

# Psalm 48

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[ 0 : 00 ] On the night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus said, Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.

Ancient words, changing you, changing me. That is what the ministry of the word is supposed to do. It is supposed to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

And that is my earnest hope and prayer this evening as we consider together Psalm 48. If you don't have a Bible, I think that there is a pew Bible somewhere near you, and I would like to begin by reading this psalm.

Psalm 48. Hear then what Scripture says. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the great king.

[ 1 : 19 ] God is in her citadels. He has shown himself to be her fortress. When the kings joined together, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astounded.

They fled in terror. Trembling seas them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish, shattered by an east wind.

As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God. God makes her secure forever. Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Mount Zion rejoices.

The villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. Walk about Zion. Go around her. Count her towers.

[ 2 : 26 ] Consider well her ramparts. View her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God forever and ever.

He will be our guide even to the end. This is the word of the Lord. Here in the United States, our form of government is not monarchy.

We are a republic. The last king to rule over us, George III, is, by and large, not held in very good odor in our history books.

Moreover, today, when we look out across the world to find a representative of monarchical government, I suppose that for many of us, the first exemplar that comes to mind is the United Kingdom, the House of Windsor, Queen Elizabeth II.

But, of course, this is a constitutional monarchy. We may appreciate all the pageantry and the castles and the thousand-year-old traditions and so forth, but at the end of the day, it's a constitutional monarchy, not an absolute monarchy.

[ 3 : 48 ] Bless her heart, Queen Elizabeth II doesn't have much clout. She can, if she wishes, dissolve parliament, but if she does so without being asked to do so by the prime minister, she's in big trouble.

She can, if she wishes to, refuse to sign some piece of legislation into action. One monarch did it in this century, whereupon a government was called afresh by election, the legislation was repassed and the monarch signed it.

There is not a lot of clout there. When we reflect on absolute monarchies and begin to look around the world for an example, perhaps we might think of Saudi Arabia.

There is an absolute monarchy. On the other hand, we may then reflect on the words of Lord Acton. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, which is one of the reasons why most of us treasure a form of government in which there are competing branches, each trying to limit the other in some way.

In short, precisely because we believe in the pervasive power of sin, we don't want to give anybody too much clout. Sooner or later, they'll go corrupt on us.

[ 5 : 09 ] So we want some form of government in which we can turf the blighters out every few years, just as a matter of principle. This, then, is the political and cultural matrix in which we think and live.

Yet when we open our Bibles, we read that God is the great king. That his capital city is the city of the great king.

That's the language explicitly of verse 2. Mount Zion, the city of the great king. Moreover, when Jesus came preaching, he did not proclaim the republic of God.

He came proclaiming the kingdom of God. He did not come proclaiming the democracy of God. He came proclaiming the kingdom of God. And God's kingdom is no constitutional monarchy.

It is absolute. This does not mean, of course, that in our fallen and broken world, the safest government that we may devise may not be democratic and representative.

[ 6 : 22 ] It does mean that we must make a serious, conscious effort of imagination to think about an absolute kingdom in a positive sense because of all of our history and our associations and our political vocabulary and the like is against us.

Our hope turns on the fact that this king is not only absolutely sovereign, but absolutely good. he is never corrupted.

He is never corruptible. And because he is absolute king and absolutely sovereign and absolutely good, he is absolutely trustworthy.

This psalm insists that all of our security and all of our witness hinge on these truths. Psalm 48 tells us that there is security in the presence of the great king.

The psalm begins by portraying first the city of the great king, verses 1 to 3. The city, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, these are synonyms for the hill, the city, in which the Lord met with his people.

[ 7 : 50 ] Great is the Lord, most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, that city of the great king.

God is in her citadels. He has shown himself to be her fortress. At one level, of course, these verses simply contemplate the earthly Jerusalem. Jerusalem. If you have been there, you know that the heart of the city is on a mountain.

You can approach the city from several angles, and you see the city rising before you as you approach. And if instead you're across the Kidron Valley, and up on the Mount of Olives, you look across the valley, and there is the city in all its magnificent beauty.

city. And in the days in which the psalmist wrote, there were walls around the city with vast ramparts. It was a citadel city, and it had withstood many a storm and battle.

Even the little expression heights of Zaphon, it is a traditional expression in Israel and amongst her neighbors as well, to mark the greatness of a capital city, well situated.

[ 9 : 07 ] Verse 3, God is in her citadels, he has shown himself to be her fortress. Undoubtedly, the writers are thinking back to times when God did spare the city from horrible attack.

The Assyrians came in and took over the north. The northern kingdom was destroyed about 721. And then the Assyrians came south, and they took over town after town after town, but they were stopped at Jerusalem.

God is in the midst of her. She will not be moved. Yet, at another level, these verses, even while they talk about Jerusalem as the city of the great king, point beyond historic Jerusalem in at least three ways.

Number one, Zion is indeed the city of the great king. But there is even more emphasis on the great king himself than on the city.

Yes, it's true that these verses, one to three, focus on the great city. But how does the psalm begin? Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

[ 10 : 21 ] Or verse two, at the end, this is the city of the great king. God is in her citadels, verse three. He has shown himself to be her fortress. In other words, what makes Jerusalem secure is not its ramparts or its location, but the great king himself.

That is a lesson that the nation had to learn many times. It is a lesson that every nation learns sooner or later. You can build a thousand-year Reich, if you like, but if God says it will be destroyed in twelve years, it will be destroyed in twelve years.

We may think of ourselves as the remaining superpower, but if God casts us down in our arrogance, the seventh fleet is not going to help.

The Marine Corps won't be enough. God raises up nations and puts them down. He has many ways of doing so. So, God's love.

And then, moreover, not only is the language more about God than about the city, but the language of these verses points beyond the historic Jerusalem. Look at verse two. Jerusalem is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth.

[11:48] Now, you can just barely, if you wish, translate that, the joy of the whole land, but I don't think that'll do. After all, by the time you get down to verse 10, we're told, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.

Now, whenever this psalm was written, Jerusalem wasn't known about around the whole world. It was certainly not the whole earth's joy. This psalm is reaching beyond the historic Jerusalem to pull in an expectation that goes way beyond anything that these believers experienced.

In fact, it is reminiscent of language from the prophecy of Isaiah. Do you remember the great passage in Isaiah 2? In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains.

It will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his way so that we may walk in his path. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations. He will settle disputes for many peoples.

[12:57] They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Now, there is a vision of Jerusalem that was certainly not experienced in the 10th century, or the 7th century, or the 6th century, or the 3rd century, or the 1st century, or God help us the 20th century, or the 21st.

This is a vision that points way beyond ourselves yet. But there is another sense in which this passage points beyond itself.

Historic Jerusalem is on a trajectory of biblical revelation. It is part of a developing storyline that unpacks in Scripture, and it is very important to find out where you are on that storyline at any given point in Scripture's narrative.

Remember how Jerusalem came to be the capital city of the Jews. Originally, the tribes settled in the land, and they were independent.

[14:07] moreover, they cycled down in spirals of rebellion and evil. They took on pagan habits at will, until finally they were oppressed by various peoples, and then God had mercy upon them.

They cried for some deliverance, and God would raise up a hero, a judge, a Deborah, or a Gideon, and then they would be freed once again. The spiral would go down again and again.

Read it, but in the book of Judges, the spiral got worse and worse and worse, and until you come to the last three chapters of the book of Judges, and even the so-called good guys are so disgustingly immoral, you can scarcely read the passage in public.

It's revolting. And repeatedly we hear the refrain, in those days, everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

There was no king in Israel. Oh God, how we need a king. But when they first got a king, they got a king for all the wrong reasons.

[15:10] They wanted a king not so that they could be governed righteously, but so that they could be like the surrounding nations. They thought this would make them more militarily secure. We all know what happened to King Saul.

Started off so well, so heroic, so tall, so strong, and ended up corrupt, because you see, Lord Acton is right. All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But God, in his mercy, raised up another king, a man after his own heart, good King David.

Mind you, King David ended up with adultery and murder. One wonders what he would have done if he hadn't been a man of God's own heart. Nevertheless, this was the beginning of the Davidic dynasty, and eventually, though he began reigning in the south, eventually, after seven years at Hebron, he became the king of the entire twelve tribes, took Jerusalem, and Jerusalem became the

capital city of God's covenant community.

And his son then built the temple there, Solomon. So here is the capital city of God's covenant people. This is where God's representative, his vice-regent, his king lives.

This is where the temple is as well. We'll come to that reference in a moment. This psalm brings king and temple together, as we shall see. But after two generations, there is so much perversion and stupidity in the dynasty that the ten tribes break away.

[16:43] And now the dynasty continues, staggering on from crisis to crisis with short periods of revival and reprieve for about three and a half more centuries, until eventually, of course, verse 586, it comes to an end.

Nebuchadnezzar takes over. The Babylonians win. Before that happens, there is Jeremiah the prophet in Jerusalem warning the people not to rebel.

There is Ezekiel with the first round of exiles out by the Kebar River. And he has this immense vision in Ezekiel 8, 9, 10, and 11. And in this vision, he is himself transported 700 miles to Jerusalem where he sees horrible idolatry in the vision.

And then he sees the glory of God that is over the temple, that has always been over the temple, that is confronted by the high priest when he enters the most holy place once a year on the day of atonement, Yom Kippur, with the blood of bull and goats to atone for his own sin and for the sin of his people.

He sees this glory of God now leave the temple and move to a mobile throne. And this mobile throne leaves the city, crosses the Kidron Valley, goes up to the Mount of Olives and parks.

[18:01] What's the significance of this vision? The significance of this vision is that God has abandoned Jerusalem. That means the city is going to fall.

From the point of view of the exiles in the Kebar River, this is shocking. They believe that God has established himself there. He has established his king there. He has established his temple there. His glory manifests himself there. And if Jerusalem falls, they don't have a home to return to. Does it mean that the entire covenant God's promises are not strong after all?

Maybe this God is not as strong as the gods of the Babylonians? It is unthinkable that Jerusalem should fall. But here is Jerusalem, according to the vision of Ezekiel, four and a half years before Jerusalem actually does fall, picturing the glory of God abandoning the city.

Which is a way of saying, of course, that when the city does fall, it's not because Nebuchadnezzar is too strong, but because God has exercised his judicial judgment and the city will capsize.

[19:15] This is God's doing. And at the end of the vision, in Ezekiel chapter 11, God then says to the exiles by the Ka-bar river through the prophet Ezekiel, he says, you're my people and I will be a sanctuary to you.

Did you hear that? The real sanctuary is not the masonry in Jerusalem. The real sanctuary is not Jerusalem itself. The real sanctuary is not Mount Zion.

The real sanctuary, I will be a sanctuary to you. And when in the passage of time the exiles began to return and another temple was built, there is no mention of the glory of God returning.

None. But in the streets of Jerusalem, six centuries later, a man by the name of Jesus stood up and said, destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days.

The disciples were told in John 2, didn't have a clue what he was talking about. This was all too enigmatic by half. But nevertheless, after the resurrection, they understood he was talking about himself as the ultimate temple of God.

[20:33] The temple, you see, was the meeting place between God and his people. So this building is not a temple. It's just a building. There's nothing sacrosanct about this building.

The ultimate temple in the New Testament is Christ himself. Or it's the church which he himself builds, his own very body. And then the language continues along these lines until you come to the final vision of all in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 21 and 22. And there the seer says, I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and earth passed away.

There was no more sea, which is not a comment on the hydraulics of the new situation. The sea is a constant symbolism for chaos and loss and destruction and death and instability. There was no more sea.

And then changing the metaphor, he says, I saw a new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. And then as the chapter unpacks, it's described in highly metaphorical terms.

[ 21 : 38 ] It's built like a cube. 1,400 miles on edge. Now that's a whopping big city. Have you ever seen a city that's built like a cube? 1,400 miles on edge.

You know why it's built like a cube? There's only one cube in the Old Testament. Just one. Just one. It's the most holy place.

This is a way of saying that all the people of God are now forever, always in the most holy place.

They're always with God. They don't need a mediating high priest.

They're already there. That's why the seer goes on to say, I saw no temple in that city. For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

Do you see? We sometimes so focus on the relative peripheries of the descriptions of heaven that we miss the point. I travel quite a bit, usually by air, but every once in a while I'm speaking in some church within driving distance.

[ 22 : 47 ] And then I have rather painfully eclectic musical tastes. It might be something classical or it might be a string quartet or it might be some contemporary music or it might be some folk, just painfully diverse.

And not too long ago I was traveling somewhere or other and I put in, I put in the ballads of a singer who's no longer very well known, but I like his gravelly voice and I listened to him.

Eventually he sang a song of Cape Breton. I'm a Canadian by birth. I'm partial to songs about Cape Breton. The last verse said, if my life could end perfectly, I know how I want it to be.

God's gift of heaven would be made up of three. My love, Cape Breton, and me. And I thought to myself, my dear friend, you've just described hell.

Because you see, he and his wife would doubtless breed like rabbits. Another whole generation of sinners to contaminate all of Cape Breton and everything else they touched. This isn't heaven.

[ 24 : 07 ] Heaven, first of all, is the city of the great king. It is the place where God is. It is the place where we are in the presence of God forever and so transformed because of it that there's no more death or sin or anything that pollutes or decay.

Nothing like that. We are forever with God. Now he wants God's gift of heaven to be made up of three. Guess which one is missing? Again, more selfishness, more idolatry, more self-focus.

It's a new route to hell. That's all it is. Now this is part of the biblical trajectory. Merely, lightly sketched in of what Jerusalem and the temple mean to Bible readers who are following the Bible storyline.

Did you see? And in this connection then, Jerusalem as the city of the great king, it is the place where God meets with his people. Here indeed is the city of the great king.

He meets with us today as well in his body. And ultimately he will meet with us in the perfection of a transformed universe. God discloses himself in the city of the great king.

[ 25 : 18 ] Second, the conquests of the great king. Verses 4 to 8. The city of the great king. Verses 1 to 3. The conquests of the great king.

Verses 4 to 8. When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astounded. They fled in terror. That is, once they saw the city of Jerusalem in this vision of things, they thought, oh, we can't manage this one.

So they scattered. Trembling sees them there. Pain like that of a woman in labor. You destroyed them like ships of Tashish scattered by an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen.

In the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God, God makes her secure forever. You see, once again, the text makes adequate sense at the narrowly historical level.

There were times when God did, in fact, spare his people in spectacular ways. When Shalmaneser engineered the attack on the city, eventually 200,000 foreign troops died by some horrible plague that swept through the camps.

[ 26 : 24 ] God arranged for that. Wasn't the troops inside the city were so strong or that its defenses were so brilliant or that its engines of war were so triumphant. God did it. God was the defense of the city.

And this happened repeatedly in the annals of the city's history. It makes sense. When the kings joined forces together, eventually some of them were just astounded and fled in terror.

Trembling sees them and they disappeared into the bush and returned to their own home and the city was spared. Yet at another level, more things can be said.

First, the picture of the triumph here is just too perfect for the merely historical arena. After all, some of these kings didn't flee.

Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't flee. He brought up a vast army of Babylonians, besieged the city, and the city fell. The whole city was put to the torch.

[ 27 : 31 ] The temple was destroyed. The royal family was taken out. And all the sons of the king were killed before the king's eyes. And then the king's eyes were put out so that the last thing he saw was the execution of his own sons.

This was not a case where the enemy king trembled before the city. Oh, no. And even in Assyrian times, when the kings first approached, reported, for example, in Isaiah 10.

Then they are saying, is not Jerusalem like Calno? Isn't it like Carchemish? Hey, we've already knocked off Carchemish. It's no better than Tyre. We've taken over that one.

Why does Jerusalem think it's so hot? We'll take this one, too. Now, in fact, they didn't at that time. But all of these kings did not approach the city trembling like leaves, frightened as soon as they see the ramparts, the good grief, time to go home.

That's not what happened historically. The language is too extravagantly perfect. Even this reference to great ocean-going vessels of Tarshish, Spain, the other end of the Mediterranean.

[ 28 : 45 ] Chattered by an east wind. That becomes the model for the way these people are destroyed. This might just be a metaphor, like our expression, oh, the armies were sunk without a trace.

It might mean something no more than that. But on the other hand, the analogy of a great maritime disaster is a bit strange for a city as landlocked as Jerusalem. Moreover, readers of the Psalms know that Jerusalem did fall.

It fell. It fell. It fell. It fell. It fell. In 586. And readers of the New Testament know that Jerusalem fell again.

in A.D. A.D. 70. At the end of a three-year siege in which, by the end, mothers were eating their babies when their babies died.

You can read the historic accounts of eyewitnesses and the records of Josephus. Oh, the city fell. All right. No, no, no, no.

[ 29 : 51 ] The key to all of this, again, is to recognize that in these verses, once again, the real hope is God himself and God alone.

Historically, you destroy them like ships of Tarshish scattered by the east wind. Verse 8, as we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord, God Almighty, in the city of our God, God makes her secure.

Forever. If God makes us secure, we stand. If God does not make us secure, we do not.

There are many ways of saying this sort of thing in the Bible, aren't there? So we read, unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor, labor in vain.

Unless the Lord guards the city, the city will fall. Extrapolate it, brothers and sisters. Unless God guards your life, you will be a mess.

[ 31 : 00 ] unless God guards our church, it will be split and divided. Or it will be seduced by passing winds of error.

We'd better resolve once and for all that our security is in God alone. Once and for all? No, not once and for all. Once and for all and again and again and again and again because security belongs to the Lord.

This does not mean that there are no means. It doesn't mean that David did not prepare for defense of his people. It does not mean that there is not to be wisdom in the church and church discipline and right teaching and confrontation where there is error and encouragement and even church discipline.

But it does mean that mere means, mere organization, mere wisdom, mere preaching without the peculiar blessing and security that only God can give is not trustworthy.

It's not big enough. It's not strong enough. Still, that is no reason to fear.

[ 32 : 22 ] It's reason to exalt. When God says to that exiled community in Ezekiel chapter 11, now feeling completely abandoned, alienated, because God seems to have written them off, the city will fall, they have no home to which to return.

I will be a sanctuary for you. Is that not enough? I will be a sanctuary for you. And in the New Testament, after all, God encourages us through the writings of the Apostle Paul to recognize that we belong to the Jerusalem that is from above.

Not the historic Jerusalem on the ground. The Jerusalem, he says, that is above. the community of God, the residents of the great king.

We are gathered before Mount Zion in the heavens, according to Hebrews chapter 12. We look for an eternal city with foundations that are immovable. That's the vision of Hebrews, finally culminating in Revelation 21 and 22.

And to put this in other terms, we recognize such texts as these. Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[ 33 : 40 ] There is our security. He says to the individual believer, if I have begun a good work in you, I will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ. He says, writing to the Philippians in the first chapter, there is our security.

We find the Lord Jesus himself saying, no one shall pluck him out of my hand. There is our security. Or we find the kind of golden chain that characterizes Paul's logic in Romans chapter 28.

The golden chain that ties people so closely together. For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son, that we might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called. And those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified. That's our security. It is the act and work of God determined from eternity. There is security. None of this means that there are not confrontations and historic discouragements and setbacks and individual hurts.

[ 34 : 44 ] Just as in ancient Israel, Jerusalem had to face these kinds of things in a fallen and broken world, so also in the church today, there will be martyrs.

There will be failures. All you have to do is read the New Testament to see that. Do you realize that in the last 130 years, there have been more martyrs in the Christian church than since the very beginning of the church's history?

Not fewer than 2 million martyrs in the last 15 years or so in the southern Sudan. Now about 9,000 in the islands of Indonesia in the last three years.

Sporadic persecution of pastors in Iran. The best estimates is that there are currently about 3,000 pastors in jail in China. Should we talk about some of the Bush people in Thailand?

Some people don't get jobs. I was in Hungary this summer and met the Lutheran bishop of Lithuania. He had been arrested by the KGB during that regime 600 times.

[ 36 : 14 ] He couldn't remember how many with torture. Oh, there will be suffering. There will be losses. There will be failures. There will be a Paul confronting a Peter over matters of serious doctrine that the church has to face.

There will be putative members which have to be disciplined. In Paul's riffing language handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

But at the end of the day we hear the words of the Master I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. I don't know most of you but some of you have been pastors for a long time.

Some of you are pastors in really difficult circumstances. Some of you I know even in a small group like this are so discouraged that there are times when nobody is looking at you in your study you have a good cry.

[ 37 : 27 ] I know I've been there. And you know what?

Although you must work hard you must learn to be a good worker knowing how rightly to divide the word of truth loving people you must pray you must intercede you must serve you must grow yes that's all true but at the end of the day your confidence is not on the cleverness of your personality or the multiplied degrees you have earned your charm and wit your oratorical skills still less your handsome mug nope I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it so we learn to intercede with God the way Moses interceded with God this is your people Lord not mine you do something with it and there is perfect security which will finally be exemplified in spectacular unqualified way when all of God's people men and women drawn from every tongue and tribe and people and nation are gathered around the throne on the last day and worship him who is on the throne and the lamb there is our security here then are the conquests of the great king then verses 9 to 11 the renown of the great king within your temple oh God we meditate on your unfailing love like your name oh God your praise reaches to the ends of the earth your right hand is filled with righteousness

Mount Zion rejoices the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments the renown of the great king three things about this renown first this renown starts with the temple and focuses on the love of God did you see that in verse 9 within your temple oh God we meditate on your unfailing love I imagine you can meditate on a lot of things in the temple you could meditate on the sheer glory of God remembering perhaps the great vision that was given to Isaiah recorded on Isaiah chapter 6 in the year that king Uzziah died I saw the lord high and lifted up the veil was torn asunder and even the robe even the hem of the robe of his garment filled the whole temple it was filled with smoke and the set of theme cried again and again holy holy holy is the lord god almighty there are fit judgments for meditation are they not but what the psalmist here says is in your temple I meditate on your love for the temple was supremely the meeting place between this holy god and his erring rebellious covenant community this was the place of sacrifice this was the place of mediation this was the place of priestly intercession and all of these themes come together in one who is himself the lamb of god and the temple and the priest the great meeting place of Jesus himself who insisted that he is the ultimate temple within your temple oh lord we meditate on your love for if it were not for the temple and all to which it pointed in the great mediator the great priest the great sacrifice that we would not have access to god in this life or in the life to come we meditate on your love oh god brothers and sisters in Christ I have yet to meet a mature Christian growing in depth and stability grace strength perseverance who is not increasingly overwhelmed at the majestic profundity of the love of God Paul understands that when he writes to the Ephesians doesn't he I pray he said that out of God's great power you who have been rooted and established in love may join together with the entire church and grasp how long and wide and high and deep is the love of God in Christ Jesus and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with the measure of the fullness of God that's a Pauline way of saying that you may be as mature as you ought to be the point is you're not going to be mature unless you do grow in such grasp so that even in the Old Testament the psalmist is busy saying in your temple we meditate on your love how much less excuse do we have living this side of the glory of God disclosed in Christ Jesus on the cross in your temple in the abode in which you live in the church of Jesus Christ in the manifestation of your great purposes in redemptive history we meditate lord God on your love sooner or later you will get kicked in the teeth sooner or later you will either bereave someone or be bereaved those are the only two options until the Lord returns sooner or later you will suffer if you live long enough cancer or something else this is a fallen and broken world and what will be the anchor for your soul then will the display of God's love be convincing to you only if you're having a good hair day is it how happy you are today that convinces you that God loves you or is God's love convincing to you because what of what God has done in in real history on a little hill outside Jerusalem in your temple oh God we meditate on your love you don't meditate on God's love because you've had a promotion at work you don't meditate on God's love because your kids are happily going along at the moment cheer up they may not next month no no no no at the end of the day you meditate on the love of God deeply in the temple where the sacrifice takes place because that's immutable that's unquestionable that's historic it is unchangeable it is stable in your temple oh God we meditate on your love so God's renown starts with the temple and focuses on the love of God moreover this renown is grounded in justice as it reaches to the ends of the earth verse 10 like your name oh God your praise reaches to the ends of the earth your right hand is filled with righteousness that is the praise that is mentioned in verse 10 is both the renown that God deserves and the response that it awakens it is not just God's power here that is renowned but God's justice that is what issues from God's character God is a just God and we are told that righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people should that not put great fear in us as we live in declining love of righteousness in this country as we participate in it how many people in our churches spend hours a week in porn on the net and not five minutes in prayer how many people in our churches have never ever led their families in prayer and bible reading how many people in our churches cheat on their they love themselves and that's just the beginning of things where do all of us stand when we're told that the first commandment is to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves do you know why the first commandment is the first commandment because it's the only commandment we always break every time we break any other one so we're breaking the first commandment and committing the first sin every time we sin at all in thought or word or deed God have mercy and God's justice extends to the whole earth he doesn't grade on the curve lower standards for nice American democracies higher standards for nasty Arab states doesn't work like that doesn't work

like that and yet there is a sense in which this also brings hope does it not because if god is not just then we are in a perfect moral quagmire if god is not just if there is not a final accounting on the last day if god is not just then nietzsche is right let the strong man win truth comes out of the barrel of a gun did you read the papers after the towers fell in new york for the first time in quite a while the secular press was prepared to talk about evil not always very insightfully or in a very balanced way but they were prepared to talk about evil and in the midst of that stanley fish who is one of the sort of semi-pop gurus of post-modernism was asked if in the light of the towers falling and the terrible destruction and slaughter if he was prepared to change his post-modern views on the relativism of all so-called evil it all depends on your point of view he says no

[ 48 : 30 ] I'm not prepared to change a bit he says this is a perfect exemplification of the fact that there is no such thing as objective evil it all depends on your point of view in the holocaust well to the jews the holocaust was pretty bad but to the arian triumphalists well the holocaust really had as its chief weakness the fact that it didn't finally succeed and when it comes to the towers well of course to those who fell down and to those who died in burning kerosene and to the relatives and to the nation as a whole it wasn't but on the other hand to triumphalist islamic fundamentalist it was a jolly good thing the only problem was that they didn't kill more people it all depends on your point of view so he was asked well then should america in any sense defend itself against similar attacks oh yes he says they should why if there's no real cause in evil if there is no moral case to be made why should we defend ourselves he says well he said i'm an american i belong to the american tribe so i side with america do you hear what is being said right and wrong come out of the peril of a gun i am so thankful that at the end of the day god is the god of justice and on the last day not only will justice be done but justice will be seen to be done and every mouth will be stopped no one will say god that isn't fair not one and biblically speaking this same justice is also what underlies the cross itself it is not merely love that underlies the cross it is god's justice which is why in one of the most important passages on the atonement in the new testament paul says that christ hangs on that tree god placards him before us on that tree there christ bears our sin on that tree so that god may be just and the one who justifies the ungodly in other words god does not dole out cheap forgiveness he himself pays the price in the person of his son the cross marks out the justice of god as much as it marks out the love of god so the renown starts with a temple and focuses on the love of god the renown is grounded in justice as it reaches to the ends of the earth and thirdly the renown arises from right judgments and makes god's people rejoice verse 11 mount zion rejoices the villages of judah are glad because of your judgments even in the temporal sphere we learn this do we not when we go through hard things we may not see very clearly but we look back over our lives we've been christians five years now or ten years or fifteen years or twenty years or thirty years and we begin to understand what took place in ancient israel when they raised some small pile of stones and called it ebenezer saying hitherto the lord has helped me hitherto the lord has helped me and if there's some things we do not understand brothers and sisters in christ on the last day we will all gather around the throne and there will be a mighty chorus ebenezer ebenezer the lord is just all his judgments are right and hitherto the lord has helped us and finally not only the city of the great king and the conquest of the great king and the renown of the great king but now in the last three verses the faithfulness of the great king you see when you read verses 12 and 13 walk about sign go around her

counter towers consider well her ramparts view her citadels that you may tell them to the next generation when you read just those verses you might be forgiven for initially thinking that these two verses reflect a slightly intemperate pride at the physical strength of jerusalem a pride that becomes part of the national heritage passed on to successive generations that you may tell them to the next generations son just look at that magnificent size landscape imagine coming up against those walls fantastic architecture wouldn't you say have you seen the thickness of those walls whole armies have crushed themselves against those walls look at the soldiers up there on the ramparts this is a great city son doesn't it sound a bit like that to begin with but once again verse 14 shows that even in the historical arena the psalmist's focus is on

God himself for God is our God forever and ever he will be our guide even to the end this God may use the means of the ramparts but at the end of the day without God the ramparts don't mean much more importantly it is this God centered vision that grants God's people security and serenity forever and ever we read even to the end the expression is a peculiar one in the original language even to death itself it means the point is that God keeps his word he is a covenant keeping God and

he keeps his people forever and ever in serenity and security in this world there are all kinds of vicissitudes that make life insecure think back through the history of the last century the rise and fall of Nazism the rise and fall of communism the destruction at last of apartheid the decolonizing of a great number of empires and the multiplication of death by war destruction famine sword those of us who are old enough to have lived under some of these things it's hard for us to summarize these changes without thinking did I go through all of that

I remember when I was a child in French Canada you had the same sort of thing down here south of the 49th parallel I know during the cold war we had these ridiculous drills in which sirens sounded and we hid under our desks in case of nuclear bombing hid under our desks in case of an atomic bomb on Drummondville give me a break that's what we went through you younger people that don't remember these sorts of things you don't know what you missed political insecurity social cultural insecurity where is this nation going in terms of the inherited roots of a Judeo Christian past God only knows I surely don't where are we going in the personal affairs of our lives five years ago one of my best friends declared himself a homosexual abandoned his wife and family the same week my wife was diagnosed with cancer that's just one person in the course of life what can I say we all go through these things do we not sooner or later where's the security in any of this brothers and sisters in

Christ here is the security of the great king this God is our God forever and ever and he will be our guide even unto death is this the only psalm that speaks in these terms with these allusions these references no no no no there is another better known hear the word of the Lord God is our refuge and strength and ever present help in trouble therefore we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God the holy place where the most high dwells

[ 57 : 40 ] God is within her she will not fail God will help her at break of day nations are in uproar kingdoms fall he lifts his voice the earth melts the Lord almighty is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress come see the works of the Lord the desolations he has brought on the earth he makes wars cease to the ends of the earth he breaks the bow and shatters the spear he burns the shields with fire be still and know that I am God I will be exalted among the nations I will be exalted on the earth the Lord almighty is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress amen