



Favor Past, Favor Future

Psalm 132

Grace Church | 8.9.20

Our last psalm in our series today is the longest psalm of a group of psalms known as the songs of ascent, Psalms 120-134. These songs were sung by Israelites as they journeyed to Jerusalem for sacrifice and festivals. Faithful Israelites made the trek three times a year for the major festivals of worship. They were recited as they ascended the “hill of the Lord” up to the temple. They are pilgrim songs, sung as the Hebrew people climbed up to Jerusalem, the highest city in Palestine. Ultimately, the songs of ascent are about discipleship. They are about the way the Christian lives headed towards Zion, their heavenly home. A few weeks ago in Psalm 90 we talked about how as Christians we live a “refugee spirituality” on the road home back to God. These are songs for the road. And the road is not easy. Eugene Peterson titled his book on the Psalms of Ascent, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, because he saw these psalms as faithful markers of the long journey of discipleship in a culture that likes things fast and easy and instant. In the pilgrim world we live in now--all heading towards an unsure end--we need the wisdom of those who have gone before. We need the reminder of past favor, of past obedience, of past joy, to show us that the clouds do eventually break. And we need a reminder of future glory, a hope to light our days that shows us what is in store when the clouds break for the final time, never to gather again.

The Favor of the Past: David’s Vow (1-10)

As the pilgrims climb their way up to Jerusalem for a feast of worship, this psalm is part of their songs. And the interesting thing about this psalm is that their song has a historical aspect. **Verse 1**, we find the pilgrims asking for the favor of David. You see, the Israelites knew the power of the past: their prayers were big prayers and their songs were weighty songs. David was the one who was the anointed one of God, the king who held God’s favor. Who else would they appeal to as mediator on their way to worship? It was David who established the kingdom of Judah and Israel and made them a world power. It was David who brought the ark to Jerusalem. It was David who sang and made music to God, who was intimate with God himself. And the Israelites know a thing or two about favor. They know that the favor of the Lord is *transferable*, that the favor God had for David could be theirs if they asked for it. Our cultural identity is primarily one of individualism, we want to take responsibility for our own faults and get our own blessings. But the Israelites had no issue recognizing their mutual responsibility, and certainly no issue asking for the mutual blessing



of their past. So this is their prayer as they pilgrim to Jerusalem: remember for our sake your servant David.

What is it about David they ask God to remember? It's David's **vow** to construct a dwelling place for the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's very presence with his people. His vow is remembered by the Israelite pilgrims in **verses 2-5**.

To get a better picture of David's vow, we have to get a better understand of the historical picture. In the early chapters of 2 Samuel we find David anointed king of Judah after the death of Saul. The tribe of Judah respects David greatly and recognizes GOD's hand on him, and so they anoint him as their king. He reigns over Judah with his capital at Hebron for seven years. But remember that David was Saul's sworn enemy. So all those who were loyal to Saul in Israel have a harder time coming to terms with David's ascent to the throne of Judah and their is conflict between David's house and Saul's descendants. Eventually, after a few bloody accounts of rebellion and murder, the people of Israel realize David's anointing, and the elders covenant with him to make him King over all Israel and Judah. David's first move as king of Israel is to move his capital city to Jerusalem which he captures from the Jebusites. The new capital is dubbed "the City of David" and grows in might and glory. But one thing is missing from Jerusalem: the ark of the covenant. David makes quick work of that.

David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

Psalms 132 shows us David's bringing of the ark to Jerusalem was not primarily a political move, meant to establish his dominion and adorn his new capital. No, it was primarily a worshipful move. David *vowed* to not nest until the ark of God had its resting place. David was a man on a mission. He admits in Psalm 69:9 that "Zeal for God's house consumed him". The hardships of David in view of verse 1 here are most likely the trials he faced when bringing the ark to Jerusalem. Although David was successful in bringing the Ark, it wasn't without stress. We remember the tragedy of Uzzah, who touched the ark and was consumed by the holiness of God. This was holy work. No wonder David danced with uninhibited joy as the ark made its way through the streets: finally it had come to David's city, and all the people of Israel could come and worship in the tent of the ark again.

The remembrance of **verses 6-7** further recounts the day that David brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. Previously, David and his men heard of the whereabouts of the ark while they were hiding out in the region of Ephrathah. This is a large region which includes the city of Bethlehem, but the phrase "fields of Jaar" helps us to clarify what region we are referencing: the city of Kiriath-Jaerim. "Jaerim" is simply the plural of "Jaar", which means "woods". And it's here in the city of woods that the Ark dwelt for years, relatively hidden, after being taken back from the



Philistines. The psalm is rejoicing in the reality that although previously the ark rested in obscurity, now it has been brought to the great city where all can pilgrim to the dwelling place of God for worship. There was no greater physical representation of God's favor and might to the Israelites than a sight of the Ark of the Covenant. It was God's "footstool" on Earth. No longer was God's presence nomadic, the period of exile had finally and fully been brought to an end, the new Davidic era of God's favor had come.

The prayer of the people now is found in **verses 8-10**. As the ark has found its home in Jerusalem, these lines act as a prayer of commitment. It calls on God to do what only he can do: bring his presence to rest in the tabernacle of the ark, adorn the priests with the righteousness required to enter into the holy of holies and attend to the ark, and equip the people with the joy of worship.

So Church, what do we learn from the story of David and the Ark from this psalm?

The significance of God's presence. The entrance of the ark into Jerusalem was the epitome of worship. Remember that not only was the ark of the covenant which represents God's presence captured by the Philistines and moved from city to city where most Israelites could never visit its dwelling place, even if they could go to the tabernacle they were prevented from getting close to the ark by the holy of holies. So for the ark to be paraded out in public? This was a once in a generation event: they would have done anything for just a glimpse. We must consider the significance of God's presence in our own lives. The Israelites made hard pilgrimages to Jerusalem just to be near God's presence in the ark. What sacrifices are we willing to make to worship God in his holiness? How highly do we value the gathering of God's people? What significance do we place on personal devotion and prayer? Do we take the presence of God by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for granted? Or are we eager to come into his courts with joy and dancing and thanksgiving, eager to come with the saints to worship together?

The importance of rightful vows. It was David's zeal and his bold vow that brought about this great procession of the Ark. God used his fervor for his holy purposes. Have you ever made a vow to God? Jesus warns us against the foolishness of earthly vows in Matthew 5, saying: "Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." Jesus commands us to let our yes be yes and our no be no. Why? Because he knows that our vows are typically made for our own gain. We swear by something we cannot control so that we appear more sincere. But if we were really people of sincerity and truth, our simple yes and no would be enough. But not all vows are bad. We make marriage vows, we commit to our church in membership, or to other relationships or jobs or situations. But what about vows to God? Jesus makes no mention of these vows. I believe that in David we have an example of what it means to make a rightful vow to God. Typically our vows to God are only negative, and become legalistic: "I won't do this again, etc." But how often do we pray that God would give us the same zeal as David? Some of us need to pray for enough zeal to dare to make sincere vows before God. Not negative, but positive. We need more men who are willing to vow to be faithful to their purity no matter what lustful temptation comes, more women who vow to be faithful to honesty no matter what temptation to gossip or slander comes. We need some



members who are called by God to commit to radical advocacy for the unborn, for the poor, for those in sexual slavery, for racial justice, for orphans, for those who seek justice from oppressors. And we need more men and women who vow before God to use their vocations for his glory instead of their own gain only. Where is God stirring your zeal before him?

The power of past joys. The moment of the ark's entrance into Jerusalem was so powerful that it was used as a song of ascent for years afterwards by Israelite pilgrims. The significance of past joys keep us moving forward in the present. Christians are people of remembrance. We look constantly to God's faithfulness as a means of carrying on in hope when the present feels scary and uncertain. Eugene Peterson says it like this:

“What would we think of a pollster who issued a definitive report on how the American people felt about a new television special, if we discovered later that he had interviewed only one person who saw only ten minutes of the program? We would dismiss the conclusions as frivolous. Yet that is exactly the kind of evidence that too many Christians accept as the final truth about many much more important matters... The only person they consult is themselves, and the only experience they evaluate is the most recent ten minutes. But a Christian who has David in his bones, Jeremiah in his bloodstream, Paul in his fingertips and Christ in his heart will know how much and how little value to put on his own momentary feelings and the experience of the past week.¹

In other words: if you want to see clearly the present, you need the remembrance of the past. The past keeps us sane, it helps us remember that this pandemic may last a year, but God has been faithful for thousands of years to thousands of people in thousands of harder situations. When we evaluate our reality only in the present, we run the risk of judging eternal matters on the experience of ten minutes. We need the wisdom of those who have gone before, the zeal of David, the favor of that anointed King.

But if all we had was the favor of the past, we would be pitiable people. Our sobriety of the past might gain us the ability to not fall into foolish conspiracy theories, but we unless we have a favor that lasts into the future, we could offer no hope. “It doesn't last forever” is a bad hope. What happens when it is over? We just wait for the next trial to come? No: the gospel of Jesus Christ breaks into our night not just with an example of past favor, but the hope of future favor. Not only does David make a vow, God does. And unlike David's, God's vow has an eternal future.

The Favor of the Future: God's Vow (11-18)

Bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem was not enough for David's zeal. He also desired a place for the Ark to dwell, a glorious temple of the Lord.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*



Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.”

What is interesting is not David’s heart. It makes sense that someone so consumed with zeal for the house of the lord would not be content with a tent but desired a temple. What is interesting is how God responds to David.

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling... Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

What is God’s response to David’s vow? He makes a vow of his own. We see this vow remembered by the pilgrims of Israel in **verses 11-12** of our text. Notice the language of the psalm. Remember this would be recited and sung together. “A sure Oath, From which he will not turn back”—there is assurance in these words. David’s oath is noble, but God’s oath is certain.

From this psalm of ascent we determine that God is ultimately the one who makes and brings the promise of his presence for his people. While it is helpful to look for the past for perspective, only by looking to the eternal can we have everlasting hope. Friends, here is where we encounter with crystal clarity the good news of the gospel in our text. All the promises of God to David have their yes and amen in Jesus Christ. The angel of the Lord promises Mary in the incarnation of Christ that her child will be the Son of God and the inheritor of the throne of David. So we read in Luke 1:33, “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end”. The promise of God to give David an eternal kingdom is only fulfilled by an eternal king. In Jesus Christ, we call upon not just the favor of the Lord on David like the Israelites do, we call upon the favor of the Lord of Jesus Christ. The good news of the gospel is that in our union with Christ by faith we have received all that Jesus has, and the favor of the Lord rests upon us. In Christ, the Father does not look on you with disgust or disappointment, he only looks on you with favor. Let me show you how the promises of 13-18 foreshadow a wealth of gospel doctrine that we receive in Christ.

First, we have the doctrine of **election**. Notice the sovereignty of God on display in **verse 13**. David thought he chose Jerusalem as the place of the Lord, but really it was God choosing all along.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.



Remember when I said at the beginning that the favor bestowed on David was being prayed for by the Israelites because they knew it was *transferable*? The same is true for the Christian. The good news is that through no good deed of our own, God chose his people *in Christ* before the foundation of the world. Why? To be holy and blameless before him. To have favor. Here is the mystery of salvation: just as David chose Jerusalem as the resting place of the Ark, and the psalmist confirms that it was God's choice, so we come to Christ by faith with confidence that it is God who calls and saves and redeems his people. This is such good news, because it removes any margin for error. If we come to God by Christ, we come the right and only way. The blessings that we receive in Christ are due to God's work. We can rest in knowing that he knows what he is doing.

In verse **13-14** we also find the doctrine of ***the indwelling of the Holy Spirit***. The promise to David is that God will dwell in this house with him. An amazing promise, no doubt. But the fulfillment of that promise is even greater. Jesus' title of "Christ" is not arbitrary. It means "anointed". Jesus Christ is filled and anointed with the Spirit of God in the flesh, and guess what he promises will happen after his death and resurrection? That anointing of the Spirit, that indwelling, will be given to all those who believe in him. And so from Pentecost until eternity, every one who calls on the name of Jesus is given not just the favor of God to surround them but the very presence of God within them. Again Ephesians 2 tells us that "In [Christ] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

In verse **14** we see a picture of the doctrine of ***perseverance***. The resting place of God is in Zion forever, says that psalmist. The book of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 12 that in Christ we come into Zion, the city of the living God. By means of Christ sacrifice, we know longer have to chase the ark of the covenant or make the trek to the Holy City. God came to us to tabernacle in our hearts, and this presence is forever. God will no sooner desert you than he would desert his own son.

Verse 15 shows us a picture of the doctrine of ***sufficiency***. The promise to the city of Zion, those who dwell with the presence of God, is that every need they have will be provided for. So it is with every Christian> When you call on the name of Christ by faith and come into the presence of God, you have everything you need. God provides for you by his Word, where he speaks and shows himself, ultimately pointing you towards the living Word, Jesus Christ, who is the self-proclaimed "bread of life."

Verse 16 gives a marvelous picture of the doctrine of ***imputed righteousness***. God promises to clothe the priests with his salvation, implying a saving from death and sin. It was so vital to the OT sacrificial system that the priests of God were holy. God's promise in Zion is to make his priests holy by clothing them himself. In the gospel, we remember that 1 Peter 2:9 calls all believers "a royal priesthood." we are made priests after our high priest, Jesus Christ. And the holiness required to stand before God as a priest likewise does not come from us. It comes from Christ himself, who is salvation from God. He clothes us his own righteousness, as 2 Corinthians 5 says: "he became sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The



doctrine of imputed righteousness leads to the everlasting joy of **verse 16**. In Christ's robes of righteousness, we are saints, made holy before God, and our song in the presence of God is always joy continually.

Verse 17 shows us the doctrine of *sanctification*. The horn sprouting for David is the symbol of David's increasing power and glory. The horn in the ancient world was seen as the symbol of growth and nourishment. Like a young stag, David's horn would grow until he was strong and powerful. The connotation for God's future favor is that the line of David would grow until the horns sprouted fully in Christ, the Son of David who perfectly embodied power and glory. For the Christian, we get the promise of David and of Christ. As we become new creations, God grows his church like a sprouting horn into full maturity. The longer you follow Jesus, by God's grace the closer you get to the perfection of home. "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Verse 17 also provides a picture into the gospel doctrine of *illumination*. David was a light to the people of Israel, an example to follow. The Christ is the light of the world, and as he sends his Spirit to us we become lights, as the Word of God is illuminated to us and world sees our unique lives as witnesses to the light and life of Jesus, the anointed one of God.

Finally, **verse 18** paints the scene of the doctrine of *glorification*. The promise to David was that he will wear the crown of glory and favor of God while his enemies would be covered in shame. On the cross, Christ accomplished his victory, and at the empty tomb he proved his victory. The enemies of God: sin and Satan, were clothed with shame then and there is no going back for them. One day, Jesus will return and we will see his with his crown, shining in victory over his enemies, all his glory radiating out. And the good news for us is that if we are in Christ, his glory will be our glory. As 2 Tim 2:12 tells us, if we endure with him to the end, we will reign with him. His glory will be our glory, swallowed up in triune love we will shine with him as our enemy sin is finally put to eternal shame.

Friends, I want you to see that I have not over theologized this text. As the Israelites marched up to Jerusalem, they sang of the favor of David. They praised God for his faithfulness to David, and prayed that they could receive that blessing from him. But a greater David has come, and so as we make our way to Jerusalem the heavenly city, our song of ascent is similar. We praise God for his faithfulness to Christ, our better David, and we pray for the same favor. We recognize that through Jesus God did what could never happen through David. He brought chose us to carry the Spirit of God. We no longer look to the ark of the covenant, we are God's ark. He has provided for us everything we need, and he will keep us to the end. He will make us grow in holiness and strength, just as he has clothed us with his own holiness forever. He will guide our path and lead us to be a light for the nations, and ultimately he will bring us to glory and honor to reign with him.

The promises of this psalm are staggering when they are viewed in light of the gospel. Not only do we have favor of the past to ground us, we have the favor of the future to bring us forward into the great hope of tomorrow. Let me leave you with a few pastoral charges.



1. **Let the power of God's vow lead you towards zeal for his house.** Don't underestimate what God wants to accomplish with your normal life. The path of ascent is a purposeful one. You carry the presence of God and the power of God: don't settle for apathy.
2. **When your perspective of life is limited, remember God's past favor.** This pandemic or your current stress is only 10 minutes in the timeline of humanity. Look back and see how God has moved in his church and his people, and remember that suffering is for a moment.
3. **When you doubt your future, remember God's vow.** God promised David what he fulfilled in Christ. Your future is secure and your favor in Jesus is forever. We are going to come out of this stronger, because Christ is building his church and bringing sanctification and eventual glorification.

