

Gods Favourite Place in all the World

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn back to that psalm, the book of Psalms, chapter 87. I just want to share a few simple thoughts with you this evening about that psalm, Psalm 87.

As a church, we sing the psalms, and we sing them much better, I believe, the more we know what we are singing and the more we understand what we are singing.

And I hope that after this evening, as we look together at this psalm and what it means, that we'll be able to sing it with meaning and with understanding. And that, of course, applies to the whole Bible.

That's why we're here this evening, to grow in our understanding of God's Word. Psalm 87 is about a people and a place. It's a psalm of great joy.

If you want to have proof of this, you only have to read the psalms that precede this psalm and the ones that follow it.

[1 : 0 6] For example, the one that precedes is a psalm of great difficulty, where the person, David, he is crying out to God as someone who's poor and needy, pleading before the Lord, obviously in a time of great trouble.

It's the same with Psalm 88. O God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you. And there are times, of course, when we are so glad that these psalms are there and where they express so perfectly the way that we feel when we're going through these times of great trouble.

And yet in the middle of these psalms, there stands this psalm of inexpressible joy. It's a psalm of great elation and great celebration, particularly at the end.

But all the way through the psalm, it describes a joyful situation. And the gospel, of course, is the joy of the Lord. A person who comes to know Jesus Christ as a Savior and comes to discover the joy of the Lord, which is a unique joy.

We'll see that later on as we come to the close of the psalm. But this psalm is all about, let me put it this way, and I say this with all reverence and all respect to the Lord, this psalm is about God's favorite place in all the world.

[2 : 2 8] It's about God's favorite place in all the world. I say that in order to press home the teaching in the psalm, God's favorite place in all the world.

One of the benefits of living in today's world is ease of travel. I'm sure most of us know that in our own experience. You can get to most places within 24 hours. You can get around the world in two or three days if you want to.

And for a relatively small amount compared to what it used to be, you can get to pretty much any place that you want. That means that whereas a century ago it was only the privileged who could talk about the places they had been to nowadays, it's likely that many people have been to the same places as you have.

And so it very often becomes a topic of conversation where in all the world, not just in Scotland or in Britain, there's the best place you've been to. And everyone has their own places that they go back to as their favorite places.

And there are several reasons. There are many reasons why some place in the world, and you'll see what I'm talking about in a few moments' time, there are various reasons why a particular place might be your favorite.

[3 : 45] There could be scenery. There are places in the world with the most spectacular scenery. mountains and rivers and valleys and great, wonderful places. Or it could be that something memorable has happened to you there, the place where you met your wife or your husband, the place where something memorable happened.

And that place becomes the place in your diary, in your life, that has become your favorite, the place that dwells within your heart. Or it could be some kind of emotional belonging to that place.

You could feel that you're so tied to that place. I remember hearing about one particular gentleman from Braggar on the west side and who traveled all over the world and could have lived anywhere he wanted and chose always to come home to his craft in Braggar.

That's because simply he felt emotionally attached. I remember years and years ago being on the Harris Ferry with someone, and as soon as Scalpy came into view, that this person started crying because she felt so emotionally attached to this place she was from.

Her ancestors came from Scalpy and she was so emotionally attached that it got to her as soon as she saw the place. And so I'm sure that for most of us, whether it's near or whether it's far away, we have some place that we would call our favorite place in all the world.

[5 : 09] What is God's favorite place? That's what this psalm talks about. You wouldn't think that God would have a favorite place. And if you're only going to talk about geographical location, then of course he doesn't.

When the Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth, and when he looked at what he had created, he saw that it was all very good, the whole of his creation.

So from that perspective, you wouldn't imagine that God would have any favorite place. The whole earth describes and portrays the glory of God, and that extends even into the heavens.

God has been at the furthest star and the furthest galaxy in the universe. And it is all, it all speaks of the glory of God.

And yet, tonight, the Bible tells us that God has a favorite place. And just as you would want others to come back to the place that you believe is your favorite place, you want to share it with those you love, that's the reason God has this psalm written in the Bible for us, because he wants to take us to this one place he wants us to go to, and he wants us to know why it is his favorite place, and he wants us to understand the reason why he thinks so much of this one particular place.

[6 : 34] It's not a geographical location, and it's not known for its beauty. It's not like the Rockies. Many of us would choose to go to a mountain range or a rural setting rather than a city, but interestingly, this is a city.

The Lord describes, this psalm describes a city. And the Lord tells us the Lord loves the gates of this city. On the holy mountain stands the city he founded, and it tells us the Lord loves the gates of Zion.

In other words, you take all the places in the world, the most beautiful, spectacular places in the world, and the Lord, if the Lord was to take us to one place, here it is.

This is it. And it is Jerusalem. That's what it tells us. Zion was Jerusalem. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God.

Glorious things. I want us to think together this evening about the three reasons why God tells us this is his favorite place. I want us to think about, first of all, the glory of Zion.

[7 : 45] I want us to think about the gathering that the psalm describes later on. And I want us to think about the gladness that takes place amongst the people, amongst the residents, amongst the citizens, those who belong.

There's the glory of Zion, the glory of Jerusalem, the gathering that takes place in Jerusalem, and then lastly, there is the gladness of the people that are there.

These three things, then, just very briefly this evening. When God speaks about Jerusalem, he's not talking about the Jerusalem which exists today, a place which is disputed and divided, where there is war and tension, and where there is all kind of political turmoil, and where different people have different ideas about who belongs, which part belongs where.

That's not the Jerusalem that's spoken about in this psalm. It's not about whether the Jews have claimed to the city, or whether the Muslims have claimed to the city. I'm not going to use it in any way as some kind of political device.

That's not what it's there for. It's there to describe a spiritual reality. You see, this place is invisible to the naked eye.

[9 : 03] God is not talking about a place where we can go to in an airplane. He's talking about a place which is invisible. That didn't mean that it didn't at one time exist.

We know that the whole Bible is full of Jerusalem. We know how significant Jerusalem is as a historical place, starting with the Old Testament, from the time that David defeated Jerusalem from the Jebusites, and he took it over, and it became the city of David.

But it became more than that. It became the place, the town, where God would dwell in his glory, where his temple would be, and where his presence would be, and where people would gather to worship him, and where his name would be expressed and praised and glorified, and where the witness of his name would go all over the world.

It's also the place where the prophets went to speak of what God wanted the people to do, and to foretell and to see into the future, to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

Jerusalem was a place where the promise of God was remembered year after year. But it was also the place where finally the Lord Jesus came, into which the Lord Jesus came, and he preached, and he taught the people in the streets, in and around Jerusalem.

[10 : 29] And it was the place where the temple was, and in which Jesus said very clearly, and declared very clearly, that he was the temple, God in the midst of his people.

That was the message of the gospel. But it was the place where Jesus laid down his life. And that's today what I believe this psalm ultimately means, when it tells us glorious things of, you are spoken, O city of God.

Not just that David at the very beginning defeated the city. Not just that it became the place where Solomon built his temple. Not just the place where it became the capital of Israel.

But the most glorious, and remember when we describe something as glorious, when God says something as glorious, he's not talking about some kind of naturally beautiful place, like we do.

When God says something as glorious, he's describing something he has done. And out of everything that God has done, this stands at the center, that the Son of God himself in our nature, laid down his life on the cross at Calvary, in order to be a sacrifice, no, the sacrifice for our sin.

[11 : 51] The Lamb of God, willingly and voluntarily, entered into the pain, and the suffering, and the agony, and the desolation of the cross, in love for sinners, for wrongdoers like ourselves, guilty men and women, and boys and girls.

God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son, to die, to lay down his life, so that he could invite us to himself, to faith in Jesus, so that he would rise again, triumphant over the grave, and so that the invitation would freely go out, to you and to me tonight, to come to him, and to have, to possess the gift, that he alone can give us.

There is nothing in all the world, so glorious, as the man of sorrows, who laid down his life, as the Lamb of God, to forgive us, and to cleanse us, and to wash us, from our sins, glorious things, of you are spoken, O city, here it was, in this very geographical location, that the greatest event, in all of history took place, that the Son of God himself, in our nature, as a human being, as God and man, laid down his life, for our sins, and the glory of the gospel, is tonight, that he invites you, to come to know him, as his savior, as your savior rather, and as your Lord, so that's, that's the glory of Zion, then the glory, of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, but, but, Jerusalem went on, to symbolize, and this is where we believe, we understand, this psalm comes in, to symbolize, the people of God, wherever they are, in the world, in other words, the people of God, wherever they are, this evening, whether they're north, south, east, west, whether they're as far, away from each other, as it possibly, as they possibly can get, they are, they belong, this is where their, citizenship lies, and somehow or other,

God is taking us, to this place tonight, that only he, is able to see, it's not, a geographical location, but he wants us, to see the people, who belong, to his Jerusalem, Jerusalem, as it symbolizes, the entirety, of those, who have, come to know, Jesus, as their savior, and he wants us, to look at them, he wants us, to know them, he wants us, to see, what they're doing, and he wants us, to see the gladness, that is written, all over them, and he wants us, to be amongst them, he's asking us, tonight, are you amongst, those people, who are described, there, and so, we, we see, in the psalm, a second element, and that is, not just the glory, of Zion, but the, the gathering, of the people, of Zion, as far as God, is concerned, they're gathered, one day, they will be gathered, the Bible tells us, that one day, there will be, a new heaven, and a new earth, and there will be, a new Jerusalem, and that's what is meant, it's not a, physical, geographical, city, that's described, in Revelation chapter 22, it is, the entirety, the completion, of the gathering, of the people, of God, and right now,

God's people, are being gathered, God's people, are coming into, coming to faith, in Jesus, they're hearing the gospel, and they're coming to faith, in him, now let's look, at some of the things, that the psalm tells us, about, about those people, first of all, it tells us, that they are, culturally diverse, verse four, among those, who know me, I mention, Rahab, and Babylon, now Rahab, is not the Rahab, that's mentioned, in the Old Testament, Rahab, was another name, for Egypt, was just another name, that people used, for Egypt, so, you can substitute, Egypt, for Rahab there, I will mention, Egypt, and Babylon, behold, Philistia, and Tyre, with Cush, now, what's in common, with all these people, not just that they were, foreigners, and if there was ever, racism, by the way, it was found, in the Old Testament, for various reasons,

[16:39] Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Cush, what do these places, and what do these people, have in common, they were all, at one point, or another, hostile, to the people, of Jerusalem, and the people, of Israel, so, anybody reading this, Sam, would have been, utterly astonished, at what God is saying, or what the writer, is saying, what in the world, is going on, when God tells us, to come to Jerusalem, the last, kind of person, that you would find, happily living, as a citizen, of Jerusalem, was someone, from Egypt, or Babylon, or Philistia, or Tyre, with Cush, you might find them, there are slaves, you might find them, there as kind of, reluctant dwellers, but the Bible goes on, this Psalm goes on, and tells us, they were more than that, they were actually, citizens, of Jerusalem, they were born there, now, here's the greatest paradox, in the Psalm, because, on the one hand, they're from Rahab, they're from Egypt, and Babylon, and Philistia, and Tyre, and Cush, on the one hand, that's their ethnic identity, on the other hand,

God is saying, in his book, they were born, in Jerusalem, now what does that mean? it means simply this, that those people, in the fullness of time, as they hear the gospel, from all over the world, and tonight, the gospel is going, all over the world, the word of God, is being placed, into the hands of people, in all different languages, and people are preaching, the gospel, as I am doing, in churches, in Africa, and India, and Malaysia, and the southern hemisphere, and the northern hemisphere, all over the world, and people, who have never heard it before, are coming, to know Jesus, as their saviour, and do you know, what's happened to you, the Bible tells us, that when a person, comes to faith, in Jesus, that person, is born again, he's born, into, God's kingdom, as a citizen, of God's kingdom, the reason, I'm, I have a right, to be a citizen, of a passport, of the UK, is because,

I was born here, if I wasn't born here, I would have to, immigrate, into the, into the, the country, and I have to go through, all kinds of lengthy processes, in order, eventually, to get, a UK passport, if I was to go to America, it would take me years, to become a resident, alien, and then, eventually, to become, a UK, citizen, a US citizen, it's incredibly difficult, to become, a citizen, of a different country, but, as soon as a person, is born, he's automatically, a citizen, of that country, that's what God, is saying, about these people, they were, in one sense, their original birth, was in Philistia, and Tyre, and Egypt, and Babylon, that's their original, ethnic identity, but, and here's where, the but comes in, when it comes to, God's people, when a person, comes to faith, in Jesus, he's born again, and he becomes, a member, a citizen, of God's kingdom, that's what God, is saying, in this psalm, now, how does a person, what is the difference, between the people, who are, identified here, in this psalm, the people, who God is talking about, in this psalm, and every other person, in the world, because the whole world, is not in Jerusalem, here, there are many people, who are, who don't belong, to Jerusalem, what is the difference, how did, these people, from Egypt,

Babylon, Felicity, and Tyre, how did they, come to be born, how, what is the difference, between them, well the psalm, tells us, verse 4, among those, and there's only one, they didn't pay money, for their citizenship, they didn't bribe, the right authorities, they didn't go, through the process, there was one difference, they weren't, they didn't have, a perfectly clean, track record, many of these people, were lost, and broken, and at the very edge, of complete disaster, and destruction, many of these people, were, were, they were, at the fringes, of society, and yet, here they are, and they are, they are rejoicing, in the Lord, as citizens, of, Jerusalem, they are, loving, and rejoicing, in every moment, and here's the difference, among those, who, know, me, that's what it tells us, who know, me, that's what it means, to be a citizen, of God's kingdom, and his city, those, who don't know the Lord, are not citizens, of his city, those, who do know him, are citizens, citizens, of Jerusalem, it's as simple, as that, and the amazing thing, tonight is this, that you could have, walked in that door, as an outsider, to God's kingdom, and it is possible, for you to walk out, that door again, this evening, having been born again, the gospel, is as clear, and as simple, and as straightforward, as this, believe, on the Lord,

Jesus Christ, and you will, be saved, that's the promise, that God gives, to every person, who comes, in faith, believing, resting, trusting, following, Jesus, and him, alone, Jesus, is the one, who makes the difference, between someone, who's on the outside, and someone, who's on the inside, and a person, is invited, God is inviting, each one of us, this evening, wherever we come from, whatever we've done, who knows, maybe you're a visitor, here tonight, I don't know, why you're here, but God, in his providence, has brought you here, a time of holiday, and maybe, this is the exact psalm, maybe the very fact, that I found revelation, I was going to preach, on that this evening, revelation 17, so difficult, that I abandoned it, and came on to speaking, which perhaps, God is going to use, in some way, to drive home, his word, in a way, in which no other, passage of scripture, could be brought home to you, who knows, the way God works, so often,

[23 : 22] I've seen it, so many times, in which you are able, to see, that this is something, that you need, more than anything else, in all the world, you need, to be part of this kingdom, you need, to know God, you need to, love God, and you need to, be changed by him, and only God, can change your heart, don't give up on this, you may have, given up on yourself, long time ago, you may have, written yourself off, but, God never writes, anyone off, no one is beyond, God's, power to save, and to completely, transform, God is able to do, in us and for us, the Bible says, more than we can ask, or even think, and I pray that tonight, he will do that, even through, through these words, that we are, thinking about, and so, all of these people, were, had this one thing in common, they were born, and they knew, the Lord, perfectly, they knew the Lord, personally, and there was this, wonderful gathering, and the second thing, that the second thing, that the Psalm tells me, about this gathering, is that, not only they know God, but God knows them, in fact, the Bible tells us, that God knew us, before we even knew ourselves, before we were even born, before we had any, what they call today, self-awareness, before we were even, thought about, by our parents,

God knew us, isn't that, one of the most, remarkable truths, of the providence of God, of the power of God, that, that, however, far back you go in time, even before there was, such a thing as time, and it's impossible for us, to even imagine, what it might be like, where there is no time, but God was there, and he knew, every single one of us, knew what we would look like, what would be in our hearts, he would know our identity, he knew us, before even the world, was the Bible says, and, what this psalm tells us, what this passage tells us, is that, he registers, the people, verse six, the Lord, records, as he registers, the people, and we get this, marvelous picture, of, of how familiar, how intimately, familiar, God is, with every single person, now the prime minister, of Britain, doesn't know me, if I saw him in the street, he wouldn't know,

I wouldn't know who he was, he wouldn't know who I was, and, probably the same is true, for most of us here tonight, maybe it's not true, for some of you, but it's, and, and, it's, that's, that's just a way of it, isn't it, because there are millions, there are 55 million people, in the world, in Britain rather, and, of course, the prime minister, is not going to know everyone, but God knows, and even if he did know, it would be only by way, of a passing, oh yes, I met you once, at some function, or some council meeting, or whatever, it would be just, a passing acquaintance, but the marvelous, truth in this psalm, is that, when it tells us, that God registers, it's not just some kind of, formal, cold registration, registration, but God, clocks us, God has a photograph, not only, a photograph, but a, a day by day, moment by moment, running knowledge, of where we are, who we are, what we're doing,

God is intimately, and ultimately, concerned, for every single one of us, you know, that, you know how, CCTV, has transformed, our world, and our cities, it's made our cities, somewhat safer places, doesn't take away, all the danger, and all the violence, but it has made them, incredibly safer, than they were before, and of course, that's because, somewhere in an office, is looking at, 40 different TV screens, and they can see, everything that's happening, and the police can get to know, who the troublemakers are, and they can register, who they are, and so, it's impossible, it's getting more, more impossible, especially, if you're out for trouble, it's almost impossible, to do that, because, your infamy, your notoriety, becomes clocked, your photograph is taken, and you, they know who you are, and some people think, that that's a very, intimidating feature, of our world, I can't go anywhere, without being watched, by someone, everybody knows, people know, where I am, and there is a concern,

I know that, from the perspective, of the person, who wants to have liberty, and freedom, to do what they want, and to live with them, but from the perspective, of those who want, to live safely, in the streets, and they tell us, well, if you don't cause, any trouble, nobody will know, who you are, because there won't be, any reason, for anybody, to know, who you are, but the Lord, knows, every one, of his people, every single one, and it's not just, that he recognizes, our faces, but that he, has promised, it's not just, that he watches us, from afar, but he registers, his people, with love, and with affection, and every person, he registers, he actually, enters into that person, in the person, of the Holy Spirit, never to leave him, never to leave her, from day one, as he makes his way, or she makes his way, through this world, he registers, the people, one by one, as these people, the picture is, as they, as they are born, as they are born again, as they become citizens, of that place, they become known, to the king, loved by the king, and the king, has a continuous concern, and ongoing love, for them, the Lord records, as he registers, the people, you know, when a person is born, the first thing, you have to do, when a baby is born, is that the parents, have to go to the registry office, and it's illegal, for you not to register, that's how important, it is for government, to know exactly, who is where, and where they were born, and all the rest, the same with deaths, and same with marriages, it's illegal, for a pair, for two people, to be married, and for them not, to register, the marriage, with the registry office, a very important, function of society, and you know, it's done by, by some, an official somewhere, a registrar, in other words, the government have, the government have, delegated that responsibility, no matter how important, it is, they've delegated it, to, the registry office, so becomes the registrar's job, to record births, deaths, and marriages, but here in the psalm,

[30 : 14] God himself does it, he's not content, to delegate it, to someone else, he takes a personal interest, in who his people are, and his people, and that means that, that means that, he goes with us, everywhere, a person who knows the Lord, those who know me, are accompanied by God, so when we face, whatever we face in this world, God doesn't promise us, an easy life, he doesn't promise immunity, to sadness, and sorrow, and pain, and sickness, there are times, in the life, lives of God's people, where they have to go through, exactly the same trials, as others, in this world, and it's important, that they do, but God promises, one thing, that we're able to face it, face these things, with him, we're not alone, at any point, in our Christian lives, we face them, with him, I will be with you, never to leave you, and never to forsake you, but then the last thing,

I want us to see in the psalm, as we close, is the gladness, this psalm, is a psalm, of great joy, it's a gladness, which the Bible calls, in another place, the joy of the Lord, the apostle calls it, an indescribable joy, and full, of glory, what is this joy, it's a joy, that you can only have, I suppose, it's true to say, that every human being, seeks his own happiness, that's what, ultimately, we look for, in this world, isn't it, and for most people, they look for happiness, by, trying to get, a little bit more money, trying to better themselves, in this world, trying to achieve, their dreams, and their ambitions, and what they hope for, in this world, and make of life, what they can, and try to, be, try to progress, and succeed, in whatever way, they can, for their own happiness, but the Bible tells us, that ultimately, we'll never find it, yes, you can, you can achieve, all that you want to, in this world, yes, you can do that, but the Bible tells us, that real happiness, is only found, when a person, comes to know,

God, personally, and that's because, we were made, for God, we were created, in order to, enjoy God, and the fact, that you don't, enjoy God tonight, is, the symptom, the greatest, of all symptoms, that you are, a fallen person, a person, that's separated, from God, and God, can restore that, he can restore, you, to what he wants you, to be, and to what you, were created for, and this happiness, is not, dependent, on daily circumstances, not dependent, on whether things, go well for me, or not, it's a joy, and a gladness, that we find, in Jesus, who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, I'm not saying, that there aren't days, in the life of a Christian, when, when things go wrong, and when he suffers, the same way, as other people suffer, the losses, the sicknesses, the disappointment, that other people suffer, of course there are, and yet, there's one thing, you can't take away, from a person, who knows the Lord, and that is, the joy, of the, sometimes it becomes, clouded,

I know, sometimes it becomes, quite obscure, I know, and yet, even when it does, the child of God, is able to, to, and perhaps, this is the link, between Psalm 86, 87, and 88, he's able to cry, to the Lord, and know, that the Lord, is hearing him, and he's able, to restore him, to him, that joy, that he once knew, in the Lord, and he's able, to bring him, to see, and to rediscover, fresh, again and again, the gladness, that is found, only in knowing God, and the way, that the Apostle Paul, expressed this, was that, the way, that the Apostle Paul, at the moment, in the Gaelic services, we're going through, in the morning, Romans chapter 8, and we've been seeing, over the past few weeks, how the Apostle, he approaches, the whole area, of human suffering, and suffering, amongst Christians, and this is what, the Apostle says, the sufferings, of this present time, are not worthy, to be compared, with the glory, that will follow, and that's, the great promise, and the certainty, that stands, in front of me, and you tonight, if we know the Lord, that the certainty, of what God, has prepared, for his people, so there's glory, in Zion, there's a gathering, in Zion, and there is gladness, in Zion, and I hope, we can go out tonight, just like Nehemiah, sent the people, in Jerusalem, out, after they worship, the Lord, and say, go your way, for the joy, of the Lord, is your strength, may it be so, let's pray,

Father in heaven, we give thanks, for the knowledge, that you have, of your people, we give thanks, oh Lord, that when we call, to you, you recognize, our voice, and you know, our needs, before we ask, you are more willing, to give, than we are, to ask, you know, even more, than we ask, you know, what is, in front of us, what is behind us, what is within us, and you have, a concern, that we still, do not appreciate, a love for us, that we have, never grasped, and we pray, Lord, to grow, in our awareness, of your great love, for your people, our Father, bless your word, to us this evening, may we know, each one of us, the joy, of the Lord, and if again, if there is anyone, here this evening, who has not yet, experienced, the new life, that Jesus, can give to us, may they come to you, in their own hearts, and may they put their trust, completely, and uniquely, in Jesus, for we ask in his name,

[36 : 46] Amen.