

The City of God

A Sermon on Psalm 48

by
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1. Introduction

2. God Dwells Within The Midst of His People (vv. 1-3).

a. *God is greatly to be praised for His presence in Zion (vv. 1-2).*

i. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain”
(v. 1).

1. The psalmist opens with a call to praise the Lord on the basis of His greatness, and the basis of this praise is informed by the fact that God dwells among them.
 - a. They are called to give God the highest magnitude of praise they can give.
 - b. It is unreserved, unbridled, complete passion and joy in expressing the very greatness of God.
2. As for the location in which they are to praise God, it is “the city of God, His holy mountain,” which is Mount Zion, in Jerusalem.
 - a. The scope of the psalmist doesn’t simply focus on Mount Zion, but includes the whole of Jerusalem as a place of prominence above the rest of Israel, and even the rest of the world.
 - b. The reason why the Psalmist calls them to exuberant worship is because they are in the one place out of all the earth, where they are closest to the very presence of God Himself.

ii. “Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King” (v. 2).

1. The City of God is given several descriptors of what makes it so glorious among all the earth, but it is important to understand this is seen in light of God's special presence among them.
 - a. The first is that it is "beautiful in elevation," or more simply stated, it is beautiful in its lofty heights.
 - b. The second is that this mountain is the joy of the whole earth.
 - c. In the third description of it being in the far north, there is some wordplay being used to show God is supreme above any of the pagan gods.
2. The psalmist highlights the supreme sovereignty and authority of the One True God above all others when he talks of this being the city of the great King.
 - a. The Lord is not merely the great God of Israel, but the great Ruler and Authority over all of creation, and He puts all other gods to shame.
 - b. This is a pure expression of the sovereignty of God flowing from the city of Jerusalem and manifesting itself clearly to all corners of the earth.

b. God is the source of all strength and security (v. 3).

i. "God, in her palaces, has made Himself known as a stronghold" (v. 3).

1. Within the city itself, God has made Himself known as the sole source of their safety.
 - a. It is not that the city itself is said to be indestructible, but rather, that God is their place of refuge.
 - b. The city of Jerusalem serves a continual reminder of this fact because this is where God dwells among men.

2. The significance of this cannot be overstated—but the most important part of it is the glory of this city is found in God’s glory emanating from His presence.
- ii. There is rather wonderful imagery being shown in verse 3: the city itself is not indestructible, but God is, and He has made this known.
 1. He has continually shown them from one generation to the next just how safe and secure they are in the grasp of their God.
 - a. Throughout their long and often bitter history, it was the Lord who saved them in their time of need.
 - b. Jerusalem stands much like a monument built in memoriam for all the faithful works of God.
 2. The city stands as a testament to God’s gracious provision and His covenant.
 - a. Their confidence as they look out upon the city of Jerusalem is not like the other nations who look to their own provisions and protections.
 - b. Their confidence stems from the fact that God is with them at all times.

3. God Preserves His People From Their Enemies (vv. 4-8).

a. God defends His people from their enemies (vv. 4-7).

- i. “For, lo, the kings assembled themselves, they passed by together. They saw it, then they were amazed; they were terrified, they fled in alarm. Panic seized them there, aguish, as a woman in childbirth” (vv. 4-6).
 1. The description given here tells of a time where pagan kings came to battle against Jerusalem and fled in abject terror.
 2. While we do not know what it is that they saw, it is quite certain that this was a miraculous intervention from God on the day the Israelites needed Him most.

- a. It is possible God opened their eyes to see a legion of the heavenly host that surrounded the holy city, ready to demolish them in an instant.
 - b. It is even possible that God Himself appeared to them, or that He simply made His holy presence known and filled them with such dread.
- ii. “With the east wind you break the ships of Tarshish” (v. 7).
1. The people of Tarshish were known for their impressive and strong ships to carry trade cargo over the seas.
 2. The object lesson in destroying these ships is to simply show the strength and power of Yahweh.
 - a. The ships were seen as the epitome of strength and the cunning ingenuity of man; yet the Lord merely destroys them.
 - b. The point then is quite simple: God is not merely limited to the city of Jerusalem to demonstrate His power and authority.
- b. *God demonstrates His faithfulness to not let them fall (v. 8).*
- i. “As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God; God will establish her forever” (v. 8).
 1. There is a twofold approach to them understanding just how safe and secure God keeps them.
 - a. When the psalmist states, “We have heard...” he is alluding to the oral tradition that every Israelite family was commanded to participate in.
 - b. And these children, now grown men and women of great faith in their God, witness for themselves how God saves and protects His people.
 2. This city is the city belonging to the Lord of hosts; it is this city that belongs to their God.

- a. This description of God portrays Him as the One who holds all authority in His hands.
 - b. Yet it also portrays the intimate nature of their own relationship to this all-powerful, all-sovereign God.
- ii. Every victory they witness is but a foretaste of the final victory that God has promised, where He will secure this city forevermore and reign from the throne of David.
 - 1. Simultaneously, every defeat they see will be seen in light of the sure promise that God has made. It will not be a final defeat.
 - a. Every exile they faced would be a reminder to them that God would still restore the fortunes of His people, and subsequently, put an end to all that plagues them.
 - b. In every single aspect of life and death, they will see the sure promise of their God, and be reminded of His covenant faithfulness to perpetuate the place of His own choosing.
 - 2. As generations of the Israelites come and go, this promise only continued to develop all the more to point toward the day where Christ Himself would reign in this city.
 - a. Isaiah 52-53 speaks of a clarion call given to Israel for their forthcoming redemption from exile, where those defiled by the sin of unbelief and rebellion will not enter into the gates of Jerusalem ever again. The people would taste of redemption through the suffering servant.
 - b. Micah 4:1-5 speaks of this restoration this way: peace, security, and worship of God characterize all the land, emanating from Mount Zion to all the earth from that point through all eternity.

- c. Obadiah 1:15-21 depicts this from yet another angle, where Zion is said to be made holy once more, and it is from here that the nations are judged, the remnant restored, and all the kingdoms of the earth become the inheritance of the Lord—from that point through all eternity.
- d. Isaiah 54 describes this restoration of the City of God in the final sense, much like what we find in Revelation 21 where the New Jerusalem is described.
- e. All of this highlights God’s sure promise to bring about the end of the age; and this city is a vital part of that promise.

4. God Sustains His People in Lovingkindness Even Unto Death (vv. 9-14).

a. *God is greatly to be praised for His covenant faithfulness and righteousness (vv. 9-10).*

- i. “We have thought of Your lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of Your temple” (v. 9).
 - 1. The people have come into the temple of God where His Spirit resides, and contemplated the richness of His covenant faithfulness.
 - 2. The result of this, is once again that God is deserving of the highest magnitude of praise they have to offer.
- ii. “As is Your name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness” (v. 10).
 - 1. Just as God’s very name reaches every corner of the earth because all the earth belongs to Him—they seek to praise Him appropriately.
 - 2. Yet what they also seek to praise Him for is His right hand, which is full of righteousness.
 - a. The idea that the psalmist is highlighting here is one of God’s awesome power.

- b. The manner in which God has executed His power and might are in complete righteousness as well. It is utterly consistent with His Word.

b. *God is greatly to be praised for establishing the city of God (vv. 11-13).*

- i. “Let Mount Zion be glad, let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments”

(v. 11).

1. There are two jussives in this verse—and jussives carry the full weight of an imperative command. Those commands then are to be glad and to rejoice.
 - a. The two people groups identified are those on Mount Zion and the daughters of Judah.
 - b. The people on Mount Zion are all who lived within city, and the daughters of Judah are those in the suburbs that line the hill country.
2. The call for them to be glad and rejoice is set within the context of God protecting and preserving them from their enemies, as we saw in verses 4-8.
 - a. They are to see God’s faithfulness to their generation and bring Him the appropriate praise that He is due.
 - b. Yet as well also saw, it set within the context of knowing that God’s covenant faithfulness will lead to this city being established throughout all generations.

- ii. “Walk about Zion and go around her; count her towers; consider her ramparts; go through her palaces, that you may tell it to the next generation” (vv. 12-13).

1. As they look upon the city they are to consider how God has established her, protected her, and promises to sustain her throughout all of time.
 - a. Part and parcel to this is undoubtedly set within the framework of the One they know will reign from the throne of David forevermore.

- b. But the larger emphasis here is upon the fact that God is a saving God, who has preserved them.
 2. Yet the psalmist also places an emphasis on teaching future generations of this undeniable truth they observe.
 - a. The purpose for why they are to walk about the city of Jerusalem and examine it is not just so they can appreciate God's saving graces to them.
 - b. They are to take all of this in with an eye toward raising up the next generation of faithful Israelites.
- c. *God is our God, forever and ever (v. 14).*
 - i. "For such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death" (v. 14).
 1. Verse 14 has caused no shortage of controversy for many because the verse is referring to the City of Jerusalem when it says, "For such is God..."
 - a. However, the point is not that they view the city itself as divine.
 - b. When we consider all that has been said of God's faithfulness to these people and His love for the city of Jerusalem in particular, it is clear that the psalmist is referring to the fact that God is with them.
 2. The city is simply representative of all of the promises that God has made, and His abundant faithfulness to keep those promises.
 - ii. The joy they have in the city is a joy rooted in God Himself—for it is God who is theirs forever and ever, and it is God who will guide them until death.
 1. The rich significance of this psalm is that it leads us to see that the Israelites here contemplate every aspect of their existence, and recognize that all of it is the sheer gift of God.
 2. The people start by giving God the glory because He dwells within their midst.

- a. They continue to give God the glory because He has chosen this particular city out of all the rest on earth to make the hub of all social, political, and religious life.
- b. Yet it is not simply because God has done these things that they praise; they likewise give God the glory for making Himself known as their stronghold.
- c. From there they speak abundantly of God's covenant faithfulness to His promises and recognize: without God, every bit of it is meaningless.
- d. Yet He is there, guiding them, from all of life and death, and even into eternity.

5. Conclusion