

## **“Free At Last!”**

### **Psalm 122**

June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020

A family talked Mother into getting a hamster as long as they took care of it. Two months later, as Mother was caring for Danny the hamster, she found a new home for him.

She broke the news to the children, and they took it quite well; but they did offer some comments. One of the children remarked, “He’s been around here a long time – we’ll miss him.” Mom agreed saying, “Yes, but he’s too much work for one person, and since I’m that one person, I say he goes.”

Another child offered, “Maybe if he wouldn’t eat so much and wouldn’t be so messy, we could keep him.” But Mom was firm. “It’s time to take Danny to his new home. Go get his cage.”

In tearful outrage the children shouted, “*Danny!?*” We thought you said, “*Daddy!*”

I didn’t have the best role model of what it is to be a godly father. With rare exception, my Dad didn’t attend Sunday worship in the house of the Lord with us. He worked on Sundays. Father’s Day for the Dietmeier’s meant *mom* taking us to Church.

Thankfully, the Lord led us to a church family when we moved to Alabama. Zach was nearly 5, and Molly wasn’t yet 1 year old. Having a loving church family was helpful in countless ways. I learned ‘on the job’ what a godly husband and father did. Though I sometimes struggled (and still do), I am grateful for our 8½ years with First Presbyterian Church in Prattville, Alabama.

Today, as we return to in-person worship in our beautiful sanctuary, we praise our God for bringing us through the last 14 weeks of coronavirus lockdown. Live-stream worship has been a lifesaver – no, make that a *soul* saver. We might not have endured shutdown to in-person gatherings without it. We owe a debt of gratitude to AJ, Colby, Pat, and Steph for working the technology; Steve, Don and Bob for their ministry on Sundays; the musicians – vocal and instrumental – for their ministry of music, to Jan for securing supplies, sanitizing the building and keeping things going operationally. Thanks, too, to the elders who led worship.

So, this is a day of celebration! We are open again for public worship! Yessss! And to help in that celebration, **Psalm 122** is our sermon text. That means we are taking a Sunday off from our sermon series in Romans. The last couple of Sundays we have mined some of the deep truths in the Bible – such biblical concepts as election and reprobation. It may be helpful to let those concepts continue percolating in our minds before we return to them next Sunday.

#### **Psalm 122:**

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD.’”

<sup>2</sup>Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!

<sup>3</sup>Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together,

<sup>4</sup>Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD,

To the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

<sup>5</sup> For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

<sup>6</sup> Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you.

<sup>7</sup> Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces."

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace *be* within you."

<sup>9</sup> Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good."

**Psalms 120-134** are known as Songs of Ascent. Remember, a psalm is a song. True, Psalms are often prayers as well. Israelites participating in annual worship feasts ascended the mountain on which Jerusalem was located and they sang psalms as they did so. In **1 Chronicles Chapters 21 & 22**, the Lord instructed David that the place on Mount Moriah where he had built the altar was to be the very site for the temple. And, you may remember Mount Moriah was the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac – the child of promise – as a sacrifice to the Lord.

The Holy City, Jerusalem, was the center of Israelite worship. And the temple was the centerpiece of Jerusalem. The feasts the ascending Israelites participated in were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

A brief outline of this psalm instructs us on some of the elements ('what') of worship, who it is that worships, and where to worship. That's 1) **what**; 2) **where**, and 3) **worship's** results.

While it is not technically an element of worship like praying, preaching, and singing are, "joy" is the spirit in which worship of God is to be conducted. Joy permeates the first verse of this psalm - "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD.'"

I thought of the words of the late Martin Luther King, Junior, and for a different reason, we are "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we're free at last!" We are free to return to the house of the Lord!

As soon as our last in-person service of worship concluded on March 15<sup>th</sup>, I began to look forward to the day when we would be free to be back together in this room. But, as the weeks from that point in time passed, I realized that physical spacing recommendations, a person's susceptibility to illness, age, and concern for others' health all had to be taken into account as well. What I thought was going to be a church-wide expression of joy early on is somewhat less than that, if not a lot less.

Even so, we have much for which to be joyful! After all, as Nehemiah puts it, "...the joy of the Lord is our strength." (**Nehemiah 8:10**) The psalmist describes God as his "exceeding joy." (**Psalms 43:4**) And, we remember that joy is a fruit of God's Holy Spirit – "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (**Galatians 5:22**)

Even if we don't feel like rejoicing, and I have often felt that way the last 3 1/2 months, we must understand that nothing can steal our joy ultimately because our joy is firmly rooted in the Person and works of Jesus Christ. It is because He has come to earth to save His people

from their sins that Christians can be joyful in the midst of difficulty.

This psalm also reveals these elements of worship:

- Giving of thanks (verse 4). Thanking God for what He has done for us is our most important task and our greatest privilege. (Wiersbe, 153)
- Verse 6 reveals another element of worship is prayer. In **Isaiah 56:7**, God says that His “house shall be called a house of prayer for the nations.” Jesus quotes this verse in **Mark 11:17** when He cleanses the temple of moneychangers.

Joy, giving thanks, and prayer are three elements of the biblical worship of God. All are to be evident in the service of worship. An application for Christians today is that we must pray for one another and for the ministry of the churches. We belong to each other, we need each other, and we must help each other. We must pray for peace within and among the churches. We must pray for the needs of our brothers and sisters, and we surely must pray for the lost. “A heart for God will surely be a heart filled with prayer.” (Wiersbe, 153-54)

**This psalm not only teaches us some of the elements of biblical worship, it also teaches us where to worship.** Verses 2, 3, and 6 mention Jerusalem is the place of worship. And, at the time of redemptive history – the Bible’s timeline – when this psalm was written and God’s people ascended to a temple, Jerusalem was the focus of their worship.

There are actually three ways, all with biblical warrant, to view Jerusalem. I find James Montgomery Boice’s discussion on this in his commentary to be very helpful. There is the earthly Jerusalem, spiritual (symbolic) Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem.

We’ve already seen, briefly, the earthly Jerusalem as the place where God’s people ascended to bring their worship of God. It was first mentioned as the city of which Melchizedek was king (“the king of Salem” in **Genesis 14:18**). The site was inhabited by people known as Jebusites since about 3,500 BC. It was a border town that belonged to none of the existing tribes of Israel, so King David made it a city that would belong to the entire nation. It became the capitol of the southern kingdom Judah after Israel divided.

As to the spiritual Jerusalem, “What Jerusalem was to the Israelite, the church is to the Christian.” (Kidner, 434) Our Jerusalem is the Church; the temple in Jerusalem looked beyond the types and shadows and the furniture and furnishings of the temple to Jesus Himself. Something much better came through Jesus’ work. He established a new, spiritual temple by His sacrificial death on the cross and He brought us not to Mount Sinai or to the old Mount Zion, but to a new Mount Zion and a New Jerusalem.

This is from **Hebrews Chapter 12**, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made

perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” (**Hebrews 12:22-24**)

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” (**Hebrews 12:28-29**)

One important parallel is how physical Jerusalem and spiritual Jerusalem were/are unifying places where people from various human tribes can come together and be one people. **Verse 4 of Psalm 122** mentions the tribes coming together; and the church is also a place where people of all ethnicities, nations, races, and denominations who’ve received the saving grace of Jesus Christ have their home in spiritual Jerusalem.

The name Jerusalem means “foundation or habitation of peace.” Peace is mentioned frequently in verses 6-8 of today’s text. As such, we do well to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, to pray for the physical Jerusalem of today surrounded by enemies, and to pray for spiritual Jerusalem, the Church, and the wars that erupt between professing believers in Jesus Christ. Let us look for ways to unify rather than divide!

The third way of seeing Jerusalem is the New Jerusalem. We catch a glimpse of that city in Revelation, where the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, descends from heaven. Consider **Revelation 21:11-14**, “having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: Now the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the 12 apostles of the Lamb.”

*And, the temple in the New Jerusalem?* John continues, “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” (**Revelation 21:22**)

Since Jesus has come to earth, God’s people can meet Him in Christ anywhere on the face of the earth. When God’s people gather, we see the Church. The House of the Lord is much more than brick and mortar; it is the collective people of God. Church isn’t merely a place you go or attend; it’s being part of the very people of God.

The House of the Lord and Father’s Day should go hand in hand. Executives of a greeting-card company decided to do something special for Mother’s Day. They set up a table in a federal prison, inviting inmates to send a free card to their Mom. The lines were so long they had to get more cards.

Due to the success of that event, they decided to do the same thing on Father’s Day, but this time, not one prisoner felt the need to send a card to his Dad. In fact, when asked about it, many had no idea who their fathers were.