

The Joy and Peace of God's House

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 December 2018

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn just for a little to the chapter we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 122. And just a wee overview of this particular psalm. I'm not going to read through it, but just at the beginning.

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. And then verse 6, Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they be secure who love you. Peace be within your walls and so on.

Have you noticed at the beginning that this psalm is termed a psalm of ascents? And there was a group of these psalms from 120 through to Psalm 134 that all have that title, Psalms of ascents. And not that they were particularly written, or not all of them were written for the occasion of making their way up to Jerusalem to the feasts. But all these psalms were collected together and they were sung by the people, by the pilgrims, as they made their way to Jerusalem for the feasts.

So that's why they're called songs of ascents, that they were going up, they sang them as they were going up to Jerusalem. And the house of God, of course, is the great focus of this psalm.

[1 : 24] And it is a focus that you often find in the scripture as God's people are wanting to go to God's house. And of course, the reason why people want to go to God's house is that they want to go to worship God.

And they want to meet with God, the very thing that we're doing here today. When we come to God's house, we always come not simply just to, as it were, to clock in and to clock out and to say, well, that's it, I've done my bit, I've done my duty.

Although there is a duty in going, we believe there is, but primarily it is to meet with the Lord. We want to meet with him. We want to hear what God has to say.

We want the Lord to be relevant to where we are today. And that's where we come and we hope we come with faith to see and to hear and to believe what the Lord is saying to us.

Now, of course, the God's house that would be referred to here, I was glad when they said, let us go to the house of the Lord, is different to what we have today.

[2 : 33] Of course, if we go right back, we remember that God's house would be originally viewed as a tabernacle. And you remember how God gave instructions to Moses how to build that in the desert, in the wilderness, as they were making their way to the land of promise.

And God gave clear plans of how it was to be built and indeed not just the building itself, but also the structure of the worship and the sacrificial system.

Everything was given to Moses by God. So the whole structure was God given. And then, of course, later on, it came to the building of the temple.

And again, the blueprint, as it were, was given by God, where God instructed, gave clear commands on how it was to be built and even where it was to be built.

And there was all that. Remember how David himself, David was the one who wanted to build the temple. Because he was saying to himself, here's me, I'm in this palace.

[3 : 38] And God's glory and God's, God, because this is one of the wonderful things, is God promised in the tabernacle that his presence would be there.

And you remember, and we're not going to go through that, but in the structure of the tabernacle, there were various segments or sections to it. And there was what was called the holy place.

And then there was one wee room which was called the most holy place, the holy of holies. And in that place was the Ark of the Covenant. And this was the place where the Lord had specifically promised his presence to be, where the Shekinah glory was.

And only once a year, remember, the high priest was allowed to go in there. And he went in on the great day of atonement with the blood of the sacrifice, which was sprinkled onto the mercy seat, which, of course, was a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ was later to do.

It was, we've said it before, it was both public and private. The sacrifice that was made was public. The blood that was shed was public. And yet the high priest took that blood and he went in behind the veil where nobody else could see him.

[4 : 55] And he was representing the people and he was presenting that blood before the Lord. And the Lord accepted that sacrifice because it was a God-given way. And that was a picture of what Jesus did.

His work was public. His death was public. And yet there was a private part to it where God was dealing with Jesus on the cross.

And that's why Jesus said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me as he was plunged into these hours of darkness? But all, sometimes when you go to Leviticus and Numbers and the whole Old Testament sacrificial system and the ceremonial law, some of it must have been a fearful bind upon the people.

And some of it was very maybe difficult to understand. But of course it was all picturing and looking at Jesus. And that was one of the great things.

Nobody ever saw what was happening behind the veil when the high priest went in. That place was a no-go area to anybody except the high priest and only once a year.

[6 : 05] But you remember when Jesus died, there were various things happened. When he yielded up his spirit on the cross. One of the things it tells us that the veil of the temple was torn in two.

It was split all the way from heaven to earth. There was this huge veil that separated where the holy place was. And it was like the Lord was saying, that's the end of the old way.

You don't need high priests. You don't need this sacrificial system. It has all been done in and through Jesus Christ. And that is why we now have the wonderful freedom.

But it's not that, you know, some people say, do you mean to say that Old Testament Christians, that they were saved through the sacrifices? No, the sacrifices were pointing to what Jesus did.

And the Old Testament believers were saved in the very same way as Christians are saved. We're all saved in the same way. It's by looking to Jesus. They were looking to the Jesus who was to come.

[7 : 10] They were looking to the promises that were to come. That's why it says in the Old Testament, why Jesus said of Abraham way, way, way back before there was any, the tabernacle or anything.

He said, Abraham saw my day and rejoiced. So that Abraham had the faith to see and understood what God was saying, the promises that God had given that through him from the human side, that all the nations of the world would be blessed through the promised seed.

And Abraham saw that and he believed. So this is why at the very heart of the whole structure, there was this importance of meeting and coming to God's house.

I was coming back to what we're saying. David had said, I want to build. And it was a great idea. I want to build a really good temple for God. Because the tabernacle was a tent kind of thing.

You know, it was portable. You could put it up and take it down. But he wanted to build a good, beautiful structure. He says, I'm in a palace. Why should God's place just be a tent?

[8 : 18] And he, of course, started straight away to have this idea. But the prophet came to David and said, you know, your idea is a good idea.

This is the message from the Lord. Your idea is a good idea. But you're not going to build it because your hands are red with blood. David, as you remember, was very much a fighter through his life.

And the Lord said, your hands are too red with blood. But your son, who's going to be a man of peace, he will build it. And, of course, that was Solomon.

So, again, we have, and even the very place where it was to be built, God told David that it was going to be in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah.

Because that's where David had sacrificed. So, as we say, there was all this. And, of course, then when you come to the New Testament times, and you think of the synagogues that were built and where the word was read and taught, Jesus always attended the synagogue.

[9 : 25] And he himself taught in the synagogue. And the practice of the New Testament church was to meet together, just as we're doing and as people are doing all over the world today.

And we are told, even in Hebrews, not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But a building, what we have here, becomes a house of God when God is present with us. And wherever God's people meet together, whether it's two or three, or whether it's huge crowds of thousands, it doesn't matter whether it's just a gathering of two or three people, if they are there in the name of the Lord, if they've come to worship the Lord, if they're seeking the Lord and wanting to worship the Lord, Jesus has made that promise.

And he says, you know, where as few as even two or three are gathered together, he said, I'm there in the midst to bless. And it's a wonderful thing. And that is one of the great things about coming to God's house, is that we know that God is going to bless us, that he's going to be there.

Now, of course, when it says God is going to bless us, that doesn't always mean that God is going to make us feel good. Normally, it should.

[10:40] But sometimes, and I'm sure you're as aware as I am, sometimes when we come under God's word, God's spirit, and I'm digressing here, we've got to remember that there is no temple today.

We are, according to the scripture, the temple of God. Now, that the Holy Spirit, we're told that in letters, Paul's letters, that you are the temple of God. It's an amazing thought that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, comes to live within us.

And, of course, that's what causes the battle. We're told about that in Galatians, that there's this conflict, this head-on collision between the flesh and the spirit.

And the one is fighting against, and the one is lusting against. And so there's this collision. That's why the Apostle Paul said, you know, the good that I would, I do not. And the evil that I would not, that's what I do.

And I'm sure there are times you and I find that, that there's this collision. The Holy Spirit is guiding us always according to the truth. Our old rebellious nature is often in conflict against that, and is fighting against that.

[11:51] And so there are, we're riddled with all that, every single, whether you're a, it doesn't matter how old or how long you've been a Christian, you still have all that every other person has, every human being, all the potential to sin, all, it's all there.

And yet the Holy Spirit is working within us, pushing us and working and conforming us to the image of Christ all the time. So when we come to God's house, sometimes the Lord rebukes us.

I'm sure there are times you come in as I have, and it's maybe under the word, or under the singing, or in the reading of the word, or in the preaching, and something just bangs into you, and you really made aware of, maybe about your life, maybe even sometimes on a day like today, which is the last day of the year.

And sometimes, all of a sudden, there's things that brought to your mind, and you think to yourself, oh, there's things I need to change. There are things about me that need to be changed, about the way I live, about attitudes I have to people, about the way that I speak, the thoughts that I have, the habits that I have, that there are so many things that you know that are wrong, and God's Spirit, through His Word, convicts you of these things.

So that's sometimes one of the things that happens in God's Word, in God's house. But often, God reassures you of His love to you, of His care of you, that His promises become real to you.

[13:28] You open the Word, and there's that, it's like a nugget of gold, it's there, and you say, whoa, that'll do me, that's just, just what I need.

Because sometimes, you might be here, and you're thinking back over things you've done, and you say, you know, sometimes you think, the Lord's going to give up on me, you know, because I've just, I'm so slow to learn, I go back to the same sins over and over again.

One day, He's just going to say, that's it, I'm done. Then you come to, under the Word, and there the Lord reassures you again, I'll never leave you, He says, I will never forsake you. His commitment to you is 100%, not 99.9, it's 100% all the time.

And so when we come to God's house, it gives us an opportunity, not only that we come to hear what God has to say to us, but it gives us also an opportunity to speak to the Lord.

And of course, as you know, a lot of the speaking that we do to the Lord is silent. A lot of, because even as we go around in our day-to-day life, we talk to the Lord, talk quietly within our own heart.

[14:40] And again, that's a very biblical thing. We find that in the Word of God. And so often we're asking the Lord for help, for strength, for wisdom, for guidance, for protection.

Sometimes we go into situations and we're just not sure how to deal or cope with and we're saying, Lord, help me here. I really don't know what to do. I'm not too sure how to cope with this or handle this.

Help me, Lord, not to say the wrong things. Lord, forgive me. Sometimes when you go away from a situation, you say, oh, I got that one wrong. And sometimes you go away and you've said things and you realize you've said the wrong things.

And so often, we're asking, we're talking like that to the Lord often throughout the course of the day. And that's one of the things when we come to God's house, it gives us an opportunity of expressing our thanks to Him.

And again, when, again, at the end of a year, it's a time when we should stop and give God thanks for all that He has done for us throughout the course of the year.

[15:43] And although sometimes, and I know some of you here have sore hearts because of things that have happened within your life, still even in the pain, you're conscious of the way that God upholds and gives you an inner strength and an ability to keep going in the face of difficulty, in the face of sorrows, in the face of troubles.

And you're conscious that He has given you, even in sorrow, He's given you joy. And even in turmoil, He's given you peace. These are some of the strange things that happen the way that God works.

So, that's one of the great things. And so, we see here that the psalmist says that how we should come to God's house. And he says we should come with joy. I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of God.

Here is an opportunity to, as we said, to come to worship God. When we come to God's house, we should also have a desire that others would join with us.

Now, we know that there are loads of churches and our prayer is that people doesn't, we're not saying specifically that people have to join with us or down in Kenstead.

[16:54] Our desire is that people will go to God's house and that they will go to worship God and that they will hear what God the Lord will speak. And again, there should be a reverence in our heart when we go to God's house.

Now, that doesn't mean that there has to be a rigid formality, a sort of hypocritical, sort of pharisaical way about us. It shouldn't be at all.

There should be an ordinariness and a freeness, but always remembering who it is that we're coming to worship, that we're coming before the living and through God.

The God that they, we're told that the angels are the, that they veil their faces in his presence. We're told in Ecclesiastes, keep your foot when you go to the house of God.

In other words, there has to be an element of reverence as you approach the living and through God. We've also got to go to God's house prayerfully.

[17:55] And again, if we go to God's house and we never pray, we just go, we don't need to expect too much, although the Lord in his goodness may still give us.

But, you know, it's quite possible just to go in and to go out and never having had any communication with the Lord in any way. And we shouldn't be too surprised if we don't get too much if we come in prayerlessly.

But if we, we ought to come prayerfully that the Lord will speak to our hearts, that the Lord will give us something, that the Lord will give us our portion for the day.

That's what he's promised his people. Just like in the wilderness when God gave them the manna, he gave them enough for the day. And I've often said it, and I think it's the best illustration we can use.

Day by day, and when we come to God's house, very often it's nothing spectacular. It can be very ordinary. But as long as we get something to nourish our souls.

[19:02] It's like if you were to ask me, what did you have to eat over the last month? I couldn't tell you most of the things. I could tell you a couple of days.

I can remember Christmas Day and I'll tell you everything I ate because it was a special dinner. It was a feast. But I can't tell you what we had a week last Wednesday. I have no idea.

It was, glad my wife's not here. But anyway, the thing is, it did me good. It nourished me. It kept me going. It was what I needed.

But there are the feasts. And that's exactly what it's like when we come to God's house. There are times you can go away and people would say, what was that like?

I was alright. But you got enough. You got your portion. But there are other times you go and your soul is filled. It thrills. You're conscious.

[19 : 59] You're in the presence of the Lord. There's a power there. And you go away and your whole heart is stirred up. And you remember it. Not just next week but next month and next year.

And for years you'll say, I still remember that time. It was special. So we can never limit the Lord but we must always come prayerfully to God's house.

And then we find that in verses 3 and 4 that Jerusalem is the centre of everything. It's the centre of religious life. It's the centre of government.

And as we said earlier it was the place where David had taken this city from the Jebusites and he had made this his own capital. And it was of course it was the place where as we said where the temple was built in Solomon's reign.

And David of course had united the whole of Israel. There had been division. It had been tough times. As we say he was a warrior and there had been a lot of conflict in David's life.

[21 : 05] But towards the end of it he had brought everything together. together. And by the end when he was handing over there was a unity and there was a togetherness there was a security and there was a peace within the whole land.

And so it remained in Solomon's time for most of his reign until of course Solomon went astray quite a bit and division came in. And you know that's how it should be with the church.

There should be unity and there should be togetherness. Because what we've got to remember now when it talks of Jerusalem what we've got to remember here is that Jerusalem here of course was the physical the geographical Jerusalem just as there is the geographical Jerusalem today.

And it's very interesting that the name Jerusalem means foundations of peace. And at one level if we could say historically Jerusalem has been anything but the foundations of peace because it is very often at the very center of conflict even to this very day when Donald Trump has decided that he's going to put his embassy there and that Jerusalem is going to be the main place for him and straight away there's all this bubbling and boiling up.

So it's almost ironic to say that Jerusalem its name means foundations of peace but when we take it back to where David's time that is exactly what it was and that was what was God's intention for it.

[22 : 37] But when we look at Jerusalem today yes there is a Jerusalem and I believe we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem geographically the Jerusalem in Israel we should pray for the peace of it.

But Jerusalem is also spiritually the church and we know that there is one place where there is total peace in Jerusalem and that is the new Jerusalem which of course is in glory.

So that there are threads running right through the Bible and again we have to study the Bible to understand the way God has these threads running right through. But when we apply Jerusalem spiritually to the whole church then it is our duty to pray for that peace and that unity and security and togetherness.

we have a huge obligation towards everybody to be praying for the peace. What we have got to remember about the church is that the church is a body of Christ.

The church doesn't belong to us. It is not our church. We are in a particular denomination and in God's providence that is where we are. We have grown up in a particular denomination and I believe we should pray for the work of our own denomination.

[23 : 53] We should pray for the college the seminary and those who teach there. We should pray for all the efforts of outreach in rural areas and in our cities and so on. But when we pray for that and we support that prayerfully and financially that doesn't mean that we don't think of anybody else and we say oh well we are free church and that is it.

That is not how it is. We are part of the body of Christ. Same as every other denomination is part of the body of Christ. All who are united to Jesus all the different churches that worship the Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth are part of the body of Christ.

And so while there might be we might have different ways and such like with regard to a particular form of worship that doesn't mean that even although at one level we say well we do this differently to that there always has to be a respect there always has to be a love towards all the body of Christ.

It is our duty it is an obligation for every single believer worldwide to have a love and a care for one another because we belong to one another and we all belong to Jesus Christ.

Every believer in the whole wide world Jesus has given his life for and how dare our Christians say well I'm not going to love him or love her or love this or love that person there or here.

[25 : 24] Jesus says well I have I've loved them so much that I've given my life for them and it's an insult to the very name of Jesus for us to to act in that particular way.

So there is a huge obligation upon us that we are to pray pray for the peace of Jerusalem pray may they be secure who love you peace be within your walls and so that's one of the great obligations that we have.

You know one of the things that we pray is there's a huge emphasis in this psalm on praying for peace. Often today there's a I would almost say an unhealthy emphasis when people say how's your church or how are things in the church that people will say they instantly go and talk about numbers about the number who worship there.

And while it's encouraging to see congregations growing that's not the be all and the end all of everything. I believe the greatest blessing is to have a conscious sense of God's presence where God's people are growing where they're spiritually growing they're maturing they're developing where there is a sense of God's peace where there is a harmony and there's a unity with the people where you're conscious that God is in the midst.

And I believe these are blessings that you can't put a price on and that is showing a health within the congregation so that we're not specifically looking about numbers we should never be thinking how is a congregation doing by simply thinking oh it's because it's growing there's a lot of new people coming in thank the Lord for all new people who come in thank the Lord for every new face thank the Lord for every person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ but there's more to it than that and when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem it also means that we ourselves must be peacemakers because it's a bit hypocritical to be praying to the Lord and saying Lord may that may your peace fill the churches and at the same time be a person who's divisive and causing disagreements and causing divisions and not having a correct spirit within your heart that is that's almost like a mockery of a prayer for a person to be anything but a peacemaker and yet at the same time asking the

[28 : 08] Lord to bring peace when we pray about something or for something we should actually be seeking that what we're praying for is already part of our life and we're wanting more of it so when I pray for peace I also ask the Lord Lord help me to be a peacemaker peace is one of the great themes of God in fact it is who God is we're told that God is peace we're told that Jesus Christ the son of God is a prince of peace we know that the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within the heart the fruit of the spirit brings peace when the angel sang at the time of Jesus birth one of the things they said was peace on earth so you can see that peace is absolutely at the very heart of who God is and what God wants for his people and for his church and I'm sure that if you're like me one of the things that when I came to faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ it was one of the things that I was so conscious of was peace I remember people used to say to me what do you have since you became a Christian I wasn't very good at explaining things some things I can't tell you too much I'll tell you one thing I'll tell you one thing I have that I never had before I have peace and that doesn't mean that there are no times that you're never anxious of course I am and that there are times when you're in trouble of course we are we live in a world where things happen that cause anxiety and trouble but these things to a certain extent they're underneath there is a deep rooted peace that irrespective of what has come or whatever that is still there and that was one of the things that I could say to people well I have a peace that doesn't mean that I wasn't I remember before coming out Christian I was a very happy happy go lucky person and people will say oh you can't enjoy life unless you have the Lord well I have to say that I enjoyed life by and large but there was the one thing that I didn't have and then of course when I was brought when the Holy

Spirit came to work within me and brought to see my need and who I was before God then of course I was so troubled about my sin and things that I had never actually really seen before but as I say this one thing was peace and I believe that all the Lord's people can say well you know yeah there is that peace it is something that he gives us so our great prayer is that all of us here today will know God's peace within our own heart and that we will know and that we will pray for God's peace not only in our own church which we pray for but in all the churches that love the Lord Jesus

Christ and pray for that peace throughout our land and throughout the nations of this world that God's peace will be known and experienced throughout let us pray oh Lord our God we we pray today that we might know that peace the peace of God that passes all understanding we pray that you will bless us and enrich our lives in the knowledge of

Christ we ask oh Lord that you will do us good and that you will keep us along the way that you will bless us as one year moves into another with all spiritual and temporal blessings bless our homes and our families bless all whom we love and may your goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life protect us and keep us we pray and forgive us all our sin in Jesus name amen we pray and live ■ rightanders together and we'll see you as soon as we at ■ ing and we'll see you