

Going Up, Coming Home

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[0 : 00] Let's read the Word of God now. First of all from Psalm 122. Psalm 122. 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 tower. 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. And then from the last book in the Bible, the book of the Revelation in chapter 7, from verse 9 to 17.

[1 : 17] After this I looked, and behold 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.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these clothed in white robes? And from where have they come? I said to him, Sir, you know.

And he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes, made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve them day and night in his temple.

[2 : 43] And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Amen. And may the Lord bless to us that reading of his own holy inspired word. So we want to look today at Psalm 122.

In many ways it would be very tempting just to do a simple exegesis of this psalm in its own context. The kind of psalm that would be sung as people went up to Jerusalem to worship 3,000 years ago. But I want to do something different on that today. These are the five points. This amazing set of thoughts that the person who wrote this psalm would have had as he was experiencing what this psalm is all about.

[4 : 00] First of all, even I was invited. Remember he was told, let's go to the house of the Lord, and he was thrilled, he was glad when that was said to him.

And then the arrival, I can't believe I'm here. Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. There's a thrill that goes with the arrival.

And then I have never felt safer. Because when they went up there to Jerusalem, and as we come to Christ, of course, you come under the king's protection.

You come to the throne. You come to where God rules, where God's law means everything. And you feel so absolutely safe.

And then I've never felt so connected. Nothing is missing. That's the whole idea behind the theme of peace. That's what peace is.

[5 : 07] When there's a sense of everything being connected, nothing is missing. And it's a wonderful place to be in, to experience that.

And then finally, I've never forgotten. Because when you arrive in this Jerusalem, and when you come to be in Christ, you come to be in a place where you are surrounded by two things. Prayer, praying people, and people who are absolutely committed to seeking your good. These are the five things that I want us to explore briefly today.

Yes, this is Remembrance Day. And on Remembrance Day, it's only right that we think of people who went out on the journey of service, and some of whom died in that journey.

Some of whom are still on that journey of service. Sacrificial endings in many ways. But I want to talk today about this journey, this journey that we are on, and especially the journey that you're on when you become a Christian.

[6 : 23] There may be somebody here today who still has not trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. And I want you to know that you have been invited.

You have been invited to come, not only on a journey to Jerusalem 3,000 years ago. That was thrilling. But you've been invited to come on this most amazing journey to God in Jesus Christ himself.

See, somebody came up to the psalmist and said, let's go to the house of the Lord. Somebody came up and said that to him. Now God, he sometimes calls people just using circumstances.

There have been people who have been brought to think about coming to Christ Jesus for the first time because of difficulties that came into their lives. Trials, troubles, things that brought them to their knees.

And just like the folks in Psalm 107, they cried to the Lord in the midst of the storm and they found that the Lord was real and the Lord answered.

[7 : 40] Sometimes God just uses circumstances. Very often though, he uses people to call other people.

That's the way it was in my own case. I came to be a Christian because I was called by others to come to Christ. People said to me, as it were, let's go to the house of the Lord.

Come, let's go and meet God in Christ. Come and let's become one of the Lord's people in Christ. It's a wonderful thing if the Lord has put people into your life who have actually called you to Christ, called you to become Christians.

It's a wonderful, wonderful thing and never, ever minimise that because the people who called you, do you know what you can say about them?

They are people who are already in Christ. They know what they're talking about. They really know what it is to be Christians. They know what it is to have this amazing relationship with God.

[8 : 52] It's very, very real. And that's one of the reasons why they're calling you. The second reason is they know where they're going. They know they're on a journey.

Every one of us who are Christians are on a journey. And we know that one day, perhaps, people will remember us when we're no longer here. That's the way it's going to be because we know where we are going.

As Nigel was preaching last Lord's Day evening about the Thessalonians, they became Christians. And what was it they were doing? They were waiting for the arrival of the Son of God.

The Son of God hasn't arrived yet, but they've gone to meet him. And that's going to be the same journey for so many of us. Paul says, for me to live is Christ, he says, to die is gain.

See, when you have somebody who can say that and mean it and who invites you to become a Christian, listen to them because they know what they're talking about.

[9 : 58] For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. Listen to such people. And these are also people who love the worship of God.

The people who invite you to become Christians, they love the house of God. They love the worship in Jerusalem. They love the whole idea of gathering around Jesus Christ and in Christ, gathering around God.

They love that. And they don't just do it at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning. They do that all through the week. They know what it is to worship God and their lives are lived before his gaze.

So when these people are saying to you, come, let's go to the house of the Lord. Think of it. Even you are invited.

There's great news. A really amazing, glorious gospel. And these people aren't just saying to you, go, go to Jerusalem.

[11:10] They're saying, come. Let's journey together. Let's journey together. See the people who are asking you to follow Christ now.

They're here just now. They won't be here forever in this world. But for the moment, they're offering their companionship, their friendship, as you journey together in Christ.

It's a beautiful, beautiful thing. So there is something quite amazing about being invited, about being called.

God himself, when he had prepared a feast and the people didn't want to come, he says, go out into the highways, go out into the byways, go out into the far off regions, go to the people who think they would never be invited, and tell them, the king invites them, come, everything is ready, and don't you ever think that God doesn't want you.

And that's the way it is for you today. If you're not yet a Christian, don't ever think God does not want you to come. In fact, he sent people to call you.

[12:31] Have you not a bad nagging thought in your mind when you put your head in the pillow at night? Often on a Lord's Day evening, have you not a bad nagging thought, I am not ready, I'm not yet a Christian.

Well, the Lord is calling you. And this psalmist says, even I was invited. The second thing, verse 2 there, our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Could also be the present tense here. Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. It's as if, yes, he received the invitation, and then a time came when he's reached the end of the journey, he's in Jerusalem, he's at the city gates, he's looking at the city, and he's absolutely mouth agape saying, this is absolutely amazing.

See, the joy of being invited is one thing. The joy of arrival is another thing. See, this psalmist could never have been able to write about the joy of being invited if he had turned down the invitation.

But he can write about the joy of being called because it was followed by this amazing arrival to the point where he just, as it were, can't believe that he's actually here.

[14:04] When he comes to Jerusalem, he looks at the city and he says, it's beautiful. It's a city. people are gathered together and is bound firmly together.

And there's all sorts of different tribes here. They're not all people from my family group. There are people from another tribe and this tribe. And there's all sorts of people who have come to this city. The tribes of the Lord. And they're all commanded, decreed to be there. See, there is something beautiful about becoming a Christian.

In a sense, that's the first stage of arriving. Arriving. I remember it so well. The night I became a Christian, I couldn't stop smiling.

I just couldn't stop smiling because I knew God was my Father because Christ was my Savior. And I was on a journey into life.

[15:07] It was beautiful. Invergordon. It happened in the Highlands and it was lovely. And I could have just said with the psalmist, I'm here.

I've arrived. I'm in Christ. And there was the sheer joy of arrival. And then there's another joy that comes with, and it's a joy that I've experienced and I'm sure other Christians have experienced it, this joy of assurance you know, there are times when even Christians struggle, different trials come their way and you feel the weight of certain things come upon you and you think, how am I going to be able to cope?

And then the Lord, the Lord just comes like a cushion and wraps himself around you and you feel so assured that God himself genuinely, really cares in that moment, in that situation and you feel all over again as if you have arrived.

This assurance and the Lord gives us that sense of assurance time and time again just when we needed. My aunt, she's now in heaven and I am absolutely sure that when she arrived in heaven, having left her body on the earth, it's quite poignant when I went up to the funeral.

I mean, she was buried in the grave and next to it was my own father and my own mother and the headstone there, buried next to one another and there was something very poignant about it, but there's beauty.

[17:07] My mother and my aunt, the two sisters, together again in the presence of the Lord who loved and gave himself.

There was a sense of arrival. I mean, you see it in the Pilgrim's Progress if you read that wonderful book about having come over the river and you've arrived and there's this wonderful sense you're home and it's beautiful.

God. And yet, that's not the greatest. Conversion is great, assurance repeatedly is great, arrival in heaven is great, but as I look over the wall over my study into the graveyard and bath gate, I think of all the Christians who are there buried in that cemetery and they will rise in the resurrection morning, bodies and souls join together and what a sense of arrival it will be in the new heavens and in the new earth.

Death will be swallowed up in victory. Death will be swallowed up in victory. Death beautiful.

See, the great thing about each of these moments of arrival is that they all have this in common, thanksgiving. Thanksgiving.

[18 : 49] The tribes go up to give thanks to the name of the Lord. See, when you become a Christian, you never say, oh, well done, John Angus, you made it.

You give thanks because you deserve the opposite. Every time you receive assurance that the Lord is present and helping you, you don't say, ah, I must have been good this week, that's why the Lord has blessed me.

No, you give thanks for his mercy. Just as in Psalm 107. And even when you arrive in heaven, you don't say, wow, I've been brilliant, I've been so obedient as a Christian, that's why I've been brought home.

No, even there you'll want to throw your crowns at the feet of Jesus. And on the resurrection morning, nobody is going to say to one another, well done.

We'll all be looking to him who has brought us from death to life and taken away our sins, the joy of giving thanks.

[20 : 01] See, one of the most beautiful tests of it, whether you're a Christian or not, is do you have any sense of thankfulness? The third thing, I have never felt safer.

See, this person here, when he arrived in Jerusalem, what does he see there? He sees the city, he sees the people, he sees the tribes, and then he sees the thrones of judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David, because in Jerusalem, there wasn't just the house of the Lord, there was the house of the king, and the house of the Lord, which became the temple eventually, and the house of the king were there together.

So you come to worship the Lord, and you come under the shelter of the king. That's the way it was in Jerusalem, and that's still the way it is as you become a Christian.

See, that's the most amazing thing. When God calls you and you come, he doesn't expect you to manage all things by yourself from that moment onwards.

No, he himself promises that he will care for you, protect you, guide you, he will rule over you.

[21 : 26] As king, you will never feel safer than when you become a Christian. You'll be under his protection. But you might say, but this word judgment appears here, the thrones for judgment.

See, that's a great thing, you see. Yes, the thrones are there. The throne of the king is there, and he rules according to the law of God. But you see, you don't need to be afraid of God's law.

Why? Because Christ died for all the sins that you've committed. Every breach of the law, Christ died for these. So you don't need to be afraid of judgment because you have been brought into a place of forgiveness.

The Christian should never be afraid to explore the law of God in the most minute detail and say, yes, I have broken this law and that law, but I am forgiven.

I am forgiven for time and for eternity. And as you become a Christian, you actually love the judgment of God, the justice of God, the law of God.

[22 : 50] You want to find out more about the character of God and you learn it by the kind of things he says, do this but don't do that.

And you say, ah, the law tells me what God is like because he doesn't want these things to be done and he does want this to be done.

So you study the word of God to find out what God himself is like. Christians love the law of God, the word of God.

Nigel gave us a series of sermons in Psalm 119, which is really a love poem, the longest chapter in the whole Bible and it's focused upon the law of God, the word of God, the statutes of God.

Beautiful. people. And what God does is when you become a Christian, he comes to live inside you so that then you love that law and you become shaped by that law yourself.

[23 : 59] The spirit of God takes the word of God and then begins to work in your life so that you are shaped by it and you end up bearing the fruit of the spirit.

And all of this amounts to life under the king. Where is the Lord Jesus today? He's in heaven. What's he ruling over?

He's ruling over the whole universe. And he rules over this universe in accordance with his own word, with his own laws, with his own purposes.

And as he rules over you as individuals who have come to Christ, you are saved. You could not possibly be saved.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Jesus looked upon Jerusalem, the very place where the temple was, and he wept over it.

[25 : 11] And he says, how often, he says, would I have gathered you as a hen would gather her chickens under her wing? But you would not.

But there were other people. And Jesus looks at them and he says, you've come. You've come under my wing. You've come under my protection. You're shielded by my power. You are absolutely saved. And the next thing that you find here is this amazing sense of peace.

When you become a Christian, and when these people went up to Jerusalem, there's this sense of peace. 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' sakes, I will say, peace be within you.

[26 : 15] What's peace? What's peace? Some people will talk about the feeling of peace. It's warm. Sense of happiness.

Sense of being cared, free, forgotten what that's like. For many people, peace is the absence of trouble, the absence of undesirable things.

It's also, of course, the presence of that which we desire. So for many people, peace is some things not being part of our lives, and other things that God has promised being very much part of our lives.

But these are talking in the abstract. Peace, if you are in the Hebrew word shalom, it's this sense of completeness, wholeness, connectedness.

Nothing is missing. And if you are in Greek, the word is irene, from which you, comes from the verb to join, where everything is joined together, where you get the word serenity from.

[27 : 40] It's this idea of not so much no storms, no troubles, no trials, rather it's this sense that all is well.

All is well. Remember what Jesus said, in the world he says, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, he says, I have overcome the world.

Peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, give I to you. See, he gives them peace, and at the same time he says, you're going to have trouble. How can you square the two things together?

If I become a Christian, surely I'm not going to have troubles. Surely I'm going to have a green card that takes me straight to heaven. No, no, it's not like that.

When God says that you will have peace, and you will have peace, it's often peace in the midst of the storms. Peace in the midst of the storms.

[28 : 45] It's one of the most strange things that you can only talk about as you experience it. You may be in the midst of the most awful trials, and yet you know nothing is missing.

It's all joined up. It's all connected. It's all in God's hands. He's got the universe in his hand, and he's got my universe in his hand.

And when he reminds you that it's all okay, it's all well, that's beautiful. Peace in the midst of trouble. Sometimes it's reminding us of the peace that we have with God. And isn't it great when you can look God in the face through Jesus Christ, and you know you have such a wonderful relationship with him.

You can call him father, he can look on you and say, my son, my daughter, and you know nothing is missing. Nothing need ever be added to make that relationship better than it is to now.

[30 : 06] How long have you been a Christian? How many decades? Some of you. How many weeks? Some of you. Listen, it doesn't matter how long. The moment you trust in Christ, nothing is

missing from that relationship with God.

You are justified by faith, you have peace with God, and it's perfect from the moment it happens. A living relationship with God and Christ.

Nothing missing. And then there's the addition of peace with our fellow Christians. Strangely in my experience, that's where we have the most trouble.

It's not so much of peace in the midst of the storms, all is well, or peace with God. We know we're forgiven and safe, but the relationships we have with Christians sometimes can be fraught, sometimes, and yet I don't think I have ever been happier than when I've been with the Lord's people, and we're all like-minded in worship around God and Christ.

That sense of connectedness, we often feel it in a prayer meeting. We sometimes feel it on the Lord's day here. We often feel it at the Lord's supper when we gather together.

[31 : 52] It's beautiful. Your life might be messed up with all so many things, so many troubles, your health might be damaged, you can have all sorts of things, maybe things on your horizon and you don't know what's going to happen, and yet you look and you're aware, you look around at each other and say, these are my family, this is my Lord, and it's beautiful, beautiful to have that sense of connectedness, peace, nothing is missing.

See, that's the thing about when you become a Christian, it doesn't matter which direction you look in, you look up to God, peace.

You look out into the world with all the mission that he gives you and there's a sense of peace.

peace. You look out into the church and even there, there may be difficulties but there's peace.

And you look inside and even when you look in there, you say, yeah, what a mess in some ways, and yet, peace.

peace. I couldn't be safer than I am now. Couldn't be more saved than I am now. And then the final thing here, I'm never forgotten.

[33 : 32] Never forgotten. Loved forever. See, the person that traveled up to Jerusalem here, he himself became part of a group of people that encouraged others to pray.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for it. Peace be within your walls. For my brothers and companions' sakes, I will say, peace be within you.

See, when you become a Christian, when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation, what you find is that you become part of a community that actually prays for you.

Prays for you. It's our privilege to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. For my brothers and companions' sakes, I will say, peace be within you.

If you know that there's a brother or sister in Christ that you're struggling, of course you do. You pray for them. What are you praying for them? Do you go to God and say, God, take away the storm out of their life.

[34 : 50] Take away the pain. Change their circumstances. Make it more bearable. Don't let their loved one die.

Don't let their loved one die. I don't think God wants you to pray these prayers, at least only these prayers. I think he always wants you to say, if it be your will, and if not, Lord, grant peace, a sense that all is well and nothing is missing prayer.

In the midst of the storm, in the midst of the trial, prayer. We should be praying for every Christian generally, because we don't know the detail of their lives.

We should be praying for our brothers and companions throughout the land, throughout the world. your privilege is to pray generally and for the Lord to answer specifically.

But it's also your privilege to pray specifically when you know the details, or at least some of the details. In my experience, you don't see into the hearts of people.

[36 : 21] You may know some of the details, and you should pray. And that's what we do when we gather, often on the Wednesday evening, we gather to pray, and the detail matters.

We're only doing what we find in this psalm. People are not forgotten. Remembrance day.

We have a remembrance day every day. people are not forgotten. But there's something else here.

People are seeking your good. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. There's the personal commitment of this person.

He was amazed he was invited, amazed that he's arrived, amazed that he's under the protection of the king, amazed that he's at such peace. And what does he do?

[37 : 25] He says, I'm going to pray for the good of God's people. I'm going to seek their good.

I'm going to work for it. I'm going to ensure that people enjoy what God wants to give them. I'm going to use my gifts.

I'm going to use whatever talents the Lord has given me. I'm going to use my time for them just so that they will be helped. I will seek their good.

Never forgotten. The older I get, the more I have a whole list of people in my mind who have prayed for me generally, specifically, and who have sought my good.

Above them all, of course, is Christ. Satan has desired to sift you as weed, but I have prayed for you. Jesus ever lives to make intercession for you.

[38 : 38] He's the one who never, ever forgets you. Never. See, when you become a Christian, it's not the lonely road that you think it is.

It's the most beautiful road of being never forgotten. I trust that you will come to Christ and in Christ discover all that we have been speaking of this morning to be true in your own experience.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we, our Lord, we entrust ourselves to you. We know that you are the one who calls, you are the one who changes us, you are the one who brings us to that place of conversion, faith, repentance, assurance.

You bring us to heaven, you'll bring us one day to the resurrection morning. You will be the one who will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

We are so thankful, Lord, that we are in your gracious, loving, compassionate, powerful hands. Will you protect your people, Lord?

[40 : 03] Will you call people, even in this congregation, the families here, the youngest ones to the oldest ones? And will you, Lord, work, we pray throughout the land and world, that we would not be content to see Christians only gathering together, but that we would long to see people coming for the first time to worship God and Christ.

Lord, give us a thirst and a hunger for these things. we ask it in Jesus. Amen.