

# Secure in Christ

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're just going to do a one-off sermon series. Well, it's not a series if it's one-off. We're going to do a one-off sermon today in Psalm 48.

But next week, just to tie in with 1.30, we're going to start our apologetics series. So come back with me to Psalm 48. It's probably not a familiar psalm for many of you, talking about physical walls and towers.

This doesn't seem relevant, but let's see what God has to say. Let me pray before we start. Father, we thank you for giving us your word, not just the bits that we are familiar with, but every word in your scripture.

And so we want to come to this psalm today and ask that you teach us how we can still apply it to our lives and how it will be relevant to us as individuals, but also as a church together.

Help us to understand it. Help me to speak by the power of your spirit. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Well, friends, one of our most basic needs is security.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] A baby seeks it from the moment he or she is born. In fact, that's what a baby experiences and learns in his mother's womb. The warm security of the amniotic fluid, the comfort of her mother's heartbeat.

And so the first thing, one of the first things I learned when I became a father was how to swaddle my little Emma. It's not hard, but I started enjoying doing it, you know, wrapping her really tight. Not too tight. Old babies love sleeping in their mother's arms. Why? Because it's secure and warm and comforting. And as we grow, as they grow, they take their first steps away from that security. And even as they do, they seek other forms of security. Perhaps a kind teacher at kinder or a circle of close friends at school. Every time we enter a new situation, we always try to reestablish our sense of security because we cannot function well without it.

So imagine, for example, an employee who fears the loss of his job. Will he or she perform at his or her best? Unlikely. Or even here at church, if you can't trust your pastor or the people in your growth group, would you open up to share your life with them or give yourself sacrificially in service?

[ 2 : 5 2 ] You may do that, but it's going to be hard, isn't it? So security and safety, the safety that flows from it, are basic human needs. And this was no different for the people of Israel.

God had given them the land of Canaan, but they were surrounded by enemies, including the enemies that live within their borders. And so for them, they needed to know constantly that they were secure in the land, that they were safe from their enemies.

Where will they turn to for that security? Well, our psalm tonight gives us that answer. Now, Psalm 48 is what we call a psalm of Zion. And there are others like it in the Psalter, like Psalm 46, 84, 87, and 122, just to name a few.

And each of these psalms focuses on the city of Jerusalem, which sits on Mount Zion. Zion or Jerusalem, you see, was the symbol of Israel's security. It was tangible.

They could look at it and find assurance in its walls, its ramparts, and watchtowers. This was a fortified city that the people could take refuge in.

[ 4 : 0 0 ] Some years ago, when my parents visited Jerusalem, they brought me back a poster. Just get a couple of maybe volunteers. Shall we? Just to hold it up for me. Go to the color side.

The color side, yeah. Just lift it up. Hopefully you can see. Can you see the walls? Yeah, it's a bit small in here. It looked really big when I looked at it in the bedroom.

But anyway, you should be able to see the walls here, just lining, and it circles the city. And this is just the inner city. And these walls are only, they only date back to the 16th century.

So these were the ones that the psalmist was looking at when he wrote this psalm. But nevertheless, you get a sense of how impressive they were to someone approaching it. Okay, I don't know whether you can see, but those are whole houses there. So a person would be even smaller than that. This would have been a great and formidable city, just approaching the city. [ 4 : 59 ] Thanks, guys. Just leave it on the chairs. But as we look at this psalm, the first point the psalmist makes, and perhaps the main and only point is this, that Jerusalem is great because God is great.

And because he's chosen to dwell in it and make it the focus of his protection, Jerusalem's security lies in God himself. So we read in verse 1, Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. In the city of our God, his holy mountain, beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the great king.

God is in her citadels. He has shown himself to be her fortress. So praise for the city is first and foremost directed at God. And rightly so.

Jerusalem is great because God is dwelling in her midst. It's his holy mountain, the city that he has chosen to rule from. God is Jerusalem's great king.

[ 5 : 56 ] Now many of you would have watched the Lord of the Rings movies. And to me, these verses remind me of Minas Tirith. Those of you who know your Lord of the Rings, it's the capital of Gondor, right?

I've got a slide of it. And what it says is that the higher the city is in the mountain, the more impregnable it is, right? So trying to get right up there would have been difficult.

And this is the picture that is trying to be painted of Jerusalem. But if you've ever been to Jerusalem, what you would notice with this psalm is that the psalmist has taken a lot of poetic license in the writing of this psalm.

Because in actual fact, Jerusalem, and even that poster showed, doesn't sit on top of a high mountain. It actually sits on a lowly hill, some 750 meters above sea elevation, sea level.

There are actually other mountains that are taller around it. But the psalmist is actually speaking from a perspective of faith, that because God is protecting her, it's as though Jerusalem is on top of Mount Zephon.

[ 7 : 04 ] So Mount Zephon is an actual mountain in the north of Israel. And it's about more than twice the height in elevation of Jerusalem, about 1700 meters above sea level.

Jerusalem is impregnable because God is in her city, not because of her actual elevation, elevation. But in verse 4, the psalmist switches the image by saying, he has shown himself to be her fortress. So God is in her citadels, that is, God is present in the fortress, to then saying, he has shown himself to be her fortress, that is, God is her fortress.

God is the real source of security. God is no longer taking refuge in Jerusalem, he never was. But on the contrary, Jerusalem is taking refuge in him. Now, how has God shown himself to be her fortress?

Well, the next few verses show quite clearly by protecting her from her enemies. So verse 4, when the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astounded.

[ 8 : 11 ] They fled in terror, trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. You destroyed them like ships, I keep saying sheeps of Tarshish, ships of Tarshish, shattered by an east wind.

The kings of this world, even when they joined forces, are no match for the great king, God. Now, if you look at the rest of the Bible, you'll be hard-pressed to find any details of these victories.

Perhaps it did happen, and it's only recorded here. I doubt it, because if ever such a victory did occur, it would have been significant enough to be included in the history.

More likely, what the psalmist has done is to bring together in this one short poem all the victories that God has won for his people. So from the victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea to the battles with Edom and Moab in the wilderness, and then during Joshua's time with the Canaanites in the land and then beyond.

In fact, if you read the Song of Moses that's in Exodus 15, you'll find numerous allusions here to that song. The song is played straight after the Israelites left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, but it anticipates what God will do for them once they were in the Promised Land.

[ 9 : 24 ] So, I've got it on the slide. Exodus 15 and 14 says this, the nations will hear and tremble. So just pick up on some of this. Anguish will grip the people of Philistia.

The chiefs of Edom will be terrified. The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling. The people of Canaan will melt away. Terror and dread will fall upon them. And just a few verses earlier, we have a description of the parting of the Red Sea.

So again, another verse, verse 10, but you blew with your breath and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Now, we know that when God parted the Red Sea, we read in Exodus, it was a strong east wind that did it.

And that's an illusion we find here in the psalm. Because the ships of Tarshish, in verse 7, are actually tall, ocean-going ships. They would have been anchored in the Mediterranean.

So, if ever they were to be destroyed, then actually, they would have been destroyed by a west wind coming from the sea, not an east wind. But the psalmist says here it's an east wind.

[10:29] Why? Because he's trying to draw this connection with the Red Sea parting. Furthermore, none of these events took place in Jerusalem, which only became a city of prominence in the reign of King David.

Instead, what's going on in the psalmist's mind is that he's using Jerusalem as a symbol of God's people. It's the place where God dwells. And so, as the enemies came upon him in the desert, God's people were Jerusalem there.

A mobile Jerusalem, if you like, wandering in the desert. And on each occasion, God was with them. And so, they became as secure as Jerusalem is.

God is their fortress, their citadels, their ramparts. Now, as the psalmist continues, what he does then is he brings what's happened in the past to bear on what God is doing now.

So, he says in verse 8 that just as they've heard about the past, now they're seeing God in action in the present. These stories of victory that were passed down through generations are now being confirmed before their very eyes.

[11:36] Because as they look on Jerusalem, secure and strong, it was a sign of God's protection over them. And so, with this knowledge in verse 9, attention shifts from warfare to worship.

With the battle over, the people sort of, in one sense, gather at the temple to meditate on God's unflinching love and recall his mighty ex to proclaim his name to the ends of the earth.

So, verse 10, like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Mount Zion rejoices. The villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments.

Notice here that God is praised not only for his protection of Israel, but for his just rule. His right hand is a symbol of that rule.

And it's filled with righteousness. Further on, the villages are glad. Why? Because of his judgments. God, in other words, is not just a petty ruler taking Israel's side and who just so happens to be stronger than the gods of Egypt, let's say, or the gods of the Canaanites.

[12:44] No, God's victory is motivated by righteousness and justice. He's a universal God who takes the side of the weak, those who trust in his goodness, those who look to him to right the wrongs.

So God's not taking sides when he protects Israel. He's doing it from what stems from his own nature, his character. So what a comfort then it is for Israel because God's defending them because of who he is.

Not because Israel happens to be the flavor of the month or because he's just a little stronger than the other gods at the moment. No, God's doing it because he is God.

That's what he is and that's who he is. And finally, in verses 12 to 14, the psalmist brings us back to Jerusalem. I imagine that perhaps at this point the people step out of the temple and they start walking around the city.

It would have been quite a long walk. And as they do, they count her towers and they consider her ramparts and they view her citadels. And also that they can tell the next generation as they have seen so the next generation will hear.

[13:55] And so, you can see this whole passing. They've heard, now they see, and when they see, now they tell so that the next generation will hear. And just as in verse 10, God's name is spread geographically to the ends of the earth, across the world, now God's name is spread across time from one generation to another.

And what the people hear from one generation to the next is this in verse 14. For this is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even to the end.

So, the focus rightly falls back to God and not Jerusalem. Because only God is able to give them security. Trust Him is the message.

Make sure He remains our God because God alone will guide them forever. The ramparts the walls, these mean nothing if God is not their guide.

Whether the physical fortress is there or not, God will be their fortress. And so, that's the psalm. In a nutshell, it's not hard to understand. And it's a reminder to Jerusalem of where her security lies in God and then to call her to worship Him, the source of her security.

[15:11] And I guess this is the same reminder for us as well. As I said, at the start, security is a basic human need. So where do we find our security? And there are many things we commonly look to, don't we?

We feel secure when we have a roof over our heads. We have loving families, a good job, good friends. But these are the walls and ramparts of our Jerusalem. These are not the real sources of our security.

Only God is our fortress. He's the one in whom we take refuge. He's the one who truly makes us secure. My friends, one of the mistakes that Israel made and which we are prone to make as well is that over time they mistook the gift of security with the giver of that security.

So I can only imagine that year after year they saw Jerusalem still standing, the citadels and the ramparts as strong as ever, that they thought Jerusalem was impregnable, that it would never fall, not because God was protecting it, but because of those walls and ramparts.

Perhaps they even took comfort in this psalm, thinking that they will always be secure because God will never stop protecting them, whatever they did, no matter how they treated God.

[16:27] But I guess if we've read our Old Testament, we know that in places like Deuteronomy, God warned that that was not the case. He warned that if they forsake Him, that they will be scattered and expelled from the land.

And so time and time again, God sent prophets to warn them, to warn their kings especially, but to no avail. And so many of you would know that Jerusalem did fall in 587 BC.

Notwithstanding this psalm, notwithstanding its promises, God allowed the Babylonians to come and capture their city and to take the people into exile. It was a big wake-up call for Israel.

Jerusalem had fallen, but it was not because God was powerless to defend it or that the gods of Babylon were more powerful than God Himself. No, God Himself had done this to remind them that He is their only source of security.

Not the cities, not the walls, not the ramparts. God was the one that was going to make them secure. Now, one of the great ignominies of that time was that as the exiles were in Babylon, they were actually forced to sing psalms like this one.

[17:38] It was their captives' way of mocking them, rubbing salt into their wounds, rather like POWs having to sing victory songs as they were marching to their concentration camps.

Very cruel. It was very cruel. In fact, so deeply impacted were they by this experience that actually Israel wrote a psalm about this.

Can anyone guess which one it is? Exactly. Psalm 137. And many of you would know it because actually it's a very popular song.

A reggae group composed the song in the 1970s based on it. The title of the song is the first line of this psalm by the rivers of Babylon and I thought we'll play it tonight. So, I want you to turn to Psalm 137 and there's a video actually, but I'm not going to play the video.

We're just going to listen to the song. But listen to the words or read the psalm in the song. We won't play the whole psalm because it covers Psalm 19 as well.

[18:40] So, Psalm 137, if you turn to that. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, Yeah, we will When we remember Zion By the rivers of Babylon

Where we sat down Yeah, we will When we remember Zion There's a wind That the wind is Carried us away In captivity Required from us A song Now how shall we sing The Lord's song In a strange land There's a wind is Carried us away In captivity Requiring of us Now how shall we sing The Lord's song In a strange land Did you enjoy that?

Yeah, some of you are probably not old enough to Anyway, I'm not sure that the reggae song does justice to the mood of the psalm because it's a psalm of lament and it seems rather happy But imagine if you're sitting by the river in the shadow of this other great city Babylon much, much in one sense much, much more impressive than Jerusalem and being made to sing verses 9 verses

12 and onwards of Psalm 48 Imagine if you had to sing Walk about Zion Go around her Count her towers Consider well her ramparts View her citadels that we may tell that you may tell of them to the next generation For this God is our God forever and ever He will be our guide even to the end I mean this is exactly what they had to do according to Psalm 137 How would you feel if you were made to do that?

What would you be thinking? Would you be thinking that Psalm 48 is still relevant to us? That God's word is trustworthy? And the answer is yes God's word is trustworthy it's still relevant Why?

Because God continues to be their fortress For there was a time when Israel didn't have Jerusalem There was no wall city no citadels no ramparts and yet God was still with them in the desert at the Red Sea and God was still with them in Babylon And so friends there will be times as well when some of the things that have given us security that God has given us those physical things are taken from us It may be the loss of loved ones maybe our own health financial hardship maybe our best friends move away our job is gone and some of it is not even because we've been disobedient to him we've been faithful and in those times we may not feel very much like praising God then but I say we still need to do it to tell ourselves that God is our God forever and ever and he will be our guide even to the end It may not be tormentors forcing us to do it but we should still do it

[ 22 : 51 ] And I guess for us as Christians we have to ask what gives us confidence to do that What assurance do we have that God is still our fortress? Well most of you will know the answer to that and that's the answer is Jesus because God no longer dwells with his people now in one physical location No, he dwells with us by his spirit in Christ So Jesus is our new Jerusalem our secure fortress and those who put their trust in him become a member of Christ's body we enter this fortress And so that was the reading that we had in Revelation by Andrew chapter 21 Let me read some of it again just to give you a sense of what great blessing we now enjoy in Christ So turn with me to Revelation 21 I may even have it on the slide I don't know I'll just read a couple verses here and there

So verse 2 to 4 I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a beautiful bride beautifully dressed for her husband And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God He will wipe every tear from their eyes There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away And then verse 10 And he carried me away in the spirit to the mountain great and high and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel Like a jasper clear as crystal It had great high walls with twelve gates and with twelve angels at the gates On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel There were three gates on the east three on the north three on the south and three on the west

The wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb And here John is describing the church In verse 22 to 24 I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it The Lamb of course is a reference to what Christ has done on the cross dying for us shedding his blood securing a victory not against flesh and blood anymore Notice that the kings and the nations are now not fighting against Jerusalem but they are actually coming into it So he did not secure a victory against flesh and blood but actually for flesh and blood for us and the enemy is sin death and evil and we will look at that in the next few weeks

So friends there is no greater place for us no greater security than to find it in Christ to trust in him to submit our lives to him to find our security in relationship with him And so as I said at the start security is a basic need for humans so there is nothing wrong in one sense in wanting security God made us this way but often our mistake is to find it just like Israel did in the wrong places to put our trust in the wrong things and the wrong people in our career in our personal wealth and even in our relationships Now how can we tell when we are beginning to put our trust in those things instead of Jesus Well when we keep fretting over these things and not when we don't have them or when we are constantly comparing ourselves with others they are more secure because they have got this and I don't or maybe not even with others but with our past and say oh how good life was when we had this or that or when these things become all consuming so that when we make decisions it

takes precedence over everything else in life when we would never relinquish any of these things in order to follow Jesus or do what Jesus wants

When I was studying at Ridley College I met a lot of people and friends who had given up lucrative careers in order to serve God Some were thinking of becoming pastors others missionaries or other areas of Christian ministry but we would think a lot of times that oh these people just go in there they are so sure of themselves that is what they want to do but I tell you that when we talked there were many who were not in one sense not sure how God would provide for them They were not absolutely confident or sure that they would have this secure and comfortable life and yet they did not allow that uncertainty to stop them from following Jesus Some of them had mortgages others had children that they had to put through school Not everything was clear and certain to them But what they didn't do was to allow these things to stop them from stepping out in faith

[ 28 : 11 ] They kept telling themselves that God would provide that God would guide them even though they couldn't see it right now God was their security And God does provide because He's promised that in Christ He is our God forever He's our God even to the end So I don't know where each of you may be at in your life It may not be even security about material things that you're concerned about It may be relational or emotional But whatever it is I want to encourage you to look to Christ for your security Look to God and don't allow the fears of enemies imagined or real threats to stop you from trusting God because God will be our fortress It is in Christ that we will find all the security we need Let's pray Father we thank you that you've indeed provided for us and blessed us that actually even as we sit here we are the richest people on earth compared to a lot of others around the world

And yet Lord so often we cling to these things as though they are the things that give us security So forgive us Lord Help us to keep coming back to your word to keep reminding ourselves to keep telling ourselves that it is you that is our fortress It is you that will be our guide and you will be our God even to the end And even as we hear that and tell that to ourselves each and every time Help us then to step out in faith and to obey you Pray this in Jesus name Amen