The Joy at Going to Jerusalem (vv. 1-2)

Psalm 122 begins with a note of joy and ends with peace and goodness. It is the emotional opposite of Psalm 120, which begins with distress and ends with war. The joy at the beginning of Psalm 122 is at the thought of going to Jerusalem on pilgrimage and then verse 2 comes to the point of arrival:

*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!*

Why would the pilgrim be glad at the invitation to go to Jerusalem? Well, our first clue is in the words “they” and “us.” The pilgrim loves being with the people of God. I was glad when THEY said to me “Let US go to the house of the LORD.” The second reason for the pilgrim’s joy is the destination: “the house of the LORD.” The title tells us this is a Psalm of David, which means David probably wrote it. This means “house of the LORD” is not a reference to the Temple, which wasn’t built yet, but to the Tabernacle. The focus isn’t on the building itself, but on the gathering of God’s people to worship God. The believer whose heart is set on pilgrimage is one who loves to be with God’s people and who especially loves to be gathered in worship with God’s people.

Before we go any further, it’s probably good for us to start translating this psalm for ourselves. What does it mean for us to go to the house of the Lord, to Jerusalem? When we were in Israel in early November and we were driving up the long incline toward Jerusalem, our tour guide suggested I read Psalm 122. I hesitated, because I didn’t want to confuse anyone. Why would they be confused? Weren’t we heading up for Jerusalem and wouldn’t that be the perfect time to read Psalm 122?

Well, yes and no. We are not pilgrims heading to an earthly city. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is not the destination of our hearts’ longing – at least, it shouldn’t be. For us living in the New Covenant age, we need to realize that the language of the New Testament speaks of the church as the true Israel and the redeemed people of God as living stones being built into a new Temple, the true House of the Lord. Ephesians 2, 1 Peter 2 and other passages all make this clear: We are living stones being built into a house for the Lord, where He dwells by His Spirit. We are the holy assembly, the true Israel.

Yet while the outward form of our pilgrimage is different, the heart of God’s people should still be the same: We love being together with God’s people gathered in worship. Thus, whenever we read about Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the house of the LORD, etc. in the Psalms, we should immediately translate that to being about the church.

So perhaps we should pause for a point of application and ask ourselves: Are we glad when we’re told, “Let’s go and gather with God’s people for worship!”? Are we as excited as David when we arrive into corporate worship? A week ago, we were in Atlanta for General Assembly. That’s the really big annual gathering of God’s people in the PCA for worship and to do the business of the church. I must confess that I was not super-excited about General Assembly this year. I have been disappointed with previous General Assemblies, and I had come to see them as a mere obligation. As

we were making the long journey, I could not say, “I was glad when the said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’” When I arrived at GA, I was not thinking, “Wow! I’m really here!” It was more like, “Oh, boy, here we go again!”

But I was wrong. I was wrong to be cynical, apprehensive, apathetic. I know I’ve felt that way about local church worship at times, too. It reminds me of a story of someone who didn’t want to go to church. You’ve probably heard the excuses he was making: “I don’t feel like it. I don’t have any friends there. No one really likes me. Do I really have to go?”

Well, he was told, “Yes, you have to go! Now, let’s go! You are too old for all this whining. You are 44 years old!”

“I know, but why do I have to go?”

“Because you’re the pastor, that’s why!”

B. The Reason for Jerusalem’s Greatness (vv. 3-5)

Perhaps when we’re not feeling as glad or excited as we know we should be, it might be helpful to look more closely at verses 3-5 and consider why Jerusalem is so great.

I. Unity

Jerusalem – built as a city

that is bound firmly together,

The first reason David gives for Jerusalem’s greatness is its unity. The city of built firmly bound together. David is focusing on the compact, bound-together nature of the city as an image of the unity of God’s people, bound together by God’s covenant.

No matter what our backgrounds, interests, educational levels, jobs, etc., what binds the people of God together is far more powerful than what separates us. The bond we share in Christ as children of God, bought with the blood of Jesus, forgiven of our sins, reconciled to God, brought near to His throne, made a part of His body and clothed with His righteousness is far more powerful and profoundly central to our identity and our destiny than anything else.

I had forgotten that when I arrived at General Assembly. I had grown accustomed to thinking of the PCA in terms of sub-groups and entering debates with an us-vs-them mentality. But we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord, loved by God and belonging to the same body in Christ. We are one, and that’s as true here on Sunday mornings as it is in the annual General Assembly.

2. Gathered Worship

The second thing David celebrates about Jerusalem is the fact that it is the place where God’s people gather for worship:

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.

We've already talked about David's excitement to gather with God's people for worship, and here he is specifically celebrating Jerusalem as the place where God's people in their diverse tribes put aside their differences and gather for worship. The Twelve Tribes of Israel did not always get along. In fact, they had fought a bitter Civil War for a couple of years before David was accepted and anointed as king over all the tribes of Israel. They would only hold together as a unified nation of Twelve Tribes for two kings, David and Solomon. After Solomon, the Ten Northern Tribes would secede and support Jeroboam as king.

People can be fiercely divided over all sorts of issues, but in our country two of the biggest are race and politics. Racial divisions may not be as obvious and strong as they used to be, but they are still powerful. Sadly, the observation that 11:00 on Sunday is the most racially segregated hour in America is still largely true some 55 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr famously made it. Yet the divisions of politics have arisen as an equally fierce force. We all know how we react when we see a car with particular political stickers on it. We have a deep emotional, visceral reaction, don't we?

Well, Jerusalem is to be the place where the tribes go up, as decreed by the Lord. God gathers His people together to worship on Sunday morning. He does not divide us up. We divide ourselves up – or rather, we allow the world to divide us up. We should be coming together, and we need to figure out how to do a better job.

Notice also the character of the worship of the people of God – They go up at God's decree to give thanks. Just as we have so much that unites us, so also we have so much to be thankful for. The very same things that give us our new identity and bind us tightly together are the things which should always cause us to give thanks.

3. Government

The third thing about Jerusalem that give David joy may seem strange to us –

There thrones for judgment were set,

the thrones of the house of David.

Why would David be joyful about thrones? Well, notice that the word thrones is plural and is repeated in the plural. David sat on a throne, of course, but even though He was the only king, Israel has always been governed by multiple elders. Presbyterian means a church governed by a plurality of elders.

David is overjoyed because he sees the wisdom and rightness of having a plurality of thrones for elders. No one person should be entrusted with power in any church. The church has only one King, Jesus, and His throne is in heaven, where He alone sits on it. On earth, elders don't sit on thrones, of course, but they also never govern alone. God's wisdom ensures a balance of shared authority and accountability.

When it works well, we see the wisdom of such a system. I saw this working well at General Assembly this year, which is why I was so encouraged and blessed by my time there. I experience it on an even more regular basis at our session meetings. God gives each of us a different perspective. Most of the time, we agree, but when we don't, we listen to each other and are blessed by each other's wisdom and insight.

C. The Prayer for Jerusalem (vv. 6-9)

In the third part of Psalm 122, David goes from rejoicing in Jerusalem to praying and speaking blessing over Jerusalem:

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.

In this third section, we see how we are to pray for the church and why we are to pray for the church:

I. How We Should Pray (vv. 6-7)

The two main ways David prays for Jerusalem is for peace and for security.

- a. **Peace:** Praying for the peace of Jerusalem is not praying merely for an end to open hostility, nor is it primarily a matter of praying for a literal, physical city. The city of Jerusalem is torn apart today by sectarian violence between Jews and Muslims, and barbed wire fences and armed guards cut right through the heart of the city and right through the Temple Mound like a huge scar or an open wound. But praying for the peace of Jerusalem does not primarily mean praying for earthly peace between Jews and Palestinians, although that is a fine thing to pray for.

God’s peace is His Shalom. Jerusalem is Jeru-Shalem and means “city of peace” or “abode of peace.” David named his son and heir Solomon, which is Hebrew is *Shalomo*, meaning “peace.” Shalom is centrally important in the Bible. It’s the culmination of the Aaronic blessing – “*May the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace.*” Shalom, more so than the English word “peace,” carries the meaning of inner wholeness and well-being – not just to have peace but to be at peace.

So when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, we are praying for God’s people to be whole and well, for God’s people to have peace, to be at peace – peace with God, with one another, within themselves – wholeness, contentment, well-being. So, when do God’s people truly have peace? When Christ is at the center of all we are and all we do. Ephesians 2 says, “He Himself is our peace.”

If the church is going to have peace, Christ must be the center – not politics, opinions, human agendas, greed, conflict, selfish desires, or personal preferences. For Christ to be at the center, we must focus on His worship, His word, His Gospel, His kingdom, His glory. Peace in the church, in our homes and in our lives comes only when Christ is all in all.

- b. **Security:** Along with peace, we are called to pray for security. Peace is inner wholeness and well-being, and security is protection from all our enemies. David speaks of two kinds of security for Jerusalem – “*May they be secure who love you*” and “*security within your towers.*” We should be praying for believers personally to

be protected from the attacks of the enemy. We pray for one another when we are sick or in the hospital or when we lose a job or a loved one, and it's right that we should. But we also need to be praying for one another's security from attack daily.

Security within your towers – The watch-towers of the city were critical places of protection and observation. For the church, the pulpits are the towers, where God's word is proclaimed and the alarm is sounded when the enemy draws near with false teaching, subtle attacks. Many cities in ancient times fell because watchmen were bribed and the watchtower surrendered to the enemy. Many churches are harmed because their towers have been ceded as enemy territory, where self-serving lies or worldly deceptions are taught, and not the word of God. Pray for the right preaching of the word, for the tower to be secure, not only here in our church but in other churches – “*security within your towers.*”

2. Why We Should Pray (vv. 8-9)

If peace and security are what we should pray for, why should we pray? Of course, the ultimate right answer to this question is for the glory of God. But David gives more personal reasons for praying for the peace of Jerusalem:

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.

For David, praying for peace is intensely personal: For my brothers and companions' sake. He loves the people of God deeply. They are his brothers and his friends, and so he prays for peace. Yet he also loves the house of the Lord deeply. Again, this is not a building, for the Temple building had not been built yet. However, David did make provision later in his life for the building of the Temple, setting aside massive amounts of money to fund the Temple construction done by Solomon. He put his money where his mouth was – or rather, where his heart was!

Throughout this psalm, it is very clear how much David loved the people of God, the house of God, the city of God, the worship of God. He had fought many battles to secure and protect God's people. He had invested heavily in the worship and unity and government of God's people. Through David's prayers and actions, Jerusalem was blessed and God's people were blessed, too. Of course, that was not always the case, was it? At times, David was more selfish and negligent, and the people of God were harmed by his sin.

Conclusion: New Jerusalem

And that brings us to our conclusion: God's city on earth has always been and always will be a mixed reality: blessed and spiritually prosperous, neglected and led astray. Jesus died, rose again, and is making intercession now to ensure the salvation, peace and security of His people. Yet Satan still roams about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The Savior and the deceiver are both actively working, but we can rejoice that He who works in us is far greater than he who is at work in the world.

But while we live in this world and remain subject to Satan's deceptions and attacks, we do groan and our hearts long for full, unbroken, perfect peace and for complete and unshakable security. Thankfully, that day is coming. For the old Jerusalem of David's day now finds expression in the church but will one day find its complete fulfillment and glorification in the New Jerusalem to come, the perfected and glorified church of the new heavens and the new earth.

Even while we pray for the peace of our Jerusalem, we long for the day when we will see the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her bridegroom. We long for that day when we will sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, as part of the New Jerusalem ourselves, enjoying true and perfect and eternal Shalom and real and lasting security. When the Lamb of God will be our light, the 24 elders will worship around His throne, our unity and our worship will be perfect and glorious. That day is coming and it will be marvelous! Until then, let's love the people of God and His worship and let's pray for the peace and security of His holy city!