

The gates of Zion

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[0 : 00] Now as the Lord enables us, let us again turn to the book of Psalms, Psalm 87, Psalm 87.

And we'll read the first three verses. On the holy mount stands the city he founded.

The Lord loves the gate of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God, Selah.

Now, what I intend saying about the psalm, I think to a large extent will include the psalm as a whole.

The psalm is a psalm of praise, a song of praise by the sons of Korah.

[1 : 16] Now, you may remember that David appointed certain people to various tasks in the tabernacle and particularly in anticipation of the service of the temple after the temple was to be built.

And if you were to read in 1 Chronicles 23, verses 4 and 5, you find that 24,000 out of 38,000 men, David said, shall have charge of the work in the house of the Lord.

6,000 shall be officers and judges, 4,000 gatekeepers, and 4,000 shall offer praises to the Lord with the instruments that I have made for praise.

And obviously, these sons of Korah fall within that last category, that they were those particularly focused upon rendering praise to the Lord in the worship of the tabernacle or the temple.

As you know, David was not permitted to build the temple because the Lord said that he had shed much blood during his life. He certainly shed much blood, but he had a heart to establish a permanent place of worship to magnify and glorify God in Jerusalem.

[2 : 51] And his son, of course, Solomon, the Lord appointed to do that. And the psalmist here, he has the tabernacle or the temple particularly in view.

And he was thinking at one level of the glories of the temple. The psalms we sang this evening speak of Mount Zion, speak of the glories of Jerusalem regarding the worship of God.

In Psalm 122, for example, which we sang at the beginning of our service, is one of the psalms of ascent. Psalms that they were singing as they joined together, as they ascended up to the feasts that the Lord had appointed to be observed in Jerusalem.

And the man of God there in Psalm 122 says, I joyed when to the house of God go up, they said to me. Because in Jerusalem it was the focus of their worship.

And the Lord had said that he was going to make himself known to them in that particular place.

And we see that this particular psalm and the references we have to Jerusalem and Zion in the Psalms and in the Old Testament are pointers to the Church of Christ and pointers to the cause of God.

[4 : 23] And we see that when the writer to the Hebrews was writing to those people, he said that you, he says, have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God.

You find that in Hebrews chapter 12 and 22. They were zealous for the worship of God as Hebrews. But now that they have come to Christ by faith, it's as if they have come to the real Mount Zion, to the real Jerusalem, to the real focus of worship.

They have come to the Lord himself, even the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust in him as their Savior. So what we have here in Psalm 87 and the references to Mount Zion and so on.

These references are true to the city of God or the Church of God in every age and in every generation. And there are four things throughout the psalm that I think are, to me, extremely interesting so far as the Church of God is concerned.

For example, in verse 1, it says, On the holy mount stands the city he founded.

[5 : 46] Or in other translations, he's talking about the foundation of the city. And I'd like to say a few words about what foundation this is in relation to the Church of Christ.

And secondly, we see that there is a reference in verse 2 to the gates of Zion, the gates of Jerusalem.

And it says that the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. And thirdly, there is a reference to the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem or Zion or the Church.

For example, in verse 4 onwards, the Lord is saying, Among those who know me, the Lord says, I mention Rahab and Babylon.

Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Cush. This one was born there, they say. Of Zion shall be said, this one and that one were born in her for the Most High Himself will establish her.

[6 : 57] The inhabitants of Zion are those who make up the Church of Christ. And firstly and finally, in the very last verse of the psalm, we have a reference to the song that these people sing.

Singers and dancers alike say, all my springs are in you. Those who rejoice in the Church with true spiritual joy, they acknowledge that all their wellsprings and all the blessings they enjoy come from the Lord Himself.

So these four points, the foundations, the gates, the inhabitants, and the song. First of all, one or two points in relation to the foundation.

The foundation of Jerusalem as a city, it was a stone foundation built upon a hill.

But when you think of Christ, He particularly is the great foundation stone of the Church. He is the one upon whom the Church is built.

[8 : 25] And He says, upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The Church has an immovable foundation.

But think a little bit beyond that statement. And think, for example, of the eternal decree of God.

God's eternal purpose regarding His elect people. The people whom He has foreknown in eternity. He is determined to make them like unto His own Son. God from all eternity has this decree, or this eternal immutable purpose, that His elect people will be saved.

And isn't it wonderful what the Lord says in relation to these people? He says, My sheep, hear My voice, and they obey Me.

[9 : 36] They follow Me. Because it all stems from God's eternal purpose, His foundational decree regarding His elect people, that they will come in the fullness of time, and they will come to believe in Him.

And nothing can thwart the purpose of God. Nothing can intervene between God's election of His people, His calling of them, His justifying of them, His sanctifying of them, and at last His glorifying of them.

That is marvelous foundational theology for the people of God to think upon. Their salvation is secure and is sure from all eternity, because God has elected them in Christ, and that is what makes them unshakable and unmovable in life's fiercest storms.

However feeble they may feel themselves, the Lord says, none shall pluck them from my hand. On the holy mount stand the city He founded.

It is the Lord's purpose, and it is the Lord's fulfilling of His glorious, gracious, and covenantal purpose, that His people hear His voice, and that they are persuaded and enabled to receive Jesus Christ and rest upon Him alone for salvation.

[11 : 20] It's a marvelous and glorious teaching is this, that the Lord from all eternity has decreed that this is going to be so, and the people of God will never perish, and none shall pluck them from His hand.

That's the first thing I'd just like to highlight. On the holy mount stands the city that He has founded. The second thing is that a reference to the gates of Zion, here in verse 2.

And it says that the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Now Jerusalem had gates, and in that kind of military climate, the gates had to be stout and strong, and when oppressors came to try and break through the gates, gates, the gates were manufactured in such a way that they were able to stand a lot of power, whether by a battering ram, or whatever other inventions the people had during these days, they were able to withstand much.

gates. But the gate, as it's mentioned often in the Old Testament, is more than just the gate that swings on hinges and closes to let people in, or close them in, or let them out.

The gate was a large platform area inside of the actual gates. And when armies came to attack, the soldiers within the city could congregate there behind the gate and lean upon it and give it extra strength, standing on this large platform area.

[13 : 28] But there is something else regarding the gate. It was an area where people gathered, where important business was to be transacted, where legal judgments were given, where public announcements were made.

Think, for example, of the situation with Boaz in the book of Ruth. There was a kinsman, redeemer, closer in relation to Naomi than he was.

And when Boaz desired to make the matter of his interest in Ruth public, he called this other kinsman to the gate of the city.

You read this in Ruth chapter 4 at verse 1. Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there and the kinsman turned aside and he also sat down.

And Ruth chapter 4 verse 11, all the people that were in the gate and the elders said, we are witnesses of this transaction. You see, the nearer kinsman refused to have Ruth as a wife.

[14 : 56] And when Boaz heard this, he made his interest in Ruth known and all the elders of the city were gathered at the gate of the city and this whole transaction was public and was declared to be official at that particular point.

And it says here that God loves the gate of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. what's so significant about the gates of Zion?

What does it mean for us here this evening? Well, I believe it means as if we are in gatherings such as this, where spiritual transactions are carried out, where people hear what the Lord is saying, where they acquiesce in what the Lord asks of them, where people are joined together by faith and joined with the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Saviour, where transactions for eternity are sealed and transacted.

And that is why it says here that the Lord loves the gates of Zion, where he works by his Spirit and where people are persuaded and enabled, to receive Jesus Christ, where they are persuaded to embrace the Word of God as their rule of life, where they are enabled to commit themselves in obedience and in faith and in love to the ways of God.

And God delights in the gatherings of his people because it says where the two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them.

[16 : 53] it doesn't say where two or three gather, but it's in the passive. People are gathered by the Spirit and they are gathered to hear what the Lord is saying and they are gathered to hear what the Lord is asking of them and he persuades and enables them to embrace what he says.

So this is what it says regarding the gates. And thirdly, it talks about the inhabitants of the city.

And at verse 4, we have a list. Among those who know me, I mention Rahab and Babylon, Philistia and Tyre with Cush.

These are references to nations round about Jerusalem and round about Israel. Rahab is another name for Egypt.

Called Rahab because of its pride, because also of its fierce attitude towards Israel. They were not the friends of Israel.

[18 : 14] Nevertheless, some from Rahab or from Egypt are coming to inhabit the Church of Christ. Talks about Babel.

What does this mean? Babylon. The chief city of the Babylonians. Full of idolatry. Full of hatred towards Israel.

Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed this very temple. Nevertheless, he couldn't destroy the Church because Christ is the foundation of the Church and Christ also is the one who keeps the Church in safety in the midst of all the trials and afflictions and attacks made upon it.

We see also, thirdly, behold, Philistia, the land of the Philistines, Israelites, who were always bitter enemies to Israel, but who shall be converted and become children of the Church.

Tyre, famous for its trading and for its merchandise, there it was on the coast and access to the markets overseas, and it was full of merchandise, and probably also full of covetousness, where money was so freely available and people became extremely rich, they fell in love with money, but some of these people have come and believed in the Lord also.

[19 : 52] Also, it says at the end there, Cush, another name for Ethiopia, possibly the furthest south part of the known world at that particular time, it's as if these people were so far away, nevertheless, the Lord is going to bring them in to Zion, into His Church.

Look, when we think of ourselves, it's as if the people or the peoples mentioned in that verse, these two verses, it's as if they represent the kind of people we are ourselves.

We are like Rahab, full of pride, as we are by nature. We are like Babylon, full of various kinds of idolatries in our personal lives.

We are like those from the land of the Philistines, who were always bitter enemies of Israel, enemies of the gospel, enemies of the word of God.

we are tired, maybe full of the love of money and the love of the world. We are like Ethiopia, the furthest away land.

[21 : 11] It's as if we were so far away from the Lord, so far away from the church in our thoughts, and in our affections, and in our commitment to anything to do with the Lord, it's as if it was impossible for us to come and be found in Zion.

But you see, the Lord who is the decreer of the salvation of his people, he sees people in Ethiopia, he sees people so far away, nevertheless by his effectual call of them, he calls them into fellowship with himself, he sees the covetous people, the money lovers, the world lovers, and he calls them also and they say, I'm turning away from all of these things with which I've been in love so much, because I have found a more marvellous object of my love.

The Philistines who hated Israel, maybe there are people here, I don't know, who just couldn't stand being in the presence of Christians, who just couldn't stand the thought of coming to church at one time in your life, nevertheless the Lord has changed your heart and now you love the people of God and you love the word of God and you love the day of God and the house of God, just like the psalmist when he says, I joyed when they said to me, we shall go up to the house of God, maybe you are something like Babylon, full of idolatry, various idols, maybe you are full of all kinds of sins associated with the people we have mentioned in this list here, but what does it say?

Among those who know me, I mentioned Rahab and Babylon, they have come to know him, they have had their eyes opened, they have had their ears opened by the spirit of God, they have had their affections drawn after the Lord Jesus Christ and now they love him instead of turning away from him, now they love the Lord's people instead of seeking to avoid them, now they seek to have one object of love in their lives, like the psalm said, one thing I of the Lord desired and I will seek to obtain that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I the beauty of the Lord behold may and admire, and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire.

These people are gathered and they have no real credibility in themselves and no entitlement to blessing and no entitlement to coming within the blessed fellowship of Christ but because of his everlasting covenant obligation because of his decree to have them saved they will come and the Lord himself says they know me they know me this is life eternal that they might know me and Jesus Christ whom I have saved and this is what we have here it of Zion it shall be said this one and that one were born in her for the most high himself will establish her he's talking about being born in

[25 : 13] Zion just as if a register was being kept in the council offices in Stornoway of the births that take place in our own community here while the Lord registers those who are born again and they are born again within the church they are born again by the effectual power of God spirit and the Lord records and registers the people and he says this man and that woman that boy and that girl they were born here and isn't it wonderful it says here that the most high himself will establish her when you think of your own personal journey as a Christian and you think of the number of difficulties and discouragements that may come your way as a

Christian in the world you say well sometimes I'm ready to give up sometimes I find it so hard and the hill is so steep and my heart is so hard and my mind I feel so worldly and I feel a million miles away from what I would love to be is there any hope for me well where the Lord has begun the good work he will perform it and this is what it says in these words the most high himself will establish her he has promised the Holy Spirit to his people and we ask for the Holy Spirit to be given to us to strengthen our faith don't we do that to give us a deeper love to give us more and more vision or view of Christ that we might behold more of his glory we might see more and more of the glory of the work that he has finished on our behalf that we might be drawn more and more after him and be given power against the wiles of the devil and the drawings of the world upon our heart and upon our life the Lord will establish us and he promises to give us his

Holy Spirit that he might establish and strengthen us for the fight the foundations the gates the inhabitants and finally the song singers and dancers it says here I like say all my springs are in you those who exhibit their joy in these ways they exhibit it acknowledging that their joy comes only from the Lord himself not in the things of the world not in themselves feeling able to do anything but

from the Lord who remembered them when they were low down the Lord who promises never to leave them nor forsake them isn't it amazing what the psalmist says in Psalm 73 whom have I in the heavens high but thee O Lord alone and in the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none and he goes on to say my flesh and my heart faint and fail but God doth fail me never for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever it is if you see him thinking in his mind of the powers that are against him nevertheless the Lord is sufficient to give him strength in the face of all these difficulties and he is able to sing the praise of the Lord acknowledging the Lord is my helper the Lord is my shepherd the Lord is the one who feeds me who gives me strength for duty for performing every duty to which I am called I would fail if I was left on my own nevertheless his grace is promised to me and his grace is sufficient for me and I cannot but praise him every moment of the day because all my springs well springs are in him the picture I think we have here is particularly relevant to the mind of the people of David's day who had journeyed quite a distance possibly to Jerusalem over very dry terrain with very little rain certainly at some times of the year and it's as if they were reminded that there is an available source of water for them there were wells in the wilderness oases in the desert but the greatest well and the most wonderful oasis is the Lord himself he alone when he speaks a word in season to us he fills us with heart satisfaction and joy in our soul and we are ready to say my well springs are in you isn't it wonderful what the

[31 : 15] Lord promises his people the church of Christ in glory it says they shall hunger no more thirst or thirst any more the sun shall not light on them nor any heat but the lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of water and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes this is promised this is something in anticipation something that awaits the people of God there are eternal springs to which the Lord leads his people eternally world without end a psalm of the sons of Korah a song rejoicing in the foundations of the church rejoicing in the gates of the church where these marvelous transactions take place for eternity between your soul and the

Lord see that you be present at the gates of the church as often as you possibly can because it says that the gates of Zion are beloved more than all the dwelling places of Jacob the inhabitants coming from all different quarters various areas of life different activities different lifestyles different sinful habits and inclinations yet when the Lord comes they are brought safely into the fellowship of the Lord himself they are born again by the spirit of God and those who are born again they sing the song the song that has been taught them by the spirit the psalmist says he took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay he put my feet upon the rock establishing my way and he put a new song in my mouth our

God to magnify many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely it's the Lord who teaches us the song the Lord himself is the master teacher he is the one who enables us to sing in praise of his great name may we all be found in this marvellous church of Christ having your feet upon the rock that shall never ever move being present always at the gates of Zion to hear what he says and to be given the spirit in order to obey what he asks of us and be constantly in the fellowship of the other inhabitants of the church the devil will try and make breaches among the church of Christ but if the Lord has touched your heart you be frequent in your fellowship with other Christians because you're all on the same journey heading for the same eternal reward and sing the same song the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want let us pray for m