

The Lord's City

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Preacher: Rev Gordon Matheson

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 87. If you're reading in the church Bible, I think it'll be around about page 593.
Psalm 87. A psalm of the sons of Korah, a song. On the holy mount stands the city he founded.

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

Salah. Among those who know me, I mention Rahab and Babylon. Behold, Philistia and Tyre, along with Cush. This one was born there, they say.

And of Zion, it shall be said, this one and that one were born in her. For the Most High himself will establish her.

The Lord records as he registers the peoples, this one was born there, Salem. Singers and dancers alike say, all my springs are in you. Amen. This is God's word.

[1 : 2 2] Let's just bow for a moment in prayer. Heavenly Father, help us tonight as we pause over your word for just a moment to see the most precious things that you have to say to us.

Things that point us towards our future. Help us to remember the great goal and purpose of all life is that glorious exaltation of Jesus that will take place in the fullness of the revelation of God himself coming to dwell among his people.

Help us, therefore, to remember what our lives are about, that our lives are looking forward to that great and glorious day of Revelation 22. Looking forward to a day where all sorrows will end, where the world will be as you eternally plan for it to be.

And so we pray for your blessing tonight as we look in that direction and help us to see clearly. For Jesus' sake. Amen. My kids have a book called The Jolly Postman.

And the reason I mention The Jolly Postman tonight is because The Jolly Postman has in it, it's quite an interesting little book. As you go through it, there's little cards that you pull out as if they were letters that were being delivered.

[2 : 4 2] And the last one is this amazing little thing. It's almost like an accordion. It's a few pieces of paper and card that are concertinaed together so that when you pull them apart and you look in through the tiny little viewport, you can see the scenes from the rest of the book.

So all the different houses that The Jolly Postman has been to, you see them concertinaed inside this little paper thing. I don't know what the name for these things are. I think they were probably quite popular in the past.

These days, you can go to the cinema and you can put on fancy goggles and you can see things in 3D. This, I guess, was a Victorian version of that from some time in the past. But sometimes when you're reading the Bible, and particularly, I think, in fact, in the Old Testament, the Book of Psalms, it's a little bit like that.

The psalm that we're reading tonight, Psalm 87, is a psalm which is looking in the foreground at the city of Jerusalem.

And it's thinking about Jerusalem as the place where the temple is and where the festivals of the Jewish people are. But when you look at it through the little viewport, you see in the foreground, perhaps, the city of Jerusalem.

[3 : 52] But you see extending a way off beyond it, concertinaed out past it. You see the coming of Jesus, first time round. And you also see the same things that Revelation 22 is talking about, the second coming of Christ.

And the eternal future that lies before the church as the people of God. And so tonight, I want to just very briefly to think about three things about this.

It's what you would call, therefore, it's an eschatological psalm. Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things. And so it draws us into this future tense.

So although we're reading words that were written two and a half, three thousand years ago, perhaps, we're thinking about something that still lies in the future, a day that is yet to come.

And as we sing these verses in conclusion tonight at the end of the service, hopefully we'll do that with that greater understanding of what it is that we are singing about and looking forward to.

[4 : 57] There's three things then I want to note. First of all, the city has a founder. The psalm begins, Oh, on the holy mount stands the city he founded.

And very quickly, the sons of Korah tell us who the he is, because they move on immediately in the next line to say the Lord. That's the covenant name of God, the name that God gave Moses when he said, Who will I say is commanding me to tell the people to come out of Egypt?

They won't believe me unless they know your name. And he says, Tell them the Lord, the great I am has sent you. And that's the name that's used here. The covenant God of Israel loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.

The Lord has established the city. It is in fact his establishment.

It's his work. It's his doing. It's his activity. It's his workmanship. It's him that is building it up. And we have to understand that as not simply being merely the physical location of Jerusalem, precious though that was amongst God's people as the place of the temple and as the throne of David.

[6 : 20] But because we know from the New Testament that into that building that God is erecting, that gathering of God's people that is the church, the reality is this is talking about the church itself, the gathering of God's people, the holy Jerusalem, the new city that is going to be established in the new heavens and the new earth, really is the building of the church.

It's the establishment of God's people among whom he dwells, where he lives. And there's that incredible precious imagery that flows through all of the teaching even of Jesus when he's talking to the apostles about him going to prepare a place for them.

Again, the temptation is to think of that in its physicality, to think of a place. But that place is, in a sense, more precious when you realize it's actually about a people.

It's about God establishing his cause, his people, the body of Christ, the work that he has done.

And the hill, therefore, is holy, not because the hill itself has somehow been touched by the finger of God and therefore he dwells there and sits there on the altar of the temple in the Holy of Holies.

[7 : 45] But it's not simply that God has been there once. It's that God dwells there. It's that permanent dwelling of God's place, of God's own presence, that God dwells here.

And it's therefore more precious than all of the scattering of God's people throughout, in the Old Testament, throughout Judah and Israel, and now in the New Testament, scattered throughout the world under every nation, tribe, and tongue.

What's precious is not the place, but the people themselves. That God, tonight, sees over his people that he delights in us. That he delights in the church.

That Christ delights in his bride. He sets his love upon us. He sets his throne among us. We establish his rule, really, as we worship him and as we glorify him in our lives.

And so, glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Tonight, I want to encourage you to reflect on this beyond these mere expressions of this in the Old Testament.

[9 : 01] But to reflect on the truth, that glorious things will be forever spoken of you as the body of Christ. That glorious things will be forever spoken of Christ's church, of his bride.

Just why, in that conclusion of Revelation, the spirit and the bride say, in chorus, together, come.

The longing for the presence of the Lord, who will reveal himself, and who will lavish upon his bride all of his gifts, and all of his grace, in the endless ages of eternity, that lie before the church.

We are invited tonight to see that glorious things are spoken. It tempts us to wonder, then, well, what is the glory that is spoken in our lives?

We so often, we see, don't we, our lives marred by their sin, marred by the brokenness in our lives. But God has said over us, I have saved you for good works.

[10 : 14] I have rescued you for a purpose. And as we go out, and into our families, and into our workplaces, and into our circles of friends, and into our community, as we go out, we are going as lights, showing the glory of Jesus.

And in the fullness of God's revelation of himself, the sharing of the church in that work is the glorious things that will be spoken of us.

The glorious ways in which we have mercifully done the work of Jesus, mercifully shared the good news of Christ, and established God's presence and throne in this world.

Glorious things are spoken to of the fellowship of the church. We all know the times when our own experience of sorrow has been so overwhelming. And yet, the presence of God dwelling among his people, and ministered to us through the compassion of the saints, through the sharing of the saints and lifting up our burdens, of encouraging us and helping us through our lives.

We have that sense of God's blessing, the glory of God's presence conveyed through the fellowship and closeness of the church.

[11 : 36] And we see it because we know God dwells among all of his people, and shares among us his grace in that way. So God is the city's founder.

He's also, not only is he the city's founder, he's also this thing called the book's author. Among those who know me, I mention Rahab and Babylon.

Behold, Philistia, and Tyre along with Cush, this one was born there, they say. And of Zion, it shall be said, this one and that one were born in her. For the Most High himself will establish her.

The Lord records as he registers the people. This one was born there. And that activity, again, it's God's activity. God is the one who registers.

God is the one who knows his people. God is the one who has authored what we know in the New Testament, and elsewhere in the Old Testament as well in the book of Daniel, we know as the book of life.

[12 : 38] The register of God's chosen. Of God's sovereign, everlasting choice. As the Catechism teaches us, to save some to everlasting life.

A simple point. And yet one of profound security for God's people. The range of people from which this comes is fascinating as well.

In the psalm, the nations that are mentioned are not just Judah, but Rahab and Babylon. Egypt. Rahab is Egypt. Egypt and Babylon. Philistia and Tyre, the Phoenician states on the Mediterranean coast that were a constant thorn in the side of Israel.

And this place, Cush, probably Nubia or Namidia, down into the upper Nile region, way of far south into Africa.

It's a far off place, and yet still considered a rival of Israel through the years. These are the places that are being brought in, have been encompassed, included, brought into the promises of this book, this register that God is keeping, over which he says, they are mine, over which he has made his sovereign choice.

[13 : 56] And tonight, that's our situation. Our names are written down in this book. And the book, it's an interesting function in the ancient world.

It was a way of recording for sure who was entitled to the city's protection. It was a way of knowing for sure who belonged there, who had an inheritance there, who could enjoy the safety and shelter of the walls of the city, who could come in.

And outside, you see that language in Revelation 22? outside are the dogs, and the abhorrent, ongoing sinners, those who have not been cleansed, those who have not been washed.

The city is the place for those whose names are in the book, but for everything that that registration includes. And we have to see, therefore, in these verses, the blood of Christ.

Because it's the blood of our Savior that entitles us to be there. It's his book. It's the book that belongs to the Lamb who was slain. A book written before the foundation of the world, but it belongs to the Lamb.

[15 : 19] And it belongs to him in his slain status. It's his because he went to the cross. Because at the cross, he earned that security for God's people so that we tonight can sing these verses.

And we can sing them with that full now understanding of what was entailed in this record that has been made. this one was born there.

That statement of birth now belongs to those not naturally born there because very few of us, I suspect tonight, none of us, I don't know for sure, but none of us were born in Jerusalem. And yet, all of us tonight, if we're believers, have been adopted into the royal family and household of God.

As Revelation 22 says, we will reign with him forever. We're brought by adoption into this privileged and dignified place.

Our whole identity is now rewritten because of this adoption of what we have been brought to and secured into by our Savior.

[16 : 32] And so tonight, for those who are struggling with questions of assurance, for those who doubt that their works and their grace and their goodness are sufficient, I just want to remind you what matters for your security is not how well you do, but it is how well he has done.

The security comes from that voice from heaven that said, this is my beloved son. See him, worship him, acknowledge him, believe in him.

This son of God who went to the cross and who shed his blood for his people, that is our true security tonight. And that shed blood is the ink in which these names are written.

That is where our security is to be found. The psalm, it ends with one final picture. The Lord records as he registers the peoples.

This one was born there. Pause. Strain singers and dancers alike say, all my springs are in you.

[17 : 55] This is alluding to certainly a passage back in the days of David. 2 Samuel chapter 6, I think.

Remember when the Ark of the Covenant is brought towards Jerusalem, David dances with all of his might before the Lord and Michal, Saul's daughter, his wife, scorns him for the scene of his dancing.

And yet his reaction was the right one. The overwhelming joy that he expressed on that day, not as a priest, not as part of the figurative cult of Israel who are carrying out all of these activities as prefiguring things to do with the work of Jesus, but just David in the sheer expression of his joy in the presence of the Lord.

His joy in the work of the Lord being done and all of the singers that accompanied that, that great procession that is thrown together and it's alluded to repeatedly throughout the book of Psalms.

There's this procession of singers and dancers who are rejoicing in what? And they say this word, the springs. All of my springs are in you.

[19 : 14] And there were a handful of springs in Jerusalem, but the real imagery there is the imagery of these apocalyptic tales of the latter Old Testament and the end of the New Testament.

The stories of the spring, the river that flows from the temple gates in Ezekiel. The picture of the river of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb in Revelation.

It's this idea that Jesus himself speaks of when he talks to the woman at the well in Samaria. How he will open up in her a living water.

How Christ is the source himself of life. He is the wellspring of salvation. He is the source of our life that flows from the throne of God and glory out through the city, out among the people.

The imagery of Revelation 22 is those people who are allowed into the city whose names are written in the book. They are the ones who are entitled to drink from the water of the river. They are literally the trees that line the street whose leaves are for the healing of the nations and who bear these twelve fruits.

[20 : 37] That's the church. The church that is tonight for the healing of the nations because it receives life from the throne of God, from the one who is seated there, from the Christ, from the Lamb slain, who has brought forth living waters in our experience and in our hearts.

You know, that's us tonight. We are refreshed. We are born again to bear a living message, a living witness, and the source of our life is Christ, the one who is there seated, who is our Emmanuel, God with us, God dwelling among us and in our hearts.

This is a psalm that speaks of our future because the day will come when that living water will no longer be something that we struggle to experience.

We know that at times. At times, sometimes as Christians, don't we feel so dry? The day is coming and we'll be set, established forever, that these waters will flow abundantly.

And the idea of the 12 kinds of fruit, I think, is just the perpetuity of the fruit. In every month of the year, there is constant fruit. We will be fruitful forevermore.

[22 : 12] It's so precious to see what Christ will do as we rejoice more and more in his great work. And so tonight, we are invited, as the psalm concludes, to join in that joyful singing and dancing, as we rejoice in the truth, the same truth that these Old Testament saints, the sons of Korah, spoke of.

All my springs are in you. The source of our life is in Christ. He has done it. Let's bow in prayer. Heavenly Father, we pray tonight that you would help us to see Jesus in this psalm.

Help us to see the fullness of what he has done. Help us to see the great work that he has engaged in. Help us to see the great security that he has brought to us. Help us to see the life that he shares with his people.

And may we tonight know overwhelmingly that great security and that great truth that we are secure and safe in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bless us then in him. Help us to see him and savor him more sweetly, we pray. In his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.