Community

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Date: 10 March 2013

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[0:00] If we could turn together to Psalm 122 in the Bible, Psalm 122 is on page 622 in the red church Bible you may have received on the way in. We're going to read the whole of that Psalm and the kind of area I was given to look at was community and we're going to see how the Psalmist reveals to us the Christian community through Psalm 122.

Let's read these words together. I rejoice with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing in your gates, so Jerusalem.
Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. They're the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends I will say, peace be within you. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.
It was about this time last year as I was approaching the school, there were two very large groups of before me. One of the groups was terribly excited and the other group was a little apprehensive. They were all swarming around this rather large bus. It was the time of the ski trip, obviously. One group full of enthusiasm and excitement were leaving mum and dad, Yebeuty were with her mates on the powdery snow of France. What's not to love about that? Absolutely high as kites. But then you have another group of people who are a bit more sullen, shall we say? They were the teachers. What was on their mind was 60 teenagers, one bus, 24 hours, nightmare. 30 minutes in the toilet will be blocked.
[2:28] Who will be first to mop up the human mess that will inevitably come during this trip? How are we going to prevent them from drinking Red Bull at the service station? How am I going to get through this? I don't know what your attitude was when you came to Worship today. Were you like the sullen teachers who were a little bit apprehensive, who weren't really looking forward to being here tonight but who have kind of just come along as an endurance rather than as a joy? Or are you more like the teenagers who came excited and anticipated? They came longing to be with their friends, longing to gather with their friends and longing to be with one another. What is your current experience of life in the community of God? In this Psalm, the Psalmist is pushing us to see what life should look like in the community of God's people. What the Psalmist is pointing towards is a community where we should be gathering together in anticipation of great things happening amongst each other.

At the center of the community of God is worship. At the center of God's community is this joy. It is worship when we come together that unites us all. It's also when we come as God's community, it's an opportunity for us to look after and to care for our fellow worshipers.
This Psalm, Psalm 122, is a Psalm about worship in community. You know, worshiping together is completely natural to us. It comes easily. We love to worship. It's part of our DNA.
It's within us. Now, maybe we don't use the worship to describe what word worship much in the non-religious context, but we're the people who are always worshiping. Now, we all like to honor something or somebody else above all others. And we love to do this in community. The desire to worship in community is found in all aspects of life. We as a nation kind of worship together at the summit of sport that we had last year. We were worshiping the gods of sport in all their tremendous feats. I don't know if there are many worshipers left at time, Castle, but the few that are there come together to worship the hearts.
It's tough sometimes, but they do come there to worship now and again. Some of us will worship comfort. We love our home. We love the space. We try and create this cozy, nice atmosphere

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because we love to worship comfort and peace and tranquility. And there are thousands of other examples of worship in the world in which we live, and we're always worshiping.
[5:25] Now God has planted this desire to worship within us. He wants us to worship. God wants us to glorify, but he wants us to glorify himself. What God wants is he wants the worship which he has put within us to be directed towards worship of God and the God that we worship is the God of the Bible. And so before we break into this sermon and to look at it scene by scene, what we need to do is kind of get a view of what's really happening in the context. What's going on as the psalmist writes this Psalm first of all? Well, the first thing we notice is under your title is that little, a song of a sense of David.

This is a song of a sense, which means that it would have been part of the Jewish hymnbook. As the Jews gather together to go up to the great celebrations and feasts associated with the Jewish religion, as they move towards Jerusalem, the gathered crowd would be singing the Psalms of ascent. They would be glorying and praising God through the reciting of these Psalms, because these were Psalms which are all about expectancy. They're all about coming to know and to worship God. The Israelites are a people who love to worship just like us. They love to come together to worship. They love togetherness with those whom God had chosen to be his special people here on earth.
Psalm one to two is a Psalm of rejoicing. It's a Psalm that gives an account of the joy that comes when the family of God gather together to worship. It is a Psalm that shares with us the excitement and the anticipation as the pilgrim moves from the alien land towards the city of Jerusalem. But the question is why are they so excited about going to Jerusalem?
Why are they so keen to go to Jerusalem? What is it about Jerusalem that means that they want to rejoice and to praise God? What is it about this city that marks it out from all other places in the world? Well, Jerusalem is the place that God had appointed to be his dwelling place. Jerusalem contained the house of the Lord. It was to be the centre of worship to God. It was where the tabernacle was. It was where the people went to make sacrifice. Psalm one to two is the final part of the Jerusalem trilogy. We start off in Psalm 120 and the pilgrim is in a far off land. He is far from Jerusalem. He is far from this worship of God in Jerusalem. His heart longs for the homeland. His heart longs for Jerusalem in Psalm 120. Then in Psalm 121 we have that movement towards Jerusalem.
He is in a far off place but now the pilgrim is moving towards Jerusalem. We know that it is not an easy journey. It is not sitting back on a nice Eurostar. Before you know it, you end up in Paris. No, it is a journey which is full of difficulty. The difficulty pushes him to the very limits. It goes through a rocky wilderness but God will not let his foot slip. He is in the midst of the baking sun but he is assured that as he goes on this journey the Lord would be his shade. God was going to keep him safe as he journeyed towards Jerusalem. Then we reach Psalm 122. The pilgrim is at the gates of that mighty city Jerusalem.
[9:29] As he looks around, as he gazes at the house of God, he is filled with joy. As we examine this Psalm tonight, I would like to look at it under three headings. The first heading would be that God's community has at its heart joy. God's community has at its heart joy in verses 1 and 2. Then we will see that the community of God is united in its diversity in verses 3 to 5. Then we will see that the community of God is concerned for one another in verses 6 to 9. First of all, come together with joy verses 1 and 2. Imagine there is virtually one place in the whole world where you can worship God. Imagine the longing you would have to be in that place. Imagine the isolation you would feel as you were miles from that place. This is the world of the Old Testament believer. This is what life is like for the Jewish believer who is scattered throughout the known world at that time. God had appointed one place on earth for all believers to come to worship Him. Jerusalem was that place. Jerusalem was the central part or central area in the world for the worship of God.

The Jew knew that it was home to both their earthly and heavenly King, and it is where the Jew wished to be. As we look at verse 1, it is like a flashback. I rejoice with those who said to me, past deads, let us go to the house of the Lord. He is going back to the feelings of Sam on 20. He is remembering that first discussion. Why don't we go on this road trip? Why don't we go to Jerusalem? Why don't we go and worship the Lord? As he thinks back to the excitement of planning this road trip, planning how he is going to get there, and all the anticipation of the journey. He wasn't bothered that it was going to be 24 hours or however long it was going to be, but he was just very keen to go to Jerusalem to be with the people of God, to worship the God of Israel. The God they

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were going to worship had told them to come to him to worship. The God of David, the God of the Samhith, had invited the Israelites to come to God to worship in the house of the Lord. That's why they planned to head to Jerusalem. They didn't head to Jerusalem thinking that I'm not sure if God wants me here or not, but I'll take a risk. They knew that God wanted them to come to worship him. The God of the David declared to them, come. The God of David had said to them, you are welcome. The God of David had said, enter. The God of David could have said, go. The God of David could have said, go. Far away you are unclean. I am a holy God. You have no place near me, but the God of David had the message of come.
You are welcome. That's why they went. They went because they knew that the God of David would welcome them in to his presence. Within this house of the Lord was the tabernacle, which was God's dwelling place on earth and which housed the place of sacrifice. As worshipers of God, we are thankful that the sacrificial system that the Old Testament believers had to go through to come into the presence of God, to make themselves right before God is now no longer necessary. We are so thankful that the sacrificial system that was put in place at this time is irrelevant, because what we know as believers is that the tabernacle was a finger that pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus would become our sacrifice. Jesus is the one who would pay the price for our rebellion and who opens up the way for us to return to God. We know that King Jesus becomes the slain lamb, and because of this we too can come into the presence of God. It is because of this sacrifice, it's because of Jesus and his sacrifice that we can come into God's presence. The writer of the Hebrews tells us this about Jesus in Hebrews 10 verse 10. We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all is complete. Verse 14 he then goes on to say, by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy. And then verse 18 he says, and where these have been forgiven there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. This allows us to worship. This enables us to have that lasting joy. Jesus has done it all for us by his death on the cross. When you have been gripped by the grace of God, when you have been gripped by the truth of this statement, when you don't worship for one hour a week, your life becomes worship to God. Yes, we live in a broken world. Yes, things don't go the way we want them to go so often. Yes, things may not work out for us, but we have this joy which allows us to thank God in every situation. You and I can stand in the midst of all our experiences and declare, I am redeemed.
I am redeemed. Praise you, my Father. Praise you, my Father, for I am redeemed. This joy, this anchor, this hope, this surety, even in the midst of trouble, enables us to have that joy, that deep inexpressible joy which the Christian receives from God. We fail exams.
We go through the midst of the pain of a broken relationship. We are finding it tough at work, but we have the anchor of joy. We have the anchor that tells us, God is with me. God has done it all for me. I am safe and secure. I may not know what is going on, but I am anchored in Christ's promise, and He promised me that I would be with Him and that He would keep me forever. This is how the life of worship transforms our lives. The life of worship reminds us that God is for us. God is with us, and in every context that we may find ourselves. This truth is true. And when we grasp this truth that God is for us and God is with us, this frees us up to worship God. Do you have the joy of the psalmist? Have you accepted the gracious call of God to come and worship Him? All of us here today are being called to worship. This is the grace that drew the psalmist to the house of the [18:03] Lord, and the grace which Jesus Christ proclaimed when He said to us, Come to me, all you are weary, and I will give you rest in Matthew 11, 28. When we accept the gracious invitation of God to come to be adopted into His family, then we know and experience joy in abundance.

Let's look together at verse 2. So we see as a community of God's people we have joy. Verse 3-5 tells us that we are united in diversity. The community of God is united in His diversity.
I know lots of people argue that there is a common bond of humanity. They come up with some great statements to explain what this really is, and these statements normally call upon people of the world to unite in peace, which is a good thing. Jimmy Carter in his Nobel speech in 2002 said this, The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears and prejudices. God gives us the capacity for choice. We can choose to alleviate suffering. We can choose to work together for peace. We can make these changes and we must. He nearly gets it right. He nearly gives us the answer that the world needs.
Yes, we have a bond with all people. Yes, we have choices, but the only thing that conquers the divisiveness in our society and our world is Christ-centered living. We cannot bring about peace via broken people with broken hearts. We need Christ to come into our lives and to fix the brokenness

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of our heart. And you know, because grace has gripped our heart, it binds you and I not only to God, but to one another. The church, Christians, have an extraordinary, uniting principle, and that is God's grace, and we have this eternally.
Our society sees unity and diversity as an ideal, but has kind of resigned itself to never attaining it. But, but we as Christians have unity with diversity. We can be comfortable in our own skin. We can be at ease in the midst of diversity because we know that at the very core of every Christian believer is Christ, and that we share this same Christ-centered core. Look at verse 4. The tribes are going up, all of them together, going up to Jerusalem with all their different backgrounds and baggage, and they're all united with one desire, and that is to worship God. Israel, like every nation as past, present, and future was a diverse nation. It was not mono, it was diverse. God's people at this time were made up of twelve different tribes. Twelve very different tribes, each with their own peculiarities, each with their own gifts, but yet united under this God. Genesis 49 is a really fantastic chapter to explain the diversity of this nation. What we have in Genesis 49 is an account of Jacob blessing his sons. And so, for example, we have in verse 13, Zebulun will live by the sea shore and become a haven for ships. His border will extend towards Sidon. Then in, for example, verse 20, we have Asher described, and Asher's food will be rich. He will provide delicacies fit for a king. Each tribe had its own particular gift, each tribe had its own trait and trademark, and had its own particular strengths and weaknesses. Even so, they were all God's people, and they were all invited to worship. And God calls us, like he called the Jews and the Sammests, to gather together to publicly worship him. In verse 4, God calls us all to come up to his house and join together in thankful praise for what God has done.
[22:47] Remember, we are those who have seen the fulfillment of all the prophecies, of all the signs. We have seen the fulfillment of the sacrificial system. We have seen the greater king than David come. We are those who have seen and experienced the fulfillment of all these things in the life and work of Christ. We have received a really clear vision of Jesus, and the joy and the eagerness to worship God by these early believers should be as nothing compared to the joy and eagerness of those of us who are New Testament believers. In an increasingly individualizing world, in a world of cyber relationships and cyber experiences, remember verse 4, the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord to praise the name of the Lord. We are called to worship together. We are called to publicly worship. It was the New Testament practice. It was the Old Testament practice to join together to come to worship God. Public worship was a central priority to the Jew. Public worship must be a central priority to the Christian today. But why does God want us to worship together? What's so good about coming to church to worship God with the people of God? Well, one reason is that when we come together, we are seeing God's grace at work in the lives of other people, and that should fill us with encouragement. Because when we sit here today, we see that God is at work in the lives of each other, that God is able and is transforming lives today. Church is a reminder. St. Columbus is a reminder to us every week that God is at work in Edinburgh today, that God's grace is still being poured out on a variety of different and unique people.

We love to gather together with God's people to hear the stories of God at work, because when we see God at work, our vision of God is increased. Yes, we can see and we can witness how God is at work in our lives, but when we see God working in hundreds of lives, it fills us with a much bigger vision of God. It gives us a much bigger vision of the one we worship, and when we see how God is at work in your life and mine, we just want to break out in a thanksgiving and praise. When we come to worship, we want to give thanks to God because God is at work. If we have lost sight of why we come to church, if we only come for the social gathering, if we only come to catch up with our friends, we will soon split apart, we will soon break apart, we will soon become separatists, because the unity that we enjoy now comes from the fact that we have a heart of thanksgiving and praise towards the God of grace. Offering God thanksgiving should be our natural response when we witness the work of God in the life of the church today. As we gather, let us praise God because he is at work in our lives and in the lives of hundreds of other people.
So we see that the Christian community should have joy. We see that the Christian community is united in its diversity, and finally we see the Christian community is a caring community in verses 6 to 9. In this Psalm, we see that a community of God which is in the grip of grace has a concern for the bride of Christ. They love his church, they love his house, they love his family. Verse 6, we notice that these words pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

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May those who love you be secure, may there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. These final prayers, final verses are a prayer, and it is a prayer for peace for the children of God. The psalmist wants God's church to enjoy peace, to experience peace. Now peace here means more than an absence of war. Peace here has the idea of a state of wholeness, where everything works the way it was created to be. God dwells in Jerusalem, and so the psalmist prays for the peace of that city. What Jerusalem is to the psalmist, the church must be to us. What is your view of the church today? Does it stir within you any sort of passion at all? In a world where consumerism is number one, in a world where it is difficult to be passionate about anything, because all of a sudden it is changed and it is transformed, and we are always trying to keep up. We are never satisfied with what the world offers. In a world where material things are constantly changing, we get passionate for a little while and then our passions change. Have we let that kind of shifting ebb and flow come into our own Christian lives when we think of the church?
What the psalmist says to us tonight, you belong to the community, you belong to God, you belong to the bride of Christ, you must pray for its good, you must do everything in your power to maintain that peace. And you know what? This will mean denying yourself.
[29:22] If you are going to put the bride of Christ in its proper place, it will mean that you have to deny yourself. It may mean passing up that job promotion because you are involved in a Bible study. It may mean after university committing yourself to living in Edinburgh because God wants you in this church, in this place. It may mean moving to a smaller house because God wants you to give more money to his work. It may mean sacrificing a holiday so that you can do kids club over that week. Is the concern for God's work shaping the decisions of our life? Are we playing a full role in the community of God? Are we doing everything in our power to ensure that there is peace? And are we doing everything to ensure that others come into this community of peace? Do you have a sense of calling not just to

God but to God's people? To love this community, to love and cherish the community starts with the love of God. The love of God will always produce within you and me a love for others, a deep and passionate desire for their good that they too may experience peace, that they too may experience wholeness. Our difficulty so often in loving others is not firstly a problem to love others but a problem to love God. If we are struggling to love the church, that's an indication that we're struggling to love God because when we love God, when we love and long to be with Him that flows into a deep and loving and passionate love for His people, for His pride. As the psalmist draws his psalm to a conclusion, he puts to us this challenge, do you love the church? Are you passionate about the church? Are you giving yourself to the church and to the community? The psalmist's passion for peace drives him to prayer and he calls us all to pray for peace in the church. In conclusion, we've seen that true community and true community enjoys great joy. We see that the community of Christ enjoys unity with diversity and finally we see that the community of Christ has a deep passion for each other's good.
As we saw on the news in the past two weeks, we have witnessed great historical moments in the Vatican with the resignation of one Pope. But I think Pope Benedict in his last tweet summed up the message of Psalm 122 very nicely. He said this, may you always experience the joy that comes from putting Christ at the center of our lives. May you always experience the joy that comes from putting the Christ at the center of our lives. Amen. Let us briefly pray. Father in heaven, we give you thanks that you are a God who allows us to come. We thank you that you are a God who has called us to come and who has prepared the way for us to come through Christ. Thank you,
Father, that as we will celebrate with our brothers and sisters in communion, that is the reminder of all that Christ has done and how we too are able to come. Let us be thankful for all that you have done for us. Amen.

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