

Loyalty to Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 August 2018

Preacher: Jake Tasker

[0 : 0 0] So, Psalm 48, page 566. The heading is a song, a psalm of the sons of Korah. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, his holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great king.

Within her citadels, God has made himself known as a fortress. For behold, the kings assembled, they came on together.

As soon as they saw it, they were astounded. They were in panic, they took to flight. Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor.

By the east wind, you shattered the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever.

We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.

[1 : 1 6] Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Let Mount Zion be glad. Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments. Walk about, Zion.

Go round her. Number her towers. Consider well her ramparts. Go through her citadels. That you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God, forever and ever.

He will guide us forever. The second reading is Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 18 to 29.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

For they could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear.

[2 : 2 8] But 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.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

At that time, his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.

This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is, things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

[3 : 53] Good morning, everyone. For those who don't know me, I'm Andrew. I'm a member of the congregation here. As we begin, let's pray, shall we?

Heavenly Father, we pray that as we study this psalm, you would speak to us, that you would teach us more about the Lord Jesus and the home and safety we have in him.

To your praise and glory. Amen. Vienna has just dislodged Melbourne for the first time in the Economist's 2018 Livability Index.

Melbourne had been top for seven years. Now Vienna is the most pleasant city to live in. London rose five places, but was still only 48 overall, and that's below Manchester that was 35.

Yet London topped the charts, ahead of Singapore, Toronto, Paris, and Amsterdam in PwC's Cities of Opportunity Index. London also topped the QS Best Student Cities 2018 results, and beat New York to be the most desirable place to work in Boston Consulting Group's recent study.

[5 : 18] Now depending on which study we look at, we can either be proud we live in London or disappointed it's so lowly ranked. Jerusalem isn't ranked at all today, but for the Old Testament Jews, Jerusalem, or Zion, would have been top on every count, as Psalm 48 shows.

We read in verse 2, His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth. So what was so special about Zion?

For the Jews, Zion was where God was, sorry, what was so special about it? For the Jews, Zion was supremely important, but I wanted to see that it's even more important for us as Christians, and I'll come to that point later.

For the Jews, Zion was where God lived on earth, where his king rules. It is the city of God, as we see in verse 1, and the city of the great king, in verse 2.

And this echoes Psalm 2, where God says, I have set my king on Zion. This psalm is about God's covenant with David from 2 Samuel 7, that he would set one of his descendants on his throne to be king forever.

[6 : 37] So in singing about Zion, they were singing about God's and his covenant promises. Zion's temple was where God lived among his people, where sinful human beings could approach him without being destroyed.

So let's look more closely at Psalm 48, and you can find that on page 566 in our Bibles, and there's an outline on the back of the service sheets that you might find helpful.

Now the psalm begins, Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. In this psalm, God is great because he has made himself known as our fortress, as we see in verse 3.

And that's the first point. Great is the Lord, our fortress. And we'll be looking at verses 1 to 8. This is a celebration song because they'd seen God deliver them from their enemies.

singing this psalm would increase their vision of God, renew their joy, and strengthen their faith and confidence in God's steadfast love and his protection.

[7 : 46] And the same is true for us. God's people knew they were safe in Zion because God himself was their fortress. He just saved them from the besieging army, as we see in verse 4.

For behold, the kings assembled. They came on together. As soon as they saw it, that's Zion, they were astounded. They were in panic. They took to flight. Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor.

The imagery picks up Psalm 2. The kings of the earth setting themselves against the Lord and his anointed. That's the king that God has set on Zion.

But in Psalm 2, we read, God will terrify them in his fury. And as we see in verses 5 and 6, that's exactly what happened. They ran away. You can picture the massive army or armies surrounding Zion.

Not just one of their enemies, but all of them combined. All the superpowers of their day. Imagine how terrified we'd be if North Korea, China and Russia ganged up on the west.

[9 : 00] Yet instead of Zion being terrified, it's the mighty armies and the kings who are terrified. They flee in panic when they see how great Zion is.

In reality, how great God is. God's people knew they were safe in Zion because God was their fortress. You can picture the celebrations when the besieging army fled in terror.

And that's something they'd experienced more than once in their history. The psalmist points them to Mount Zion, to God's holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, and to the city of the great king.

Zion's citadels, its fortifications, its mountaintop location, were to point them to how great God was. God has made himself known as a fortress.

Their fortress is not the city. It's God himself. And singing this psalm is a tremendous encouragement to God's people. They could praise God feeling safe in his protection.

[10 : 04] As we read in verse 8, so have we seen, as we have seen, so have we, as we have heard, so have we seen. So while they may have heard about God's salvation in their Sunday clubs, with all their stories from the Old Testament, they had now seen God save them.

Their faith was doubly strengthened. It was no longer history and theory. It was their personal experience. And I find my faith has strengthened when I remember how God has saved me.

It's important for all of us to remember how God's love and protection and help in specific situations and supremely his salvation through Christ and to keep giving thanks for this.

And that's something the Apostle Paul says in his letter to Philippians. Do not be anxious but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

So the first point is great is the Lord our fortress. And our response? Praise, as Jake was explaining last week from Psalm 47. He is to be greatly praised and that's our second point.

[11 : 20] Praise and proclaim God greatly. And looking at verses nine to the end of the Psalm. However impressive Zion looked in its mountaintop location with its citadels it's God who should be praised.

Praised not just by the Jews but throughout the whole world. Not just in one place but by one nation but by everyone everywhere. As we read in verse 10 your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.

But being honest I don't always praise God or rejoice or even feel like doing that even though he's been so faithful to me. And the psalmist shows how they were able to keep rejoicing in God as we see in verse 9.

We have thought on your steadfast love oh God in the midst of your temple. They meditated on God's steadfast or covenant love when they came together to worship God.

And visual aids also helped them as we read in verse 12. Walk about Zion go around her number her towers consider well her ramparts go through her citadels and tell the next generation that this is God our God forever.

[12 : 36] This testimony about God was to be passed from generation to generation. This was how the knowledge of God was to be sustained among God's people how their faith would grow. And we should be encouraging each other by sharing how God has kept us safe.

The gospel is not just for outsiders. How much do we encourage each other in our families in our growth groups our Sunday clubs our prayer triplets and when we meet each Sunday.

I mean this summer we've seen some great sporting celebrations Grant Thomas cycling along the Champs Elyse having won the Tour de France champagne glasses in hand or France winning the World Cup and running around the stadium with their trophy.

Later they paraded around Paris celebrating their victory. Surely they'll be telling their children and their grandchildren all about it. But in this psalm we see a whole city rejoicing walking about the ramparts and that's certainly something that happened after Nehemiah had rebuilt the city walls.

God is to be praised and proclaimed greatly. Yet this psalm was never completely true for historic Zion. It was never the city which God will establish forever as we see in verse 8.

[13 : 58] Because the Babylonians destroyed Zion in the temple. It was later rebuilt by Nehemiah and Ezra but the Romans then destroyed the new temple in AD 70.

So the historic Zion cannot be the Zion of Psalm 48. That Zion is eternally secure. Zion is much more than a historic place in the Middle East.

It's the Mount Zion that the heavenly Jerusalem that Hebrews 12 our second reading speaks of. And that brings us to our final point the true Zion.

and it would be helpful to look at Hebrews 12 22 and that's on page 1213. So for us as Christians Mount Zion is even more special than it was for the Jews when this psalm was first written.

because as verse 22 explains we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem and to God the judge of all and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[15 : 16] We've come to God and to Jesus the mediator of a covenant that truly cleanses us from our sin so that we can be with God forever. We're new covenant people and this the true Zion is where God lives among his people where they can approach him without fear or condemnation and it's where God's king reigns and this can only be true in Christ God living among us.

All that Zion symbolised is fulfilled in Jesus the place where we meet God the place where we're safe he's God's king the true Zion is Christ and that's something which Psalm 48 foreshadowed as we read in verse 12 walk about Zion that you may tell the next generation that this that's Zion itself the city is God our God forever.

So as Christians we sing this psalm about Jesus God's great king Zion is even more precious for us as Christians than it was for the Jews when this psalm was first written and sung because we've come to the heavenly Jerusalem and to Jesus Christ is our fortress and as Andy was explaining from Psalm 46 we need to take refuge in Christ it's only as we take refuge in Christ that we're safe the Jews couldn't be safe in a great city or a holy mountain and we won't be safe if we look for security in a successful career or our marriages or a good bank balance or top exam results or promotions success in sport and music all the things that may seem so important for the people around us and also it's not enough just to be part of Grace Church we need to be in Christ to be safe any of these things can make us feel good yet I need to be asking myself we need to be asking ourselves what am I relying on what gives me confidence and security it's too easy to feel secure when things are going well but I need to remember that Christ is my security we're only safe in him he protects us the Apostle Paul makes this point in Romans 8 nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus we're safe in Jesus that's why we rejoice

God in his mercy uses challenging situations to bring us back to taking refuge in Christ finding safety in him alone it's Christ who keeps us safe safe from God's judgment safe from the devil's attacks and safe in death as Paul says in Romans 8 there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus why?

because Christ totally paid the penalty for our sin when he died on the cross when we're threatened by hostility or tempted to sin or to feel guilty or to doubt God all of these are attacks from the devil we need to remember we're safe in Christ now and for eternity as we face death or worry about dying we're safe in Christ because he defeated death on the cross that's shown by his resurrection and for any here who have not yet turned to Christ where do you look for your security and protection?

[18 : 59] how safe do you feel? will you be like the kings who thought they were so powerful? that's a bit like President Trump or Kim Jong-un parading their nuclear power yet when these kings came face to face with Zion they fled away in terror do you want to be safe inside Zion?

trusting in Jesus bearing the knee to him? or will you stay outside to face him when he returns in judgment? so for Christians who are safe in Jesus how should we respond?

praise God and proclaim his salvation praise and rejoicing should characterize Christians yet we know we don't always feel like that meditating on God's steadfast love ultimately shown us in Christ will remind us of what God has done for us and how he saved us we do this every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we remember Jesus' sacrificial death and God's love until Jesus returns but we need to be doing this each day not just at the Lord's Supper we should be meditating on God's steadfast love how safe we are in Christ and Romans 8 would be a good passage to meditate on our praise will be fuelled by sharing with each other how God has kept us in our fellowship in our Sunday clubs and at home we are to tell the next generation that this is God our God forever and ever reminding one another of God's steadfast love should be part of our fellowship and our home life and if you can't do that yet because you're not one of God's people not yet in Christ think about what you're missing out on would you like to be safe praising God and rejoicing and while God is praised in the worldwide church he's not yet praised throughout the whole world this will only be fully realized when Jesus returns until that happens we've been given the great commission of proclaiming Jesus and God's salvation to the whole world and our experience now as Christians is not all there is for as we see in Hebrews 12 from verse 26

God will shake not only the earth but also the heavens in order that things that cannot be shaken may remain therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken we're to look forward to the new creation and to the kingdom that cannot be shaken where God will always be praised something that Simon's been saying as he introduced his service our true home is in heaven so in conclusion as Christians we're safe in Christ but only safe in him we're safe from the devil's attacks we're safe in death and from God's judgment and in response we should praise our great God and fortress we should tell each other how great God is that Christ is our fortress our only fortress and this is something we can start doing in the discussion groups now and continue with a coffee and tea after the service and for any who aren't trusting in Christ what do you trust in how will you face

Jesus when he returns to judge everyone please take a good look at Jesus who he is what he's done and the salvation he offers and if you'd like to know more please speak to Simon or me or anyone else you know at Grace Church so while we may be proud we live in London as Christians we should be even prouder we're part of God's worldwide church and we're citizens in the heavenly Jerusalem where we're safe in Christ let's rejoice we're safe in Christ let's pray we have come to Jesus and have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken Lord we thank you we're safe in Jesus but only safe in him may we praise your name and encourage each other in Christ Amen

[23 : 25] Amen