

For the Peace of Jerusalem

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[0 : 0 0] We're on a series that's called Songs for the Journey, and it comes from the 15 Psalms of Ascent, which is a particular section in the Psalter, Psalms 120 to 134. And last week we saw that these Psalms are about the fact that three times a year, if you were a believer in Yahweh, God, the God of Israel, you, no matter where you lived, if you were able, you would travel to Jerusalem for pilgrimage. And these are three times a year for three festivals, the festival of Passover, of Pentecost, and of booze. And these were there for you to remember the Exodus, the salvation across the Red Sea from Egypt, the law given at Sinai, and the moments of wandering in the wilderness under the tents, the feast of tent or booze. And when you would go to Jerusalem, you would give thanks to God, as Psalm 122 says, you would make sacrifices, you would bring your best, the best of your harvest, the best of your animals, you would celebrate the deeds of God, you would do all those things. These are the songs of the pilgrimage, the songs they would sing, the songs that ancient peoples would sing as they traveled along the way. We don't do it very much anymore, but every ancient peoples did it, and these are those songs. And we said last week that they are your songs too.

How so? They're your songs because of Hebrews chapter 3 and 4. Hebrews 3 and 4 says that we, that Christians, if you're a Christian, that you are a pilgrim, that you're an exile, that you are also wandering in the wilderness, that you have a destination that's out in front of you, and you have a goal, a race, as Paul puts it, something to attain, and you are made for the world, but not, you are not of the world. You are still walking, you're still walking, you're still on the journey.

And Psalm 121 taught us that. Psalm 122 tells us that Jerusalem is your city, but how so is the question, but how so? And that's what we're looking at tonight, three things. Why Jerusalem makes us glad, the nature of the city of God, and how to seek her peace. So first, why Jerusalem makes us glad.

There are two main things to recall. Usually I don't like to review a previous week sermon, but you have to because it's a unit. And two things to recall from last week. One is this, that one of the traditions of the Israelite people when they were on the pilgrimage would be this, that you were typically not to dwell in a built shelter, a house, a city, a town while you were on the pilgrimage.

Why? Because you were there to relive the Exodus journey, you were there to relive the wandering and the wilderness. It was meant to be hard. And so there was no house, you were without home in the pilgrimage. Secondly, and I think I'm right about this, Psalm 122 comes after Psalm 121. And that's important because in Psalm 121 we saw that when the pilgrim, the Psalmist, it says, I lift my eyes up and I see the hills and I ask, from where does my help come? That when he sees the hills, he's not saying the hills make me see God's beautiful creation and want to worship God. Actually, that's true, but that phrase means something else. It actually, the hills in Psalm 121 are a place of fear. He's afraid of the hills because the hills outside Jerusalem were known as a place of robbers and bandits and mercenaries and also a place of the high places that the hills where demons were worshiped, where idols were worshiped. And so they were afraid. And so this is the picture of the pilgrimage so far. You are homeless in pilgrimage. You're coming to Jerusalem, but you are homeless.

[4 : 04] And that homelessness is full of dangers, toils, and snares on every side. As you come to see the hills, you sleep outdoors in the middle of the night. You are exposed to the elements and to humans that are after you potentially. And in Psalm 121 it said, when you sleep in the middle of the night out in the hills in the place of danger, the keeper, he does not sleep. He slumber if not nor sleepeth as the KJV puts it. He doesn't sleep. He's the key. God is the keeper. He protects you on the journey. And now in Psalm 122, where are we? Where have we gotten to? And you saw it verse two, our feet are standing within the gates of Jerusalem. You see, in other words, he was homeless, but now the pilgrimage has ended and the journey or the Psalmist here is standing in the gate of the city. He's standing. He's made it. He's made it to Jerusalem. But what I want you to notice is exactly how he describes his destination. What does he say? I was glad when they said to me in verse one, let us go to the temple. The temple of God. No, it doesn't say temple. It says I was glad when they said to me, literally, it says when they said, let us go to the home of Yahweh, is what it says. In other words, he frames it in the language of coming home. In other words, the point of the passage is as simple as this, that the pilgrimage is homelessness and stepping into the city of Jerusalem is to come home. It's to come home to the home of God, the place where

God dwells and coming home. We all know it. We've all felt it, what it feels like to come home. Some 40 of you will, as I will in nine days, will maybe on the same flight, will go back to the States and eventually you'll come home. As wonderful as the trip to Scotland will be, of course, when you do step in your door after a long journey, you feel it. It's like, we've made it back. For me, I taste it the most, not depending on where I am. When I cross the Atlantic in a plane and the plane touches the ground and I step into the terminal, whether it's Boston, New York, Edinburgh, London, Atlanta, it doesn't matter. I feel homecoming because I know that I was not made to be in a metal cylinder 32,000 feet in the air. I wasn't made for that. You weren't either. You were made to be on the ground. That's where God's put us. We weren't made to fly. There's a sense of homecoming as soon as you hit the ground. We've tasted it in all sorts of ways. All of us, it's a fact that we feel it. These are shadows. These are shadows. They're shadows of a deep desire to come home from the hills into the home where God dwells. Every homecoming that we experience is a shadow, a foretaste, at its best of the sweetest thing that you were made for, and that's to come home, to dwell in the home of God. That's why the psalmist says, verse one,

I was glad. Now, this term glad is an important word. It's an unusual word, actually, in Hebrew, in the Old Testament. It is no mere modern sense of happiness, the way that the word is commonly used, be happy. It is that, but it's much more than that. It's more like in English, the old English term for mirth, which is a term we don't really use anymore, but the term for mirth or the de facto sense of to be merry. We use it in Mary, but the real sense of what it means to have mirth or to be merry, what does that, or what does it mean to be glad here? It's put really well in the third book of the Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King, when Derek recently made fun of me a couple times for quoting Lord of the Rings, so that's why. But here it is again. It's spoken of Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings. One of the Hobbits speaks of Gandalf, and this is what he says, in the wizard's face, the Hobbits saw at first only lines of care and sorrow. Though, as he looked more intently, he perceived that under all there was a great joy, a fountain of mirth, enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth. Mirth, or gladness, the term that's used here, it means this that no matter what is happening outside the gates of the city, no matter what is happening in the hills, in the circumstances of your life, in a broken fallen world, mirth is the longing and the relief when you find it of the rest found in the hope for a true home. It's the ultimate, oh, right, you know the feeling. It's the ultimate rest. Dorothy, she was right whenever she said there's no place like home, but that's not true if your home is broken. But even in the best, most safe and secure homes in this world, there really is no place like the home, the true city of God. It's what you were made for. There is no place that can ever be like it, except it. And so the first point is simply to say this, you, every single human being, no matter what you believe, the Bible teaches you were made for the city of God, the dwelling place of God, and nothing less will ever be satisfactory or absolute home for you. Now secondly, the nature of the city of God. You were made for it, but the question remains, what is it? We haven't really said what it actually is, what is the city of God? And we know at least at absolute maximum that it is the dwelling place of God himself, the home of Yahweh, the dwelling place of God. But wait, there's more in this passage even. It's not just that, it is that, that's most fundamental, but it is more than that.

And look at how the psalmist also talks about the city itself, not only the dwelling place of God, but the actual city that God dwells in, Jerusalem. I mean, you can imagine if you look at the end of verse two, O Jerusalem, and then verse three, Jerusalem. This is a love point to the city of Jerusalem. It's an ode in every sense of the word. It's expressing the deep love that the pilgrim has in coming to the city, to the city of God, Jerusalem. And this is what, just look at what he says about it. Verse three, the first thing, you are built and bound firmly together.

In other words, this is concrete, this is physical. The city of God is a place. It is not ethereal, it is not up in the sky by and by. And this is both the Old Testament teaching and the New Testament, that the city of God is a physical place. It is built up as a city and it is bound together. Its architecture is beautiful, it's unified, it's not fragmented, it is a city. This is what the Old and New Testament teaches. Verse four, verse four says this, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel. In other words, the city of God is the meeting place of the entire family. All the tribes dispersed come together three times a year. The one people, and you can imagine, you know, if you grew up, if you grew up making this trip three times a year, you would come into the city every season and you would see, you would see your cousins and you would see the guy you grew up with that moved away when you were five and you would see all the people and it was ultimate home. It was the city of your companions, of your friendships, of your family, of all your deepest longings were met there. And then verse five, it is the city where the thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David. And that means that the city of God is the place where the throne of David sits. It is the place where the throne of David enacts justice and peace.

[13 : 01] That is, that is the, here's the review, it's where God lives, it's concrete, it's physical, it's built, it's bound, it's beautiful. It's the place of the unity of the family, one people where the throne of David brings justice and peace. That's the city of God. And just imagine it, this is homecoming, this is where the ultimate loves all converge. The love of home, the love of friendship, the love of family, the love of festival, they all together collide in the city of God with the love of God, all together at one, this is ultimate home. But we know that this city that the psalmist is talking about is not the city of God at the very same time. It's a shadow, it's a shadow, it's a shadow of the real. And there are Christian traditions and various theological schools that have thought that Jerusalem herself is the city of God. But that's not what the psalmist is even saying, even the psalmist is saying that this is a shadow. And how do we see that? Well, because of verse six and eight. And this is what, pray for the peace of Jerusalem. And then what does he mean? May they be secure who love you. You see that the prayer is for her citadels and for her walls and for her security, meaning that she can be destroyed. The reason the psalmist is saying pray for her peace is because she has enemies on the lurk. She has been destroyed in the past and Jerusalem will be destroyed after this psalm was written. This city that the psalmist is talking about here wasn't actually secure. It wasn't actually the security that is the city of God. The danger of the hills still dwelt around it. But even more, the prophecies, the city of God and the prophecies both before the psalm and after the psalm, just let me list them for you.

Ezekiel 36, this is about the city of God. On that day, the land laid waste will become the garden of Eden. Out of destruction shall come forth the garden of Eden. And that means that the city of God has to be like the garden of Eden. And in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve walked with God hand in hand. They had full relationship with him. And in this city, the city of Jerusalem, the psalmist is talking about, God dwells there, but he dwells behind a veiled curtain. And only one man, one man has access to that space where God truly dwells in the city once per year. That's not the garden of Eden. That is not walking hand in hand with the living God. The city of God is the place where God dwells with you hand in hand, where you see his face. Theologians call it the beatific vision. It's what you were made for. Isaiah 55, on that day, the wilderness, the day of the city of God, the wilderness will rejoice and bloom. There will be streams where, even in the deserts, in other words, the true city of God is a place where there are no wall, you don't need security. Even in the wilderness places, the hills, the deserts, the stream of the garden and the city will flow. The city of God does not need prayers of peace and justice. It is secure. The true city of God is secure. Isaiah 19, the city of God is Israel with Egypt and Assyria and Babylon.

And the city of God is the place where all of Israel's enemies are now her friends. You see, it's open to all the nations. Michael 4, 2, all the nations will turn to each other and they will say, together, Psalm 122, 1, let us go into the house of the Lord. Together, all the nations, even those who were once enemies, will now come in from far off and say, let us all go into the house of the Lord. In other words, the city of God, we are made for a place where God dwells freely, where we dwell freely hand in hand with God, a place where all the nations come together as one that's physical, that dispels the hills and the wilds, the fear. And that is why every time you go home, if it is truly a place of peace and love and security, a place that you actually want to be, every time you come home, there is a real sense of the feeling, the relief, the homecoming, and simultaneously the fact that nostalgia always tells us a bit of a lie. Our nostalgia for home always lies to us in a way. Now, you might have experienced this. I grew up in Natchez, Mississippi, right on the Mississippi River in the deep south, a small tourist town, it's a beautiful little town, and I was there for 18 years, I left and was not back for seven, and I had changed a lot, and I'd come back after seven years, and I went back to the house that I lived in for 18 years, 17 years there, and I was so excited, and it was, it's home, and this was homecoming, and I loved this place, and I grew up there, and we had a big old backyard, and I played so much, and you know, you've had these experiences, and I came back, and it was great, but you know, it was a lot smaller than I remembered, and you know, of course I was smaller too, but, and it wasn't as green, and you know, it needed an update, and it was great, it was home, but it was not the place that I had dreamt of, and even in the best homes, in the most secure, and loving places that we all have occupied in life, there is still something, there is a strange familiarity in that of a home that we have not seen. Now the German philosophers in the middle of the 20th century, existentialist philosophers, especially Martin Heidegger, he describes exactly this, and I think in a really helpful way, he wasn't a Christian, but he was a very sharp thinker, and he describes it with two German terms, and they're not really translatable to English, so I'm going to give them to you, and then give the phrase that they mean, the first is *Gevorfenheit*, and the second is *Unheimlichkeit*, and yes, take that home with you, that's what you need to walk away with today. *Gevorfenheit*, it means the angst and anxiety of being thrown into the world at birth, into a world that is simultaneously your home, yet there's something wrong, and what Heidegger says is that the thing that's wrong, the *Gevorfenheit* that we all experience from birth, the angst is that at the end of the track, we face losing ourselves in death. The reality of what we would call as Christians, the condition, the fall condition, and it creates this angst in us, and simultaneously with that angst, that anxiety of loss, is also *Unheimlichkeit*, which means something like unhomeliness. In other words, it's the fact that even in the places we feel at home in this world, we have a strange sensation

that we were meant for a home that was better, something better, something without *Gevorfenheit*, without the angst of falling off the track in death and losing the self. You know, C.S. Lewis, not many people put it better than he does when it comes to things like this, and this is what he said in his best book, *Till We Have Faces*, the sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing to reach the mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from, my country, the place where I ought to have been born. Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longings, the longing for home, for indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back. All my life, the God of the mountain has been wooing me. Oh, look up once at least before the end and wish me joy for I am going to see my lover. This Psalmist spoke of a shadow, a shadow, a shadow of the city of God and a shadow of true gladness. But there was another pilgrim some six, seven hundred years later, and he also made the trip to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, and he came to Jerusalem and instead of mirth, it says that he wept, because he knew, he knew that wherever human beings dwell, well, he said it like this, would that you, Jerusalem, even you, had known on this day the things that make for true peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes.

[22 : 30] You see, he's quoting Psalm 122, would you not have known what makes for real shalom, peace, but even today they are hidden from your eyes. Why did he weep, the pilgrim, when he came to see the city of Jerusalem? Why was he not filled with mirth when he saw this shadow, because he knew the truth, that he must leave his home in the most ultimate and final way if we, if anyone of any earthly city was ever going to reach true home. John Charles Wesley, he put it well in his hymn, he, the man of power, the son of man, he, he left his father's home above, so free, so infinite, his grace, he emptied himself of all but love, and he bled for Adam's helpless race. What's the nature of the city of God? It's Revelation 21, 1 to 6, we read it earlier, and then I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of the heavens, and the Alpha and the Omega was seated on the seat of David, the man of power, the pilgrim who entered Jerusalem and bled for Adam's helpless race.

When he bled, the veil was torn in two so that we could have the Garden of Eden. So the cross says to you, sinner, come home, pilgrim, come home. Now very briefly and finally, I just want to say two quick things. How do you seek the peace of the city of God, which is the new Jerusalem? Let me just say two things quickly. First, you have to recognize, to seek the peace as, pray for the peace of Jerusalem, Psalm 6, the Shalom, you first have to realize that the city of God is not yet.

You have to know that the city of God is not yet. What I simply want to say is we as Christians have to grapple with the objective fact of the city of God, its concrete physicality, its coming down nests in the future on the horizon of our existence. When Christ returns, we have to grapple with that objective fact and make it real subjectively in our hearts. And that is incredibly difficult to do.

It is incredibly difficult to have a consciousness for the fact of the city of God in your future. I mean, the Bible calls it faith and it's hard. It's really difficult. Again, C.S. Lewis, he tried to prove the fact of the city of God apart from the Bible. We can prove it from the Bible, but he also did it by reason. And this is what he said, creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exist. A baby feels hungry. Well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim. Well, there is such a thing as water. Humans feel sexual desires. Well, there is such a thing as sex. And if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If not of my earthly pleasure satisfy this desire, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. No, probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy the desire, but only to arouse it to suggest the real thing.

The city of God is real. It is not mere ethereal. It is coming down, Rev. It's going to be here in this renewed earth. And we have to grapple with the objective fact and make it real subjectively in our hearts and minds in our hearts. Because expectation means everything for how you live into today. Expectation of what's coming means everything for how you live into the day. I was, Keller mentioned an illustration I heard recently about expectations. And he said, two men are captured and imprisoned and they're going to be thrown into the pit. Think something like the dark night rises, you know, the pit in India that he's thrown into. If you know it, it's a fantastic image. Never mind if you don't. They're told that they're going to, they're going to each serve a 10 year sentence. But right before being thrown into the pit, the dungeon for a 10 year sentence, one of them is told, your family is alive and they're out there and they're waiting for you and they need you and they will wait as long as it takes for your return. And the other is told, your family is dead, your wife and your children, they're gone.

[27 : 24] What do you think is going to happen to the experience of the two men in the pit? What's the difference? One, one will do everything he can because he has hope, because he sees the future, the concrete reality out in front of that is family is alive. The other, well, the other will submit to Gavorphin. They will either give up their own life or they will do nothing but seek ultimate self-satisfaction in any pleasure they can possibly find while in the present before they die. Expectation means everything and if you can move the objective fact of the city of God down to a real truth that exists in your heart that you live with day to day, it will put everything else into place. What it will do, it will prevent you from making the little things, the good things that God has given us in this life into crummy versions of the city of God. You see, God gives us good things but if you try to treat them like the city of God, they will become bad things in your life. There is not a single house by the sea, there is not a success or a good sex, money, power, or even our earthly family. That can be the city of God for us and if you make it into it, you'll destroy it because it can't bear the weight. And so expecting the fact that the city of God will put everything else into place in your life, Lewis, our father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant ends and hotels but he will not encourage us to mistake them for the true home.

Secondly and lastly and briefly, not only do you have to know that the city is not yet, you have to know that the city of God is now. You have to also know the city of God is now and when the Psalmist here says pray for the peace of Jerusalem, there's both a negative and a positive sense of shalom, the word that's being used here. The negative sense is really clear, pray for her security. In other words, she has enemies and you've got to fight for her security and we said last week, how do you seek the peace of the city of God? You have to fight the enemies that are in front of you in the Christian pilgrimage now and the three enemies are this, the New Testament, the world, the flesh, and the devil and the flesh is your disordered desires, not physicality but your disordered loves, your broken sinful desires. The world is everything that's wrong outside of you, the devil is the one that wants to destroy you and all I can say because of time is that you can start not to get grace but because you've been given grace with self-examination, with fighting the flesh. That is seeking the peace of the city of God, seeking the peace of your own. It's fighting the sinful desires, it's fighting the flesh and we do that in prayer, pray for the shalom of your own self. Scriptural meditation, the means of grace, fellowship with companion pilgrims but positively the city of God is now in this way. The New

Testament teaches that the city of God is both objectively future and not yet in the form of the church. The city of God as we know it now is the church. She is the pilgrim on the way. We are the church. You can't have a city without people and the city is the people on the way to the fact of the city of God and so what it means to pray for the peace of Jerusalem now for you and me is to seek the peace of the church in this life and this is how Paul puts it. Do not be infants any longer tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching, by cunning craftiness of people and deceitful scheming. Instead speak the truth in love and we will grow to become in every respect a mature body of him who is the head Jesus Christ. Now this is what Paul says. How do you seek the peace? How do you protect the church? How do you seek the shalom of the church? He says this, I'm just gonna summarize it. You protect her teaching, you protect what the body of Christ has always believed, you protect her from the bond breaking, soul destroying, deceit, gossip and scheming of human sin within the walls of the church. You protect her from that, that's how you seek her peace and you protect her by ceaseless speak the truth in love.

So pray for the peace of the wandering city of God, us the church. Let's pray for it now. Lord, we give thanks to you that you have brought us across the Red Sea, that you have given justification, yet we look forward to the wilderness wanderings ending in the true home, the city of God. So we pray for her peace, we pray for her well-being, her shalom, that you would protect us from the enemies of the gospel, that you would positively help us to speak truth and love to one another.

That we would love the body of Christ. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.