

# "Pilgrimage to the True Temple" Psalm 122

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, we thank you that we can open your word in peace and security. Lord, the danger for us isn't persecution from outside, but it is a cold and apathetic heart.

! Lord, we pray that by your Holy Spirit you will enliven our hearts, that we may hear with spiritual ears, that we would submit to your word with joy and gladness. Lord, please remind us afresh this morning that you are with us.

You are the God that is close. You desire to make your home with your people, and you have done so in your Son. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Every religion has its sacred places and holy cities.

Islam requires followers to perform the Hajj in Mecca. The Hindu pilgrims visit Varanasi and the River Ganges.

Buddhists travel to a location where the Buddha attained enlightenment. Golfers go to St. Andrews in Scotland. Why do people travel to these sites?

[ 1 : 0 5 ]     Is there a heightened sense of spirituality involved? If you've been on a pilgrimage, I'd love to hear your story afterwards. Is there an aura that is felt? What's the significance of holy places?

And what does there, what seems to be universality in the human tradition, reveal to us about our need to connect with the divine?

We're continuing our series in the Psalms. This summer, we're looking at the Psalms of Ascent. And we'll be looking at Psalm 122 this morning, the psalm that celebrates the holy city of Jerusalem and the house of the Lord, which was at its center.

It was the place of worship for God's people where they would gather. I mean, the Psalms of Ascent, they're a series of pilgrimage psalms where the people three times a year would travel to Jerusalem.

It was the place where joy and gladness and peace were experienced. It was a place where God's glory and presence dwelt. However, the temple and much of Jerusalem was destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago in AD 70.

[ 2 : 1 8 ]     What's interesting is today is on the Hebrew calendar the 17th of Tammuz. And it is recognized in the Jewish world as a day of mourning.

Why? Because it is the day, among other catastrophes that happened to the Jewish nation, but it's the day that the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans.

The temple doesn't exist anymore. The history of Jerusalem has really seen that city lie in ruins. It's been a battleground.

It has not been this city of peace, the city of safety, what we'll read about, what has been read. And yet, this psalm still remains God's word.

With the destruction of Jerusalem, God's word didn't somehow get nullified. This is still God's word. So we need to ask the question, what is the significance of Jerusalem today for the Christian church?

[ 3 : 19 ] And does this psalm offer any insight into why pilgrimage to sacred sites is such a widespread human journey, a thing that humans practice?

Put forward to you that the human heart seeks holy places. Why? Because we want to experience something of transcendence here in this temporal, earthly life.

To find a place where the veil between heaven and earth is as thin as possible. A way that we can connect with the divine.

But will one find the same transcendence in Mecca and the river Ganges, or St. Andrews for that matter, as they would in Jerusalem? The passage, Psalm 122, will help us understand that the proper way to connect with the divine, to connect with God, to seek Him out, so that He will be found, is through worship.

And specifically, not any kind of worship that we engage in, that we see fit, but worship that God commands. And this worship has a necessity of God's presence involved, has the requirement of unity involved, and it has the longing for not just the earthly Jerusalem, but the new Jerusalem to come.

[ 4 : 45 ] So we'll jump right into the text this morning, verses 1 and 2. A song of a sense of David. 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. These two opening verses, they're really almost like a love letter to the city. David, he loves Jerusalem.

Not because it's beautiful, not because of its gates or walls or towers, but because he longs to be where God's presence dwells. The word here for gladness, I was glad when they said to me, it's the same root word that is used to greet one another at a high holiday.

It is a term that conveys a happiness, a joyous and merriment, a feeling of delight and of peace and of wholeness.

And it's very fitting because, as I mentioned before, the psalm and the psalms of ascent, they were the hymns sung by the Israelites as they ascended up to Mount Zion, to Jerusalem, so that they could worship the Lord in the high holidays.

[ 5 : 59 ] But there's more at stake here than just a greeting during a holiday. It is a sincere response to the promises made by God that he has saved the people from slavery.

And not just Egyptian slavery, but the slavery of death, the slavery of sin, so that they can dwell with him and he with them. So really what's at the heart of this is this faith that God is going to keep his promise.

And what is the promise? Of his very presence. That he would dwell amongst his people. And that he would welcome his people into his presence when they worship. The temple and the tabernacle before it were the places where God made his presence known.

And it's not to say that God is limited to a specific locale. God is everywhere. He has made everything. He is the creator, the uncreated creator.

He is not limited to a spatial boundary like we are. Yet he has made his home with his people. He drew close.

[ 7 : 06 ] He initiated this relationship, this closeness. Jerusalem is the place where God dwells. And it is therefore the city of joy in worship.

And we see these in these opening verses. It reflects this reality. It says something to us that is very important about worship. That God's presence is indispensable.

To godly worship. And this isn't, by the way, of saying I need to feel goosebumps when I come to church. I need to feel something. Rather, it is this act of faith so that when God says that he dwells upon the praises of his people, that he actually dwells upon the praises of his people.

Whether or not we have a spiritual experience or not. That God is present when we are worshipping him in the way in which he commanded us to worship.

That he is with us. You know, I wonder if the pursuit of greatness in sport or in business, the amassing of power, the pursuit of pleasure, I wonder if this is simply a misguided impulse to connect with God.

[ 8 : 24 ] To be in his presence or something similar so that we make ourselves large as possible so that God would notice us. We get as much power as we can attain so that we would be worthy of being in his presence.

significance, attractiveness, strength. The pursuit of this at, in a way that goes above and beyond a regular, good, healthy pursuit of good and godly gifts.

I wonder if it is not this cry to be in God's presence, but in a very misguided way. And yet such a pursuit apart from God, it's a type of pilgrimage, but it is a false type of pilgrimage.

It is not a pilgrimage up to Jerusalem where God's presence is, but it is a pilgrimage towards a false Jerusalem, a pseudo-Jerusalem, a Jerusalem that does not have God at its center, a Jerusalem that is not a holy city.

We want the benefits of Jerusalem. We want the joy and the peace and the prosperity that comes with connecting with God, and yet we want to do so without him.

[ 9 : 50 ] At the core of that sentiment is what the Bible calls false worship. The worship of a God either fashioned in our own image and likeness, or the worship of the true God in a false way.

The Bible is full of examples of both of these kinds of false worships. Friends, worship without God's presence will lead not to happiness and joy, but to emptiness and bitterness, because the joy that one seeks will not be found.

There will be an absence of joy, an absence of peace, because we are separated from the source of such joy, such peace, such love.

And will also lead us to a separation from each other, because worship is always this group activity. You'll notice in verses 1 and 2, there's a plurality of worshipers.

They said, let us, our feet. The worship of God is a communal act that unites otherwise divided and even warring tribes. So lead us to the second point about what true worship is, that it requires unity.

[ 11 : 01 ] It requires God's people to come together. Let me read verses 3 to 5. 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.

Their thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David. Jerusalem is envisioned as a city that is secure, that is unified, and that is just.

It's governed by a divine and just king. David's throne all throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, these themes are picked up, that this is not just a temporal earthly throne, but a throne that will never fade.

It is also the place that is governed by devoted and godly priests. So in verse 4, the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord go up, as was decreed for Israel to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

They're entering into temple worship. It is a place where thanksgiving and worship can flourish, and as a result, a separated and warring people gather around the one true God, and they find unity.

[ 12 : 22 ] In worship, God's people begin moving towards unity, not away from it. We observe this in the progression of verse 4 and 5.

If you look at 4 and 5, the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord go up, now they're defined by the Lord in his covenantal name, and then finally the singular term Israel is used to describe the 12 tribes and almost certainly foreigners that have gone to Jerusalem to worship.

There is a movement towards unity, towards connection to one another. This is a unity that is not just around some kind of an idea that isn't really defined, but rather around a person, a shared purpose and a shared citizenship.

If you worship the Lord, if you are called according to his name, you respond by faith, then he calls you his own. You are part of the spiritual people of Israel.

Israel. They become family because they share the same Father. So as we worship the Lord, we are gathered together and we are united as a body.

[ 13 : 39 ] And this doesn't mean, by the way, that there's uniformity in everything. There's space for style and tradition, customs, language that reflect regional and cultural expressions.

I heard it said beautifully that at its best, denominations, they are like waves in the ocean. You can see them distinctly, but they are a part of the same body of water.

It's a beautiful thing. However, however, it's problematic when the church engages in disputes among ourselves and even worse, when such issues remain unresolved.

And all of a sudden, all of a sudden, there isn't one church of Christ, but there are many different churches of Christ. Which isn't a biblical concept at all.

In fact, it's an affront to what Christ has done upon the cross. There wasn't multiple Israels. There was one Israel. There were many tribes. The tribes, the 12 tribes, they weren't dissolved.

[ 14 : 41 ] But there was one Israel, likewise for us in the church. But when that is, when that doesn't happen, it becomes very problematic. Quite possibly, the holiest site in the Christian tradition is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

If you've been to Jerusalem on a walk or a Holy Land tour, you have for sure have gone to this church. It is the traditional site of Golgotha where Jesus was crucified, but also the place where he was buried.

So there is an empty tomb there, hewn out of rock, but it is empty. The church dates back to the 4th century and has been occupied by six different traditions.

The Roman Catholics, the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox, the Coptic Orthodox, and the Syriac Orthodox. And these groups have rarely enjoyed peace.

One church, literally one church, six different traditions and a ton of disagreement. Unresolved issues.

[ 15 : 47 ] To the shame of the church and because there is one church and they are a part of this church, it's a shame that rests on us so that the keys of the church of the Holy Sepulcher, they are held in trust by an Arab Muslim family.

Not a Christian family, but an Arab Muslim family. There's also the infamous Immovable Ladder, if you've heard of the Immovable Ladder. Worth a quick Google search.

It's a ladder that sits, if you go to the front entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, right above the entrance of the second story, there's a ladder with like eight rungs, like it's an actual ladder that is tilted up against a window.

It's been there for some 300 years. It can't be moved because there's no agreement on what to do with it, where to put it. It's also become a bit of a tourist attraction.

But during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the 60s, Pope Paul VI, I think very aptly described it as a viable symbol of Christian division. Why has the Christian Church struggled so mightily with unity?

[ 16 : 59 ] There's countless pages written about it, historical and political reasons, but I would argue that the Church consistently struggles with remembering their true purpose, that it is worship.

It's to give thanks to the name of the Lord. It's not primarily, actually, to be unified, although that is clearly present in this text in an indispensable part of what it means to be a part of the Church as we worship the Lord.

Nor is it to become prosperous, but the primary function of the Church is to worship the Lord, to lift up His name, to praise Him for who He is and what He has done.

The primary goal of the Church is worship. And who is our prize? What is our ultimate goal?

It is God Himself. When that fails to be the focus, we get an immovable ladder. We get disagreements, we get splintering, we get schism.

[ 18 : 07 ] And it's not an easy fix, okay? I'm not suggesting it's an easy fix. Centuries and centuries, very, very smart, godly people tried to navigate this. The Church is still divided, okay?

I'm not suggesting it's a simple fix, but what it requires is this pursuit of worship where Christ is the prize. Not power, not money, not fame, not to say, hey, we are the true tradition.

It's not that we're trying to find the lowest common denominator, okay? But it is about valuing Christ above all. This is an important part of our consideration, especially when we examine how the pagan world surrounding ancient Israel approached worship.

See, if the godly, biblical vision of worship, what we see in Psalm 122 is to pilgrim towards the holy city so that we can worship the Lord, so that we can gain Him, then pagan worship is the opposite.

It is a type of worship that means to secure prosperity, status, victory, fertility, crops. Worship served as the way to achieve one's desires and one's goals.

[ 19 : 27 ] Make a sacrifice, pour out libations, receive from the gods because now they owe you, okay? They're in your debt. Similar to the Jerusalem of old, this biblical vision of the church is not always fulfilled.

Sometimes we find ourselves practicing the Christian faith in pagan ways, okay? We cry out to the Lord in worship and then when things fail to add up the way we want it to, we say, but I did all this for you.

And it is fine to ask the Lord, of course, we bring our requests to Him, but when we fail to see that the prize is Him, okay, the prize is Him above all and we start to see that, in fact, no, no, no, we want His creation more than Him, the Creator, that's when things start to unravel.

Therefore, we must constantly and continually pray for the peace of the church and look forward to the return of Christ when He will come to judge the living and the dead and the new Jerusalem will be realized.

This will bring us to our third and final point, verses 6 to 9. Read with me. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they be secure who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers.

[ 20 : 55 ] 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. If you have been at church for a while, a bit of a student of the Bible, it is difficult to read these four verses without thinking about the prayer of Christ over Jerusalem before His passion.

This is what He says from Matthew 23, verses 37 to 39. He says, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings? And you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate, for I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Jerusalem has never fully fulfilled its calling. It ultimately rejected the Prince of Peace.

Therefore, interpreting this solely as a call to pray for the physical city's peace, the city that exists today in the capital of Israel, the state of Israel, it misses the deeper point.

[ 22 : 09 ] And I'll just say, pray for Israel. Pray for Jerusalem. Pray for it. It's a contentious place. Pray for it. It's a good thing to do. But the call here is to pray for the peace of Jerusalem that fundamentally looks towards the Messiah, the one whom the ideal of Jerusalem and the temple foreshadows.

In fact, all of the events and the rituals and the traditions and the ceremonies of the Old Testament, they are merely shadows of the shadows. And the thing with shadows, right, and you see this a lot in movies, the shadow, you see the shadow and you see the outline of the person, especially if they're scary, like Batman to the villain, you see his little ears or Darth Vader, you see kind of the shape of his mask, but you don't see the details.

You know what it looks like, what it, the height, the size, but shadows, they are just to prepare us that something is coming, someone is coming.

They are designed to prepare God's people to long for and recognize the Messiah when he comes. So as we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray that God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

Pray for Christ's return so that the new Jerusalem will come in glory. This new Jerusalem, that it is the culmination of our hopes and longings, a place where there is no tears of sadness, there is no cancer, there is no infant mortality, there is no heartache, there is no cheating or stealing, it is the place where God dwells amongst his people in perfection.

[ 24 : 06 ] Everything that the Jerusalem of Psalm 122 points towards, this is it, but exponentially better. There's also a prayer that Christ's church will be a blessing, that Christ's church will be outward facing towards Christ in worship and towards the world in service.

That's what we see here in chapter 22, verses 6 to 9, especially verses 8 to 9. For my brothers and companions' sake, I will say, peace be within you.

For the sake of the house of our Lord, that is to say, worshiping God, I will seek your good. this is something we need to hear. The Jerusalem of the Bible murdered her prophets and crucified her Messiah and was raised to the ground because of it.

And likewise, when a church turns from the Prince of Peace, it will cease to be a church. I mean, God will have mercy upon his church, but for a time, think about Christ's words to the church in Ephesus in Revelation chapter 2.

We can overlook our calling in many ways. We can get distracted, but let me share one example that I think resonates deeply with us today. How we have this problem with commodifying the holy.

[ 25 : 32 ] We live in 2025, 80 years after the end of the Second World War. I was reflecting on this, how post-war technology has absolutely boomed consumerism.

It has been developed. Legislation and regulations exist to promote consumerism. I was thinking about this because both sets of my grandparents were born before the war and both sets grew up without running water or toilets in their house.

It's crazy. And then within a generation, they're driving cars and washing their clothes in a washing machine. It's wild, the change that has happened, especially post-war.

But this is how to, by the way, I think it's great, okay, that it takes us like five minutes to do the laundry. Okay, wonderful. No hit against that. But what's happened is that we have developed a consumeristic mindset and we can't kind of partition different parts of our body and our experience.

We are whole people so that if we are consumers in one area, it's really hard not to be consumers in another area. And as such, the church has become something we consume.

[ 26 : 47 ] And this is very problematic because what do we do with things that we consume? We consume them and then we move on. We look for other things, tastier things, bigger things, nicer things, shinier things.

But the church is not to be consumed. The church is a place, it was created by Christ Jesus himself because he spilt his blood for her.

This is a privilege to be a part of the church, to serve the church. And that's not to say that there's not going to be issues and difficulties, but at its core, it is the place where God dwells.

The church becomes a type of the temple that God dwells amongst us. Right now, here, in this gym, that is a sacred space for us.

Christ is amongst us. It'll be a part of our communion liturgy. Whether you feel it or not, this is our reality. This is not the mentality that we should have in treating the church in a consumeristic way.

[ 27 : 54 ] And when we do so, we fail to worship the Lord as he has asked us to, and we fail to bless those around us. There are people in the New Testament that they commodified the holy, and Jesus turned over their tables and he called them very, very mean but very true names.

Let us take this as a warning. Let us not commodify the holy. I'll end with this. All of humanity is on a pilgrimage. We seek to reach a place of profound peace with green fields and gentle breezes.

We desire satisfaction, belonging, joy, good order, laughter, delight, friendship, and connection. So in a sense, whether it's Elysium or Nirvana or Paradise, it's still that same human impulse, okay, to touch the divine.

we want this not just for a moment but forever with the one who created it all. But here's the rub. We don't know where such a place is and so we have no idea where to travel towards or how to travel there to begin with.

And still, we keep moving. We keep pursuing this ultimate goal, but because we are off course, we become confused pilgrims. Like I said before, we create and travel towards pseudo-Jerusalem's and false temples.

[ 29 : 28 ] We make sacrifices that at their core are selfish. Our souls are turbulent messes. We are left confused and bewildered and we become atomized, consumeristic, and tribal.

But there is hope for Christ Jesus who pilgrimed himself to Jerusalem not to worship at the temple with a sacrifice to offer but rather to offer himself as the sacrifice, the true and living temple where God's presence dwelt amongst his people.

John 1 says that Christ tabernacled amongst us the word made flesh. It's the same word that describes the temple that the Israelites sorry, the tent of meeting that the Israelites erected and brought with them throughout the desert.

It is the picture of God's presence and that is who Christ is. And through him the church would be born, God's spirit would dwell with his people forever.

It means we have a clear pathway to the new Jerusalem. That celestial city where the gates will forever be opened, and joys will last forever and where the sun will no longer be needed for light as the very light of God's presence will illuminate us all.

[ 30 : 53 ] This is the Christian hope. There's nothing else besides it. This marks Christ's kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven. So let's close with the words from the author of the Hebrews chapter 12 verse 22 to 24.

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.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jerusalem. We thank you for the earthly Jerusalem that exists today, that so many cities have come and disappeared.

The Jerusalem of the Bible still exists, but Lord, we thank you more so for your son, for he is our Jerusalem. He is the place where he, the one we pilgrim towards.

He is our prize. He is also the temple. Lord, we thank you that he has tabernacled amongst us, made his home with us. We thank you that we are also a type of temple, for your Holy Spirit dwells in your church, and you are with us even now.

[ 32 : 24 ] Lord, help us to worship you in spirit and in truth. Help us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, that is to pray your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. And Lord, we pray that you would come and you would come swiftly and that the new Jerusalem would be everything we could ever hope for and then some.

Lord, we thank you for the gift and privilege it is to be called by your name to worship you. We pray all of this in Christ's mighty name. Amen.