



# GRACE CHURCH

## **Zeal for God's House**

Psalm 132

Grace Church | 8.6.23

In the early 2000s, there were two popular worship songs sung often in youth group that have always stuck with me. Maybe I'm only speaking to a small group here—I think Dave was probably a youth pastor when these songs were popular, just recently he also used a Redman song in illustration!—but you can look them up after this if you aren't familiar. Both of these songs together capture the heart of this Psalm of Ascent: a story of undignified zeal for God's house. One song you probably know if you have been in the church for a while, it's called "Better is One Day" by Matt Redman. It's based on Psalm 84: "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere". Believe it or not, I used to lead worship for youth group.

The second song is called "Undignified", also by Matt Redman, but covered by David Crowder Band. It was a song we danced to, since it was a youthful reflection on a story of David, when he danced half-naked before the Lord and in response to his critics said "I will become even more undignified" before God. Here are some of the lyrics:

I will dance I will sing  
To be mad for my King  
Nothing Lord is hindering this passion in my soul

And I'll become even more undignified than this  
Some may say it's foolishness  
But I'll become even more undignified than this  
Leave my pride by my side

Then I kid you not, the bridge is just a repetition of "LA LA LA LA LA, HEY".

Now bear with me here: when in middle school I sang this "Undignified" song and danced around with our goateed youth leader, it was fun. It was kind of cool too, in a silly way. But in truth, we were doing something very ancient. We were reenacting a story of God's faithfulness. Which is what the ancient Israelites, marching to Jerusalem, are doing when they recite and sing Psalm 132. Most scholars believe a common practice was to use this Psalm as a "ritual reenactment" of the story of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem. As they reenacted, they would dance and sing, just like I did at youth group, putting themselves in David's shoes and being filled up with zeal for God's presence.



In our study of the Psalms of Ascents, this song may seem a bit out of place. It's far longer than any other Psalm of Ascent. And while most of the Psalms are personal prayers for help, provision, or prayers of lament, humility, and need, this prayer is more like a story. Notice the curious nature of how the prayer begins in **verse 1**, not praying that we would remember, but that God would remember. Can God forget anything?

The poet is not calling on God to mentally ascend to a certain memory, but to be faithful to his promises. He is calling on God to do what God said he would do—to remember his covenant to love his people to the end. And the reason is simple: as the Israelites go up to Jerusalem, they don't want it to be in vain. As they climb the mountain to the place of worship, they want to be able to be undignified, to worship in God's presence exposed and unashamed, and not to be turned away.

For an Israelite, worshiping at the temple was the height of religious experience. To be hindered from that, to be shut out of God's presence, would be devastating, akin to being kicked out of your own family. So their question was this: *when we approach God with zealous worship, will he turn his face away?*

## **The Appeal for Presence**

*Can we approach God without apprehension, or will he turn his face away?*

I'd like to help you see this morning that our question is very similar. There may be many reasons you are here today, but the reality is that when the people of God get together, it's to come into the presence of God. You were created for the presence of God—your ancestors Adam and Eve enjoyed it without separation—and the glory of heaven is being *with* God. And the offer of Christianity, of prayer and the church, of the Bible and the believer next to you, is that you can meet with God. At the beginning of our service, we even told you this: the call to worship is God saying: "Come on in and get to know me!"

Which should, I'd think, excite us. It should make us a little undignified (with our clothes on, of course), to know that we have been welcomed to worship the God of the universe. But the reality is, our normal response to the idea of approaching God is more of a light head nod, an acceptable "hmm, sounds nice". Where are the zealous and undignified ones among us?

And of course, there are degrees to this. Some of us have been created by God with a certain emotional bandwidth that is different from others. To be undignified before God might not look the same for everyone. Similarly, what looks like a display of "undignified" worship before God by someone might just be a show, or a personality trait of exhibition.

This is because zealous worship of God is not just an expression of the body, but of the heart. It includes both, but it starts deeper than raising your hands or singing loudly. Psalm 84 says: "My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my *heart and flesh* sing for joy to the living God."



David understood this. Early in his reign, after he conquers Jerusalem and establishes at his capital, the King's City, he remembers something important he has forgotten about, something neglected: the ark of the covenant. The Ark was the symbol of God's presence on earth, but for years it had been wandering, place to place, with no home. When David sends for it, it is in the obscurity of Kiriath-jearim. In **verse 6**, we are let into the picture. "Ephraim" is another word for the region of Jerusalem. So they heard of the ark in Jerusalem, and it was found in Jaar, which is plural for "Jearim". "Fields of Jaar" is equivalent to saying "woody fields" (Jaar means wood), or more colloquially, "back woods". The ark was in the middle of nowhere.

When David finds out where it is, he vows, as this Psalm expresses, not to rest or sleep until he brings it to Jerusalem. In **verse 2** and in **verse 5**, God is called "the mighty one of Jacob", which calls to mind his strength in battle, the one who has done mighty things for Israel. The strong God needs an appropriate house. David's soul was not at rest until he could provide that.

But zeal is not easy. In **verse 1**, the prayer, or appeal, for God's presence is that God would remember David's *hardship*. This isn't speaking primarily about his wanderings in the desert or how he was chased by Saul, but his hardship in bringing the ark to Jerusalem. Before David danced undignified as the ark came into Jerusalem, he had to endure hardship. Before he had wise zeal, he had foolish mistakes that ended in tragedy. Let's examine through the text a few reasons we may feel a lack of zeal before God, an apprehension or even an apathy when it comes to worshipping God. **First is that we've tried zeal in the past, and it seemed to make things worse.**

When David first tries to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, he fails miserably. This is recorded in 1 Chronicles 13. He starts out with zeal and dancing, but the end of the story is fear and trepidation.

And they carried the ark of God on a new cart, from the house of Abinadab, and Uzzah and Ahio were driving the cart. And David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets.

And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to take hold of the ark, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark, and he died there before God. And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah... And David was afraid of God that day, and he said, "How can I bring the ark of God home to me?" So David did not take the ark home into the city of David.

Uzzah's fate may seem harsh to you, but the point is that David did not follow God's protocol. He had zeal, but not the right kind of zeal. Instead of appointing levites to carry the ark poles as they were supposed to, he chose common men, and it ends in tragedy. David's vow had to last another three years.

The seriousness of God's presence, modeled here in this story, should cause us to have a healthy kind of fear, a seriousness about God's holiness, but not apprehension. David's mistake was not his



zeal, it was his lack of concern for God's holiness. In 1 Chronicles 13, David gathers a council to decide if they should bring the ark to Jerusalem. 1 Chronicles 13:4 says that "All the assembly agreed to do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people." They made the decision based on what was right in their eyes: no mention of prayer, seeking God's will. Their intentions may have been honorable, but they forgot to factor God into the equation.

Often this is how we approach zeal for God. The zeal seems right in *our* eyes: we get so excited about the things of God, we forget God. We are zealous about our plans *for* God, but we have neglected to seek God himself. Often I hear this lament from younger Christians, who used to be zealous and fervent but now feel apathetic. The problem is not with their intentions, but their priorities. Instead of learning to depend on God, to trust him, to listen to him, to seek his will in prayer and patience, to love his word and his wisdom, they pointed their zealousness immediately to what they could do and accomplish *for* God.

Often this leads to tragedy, to broken relationships, to disenchantment with God or the church. But it's that tragedy that God may be using to remind you: "you can't do this your way. Point your zeal first not to what you can do for me, but to a longing in your soul for my presence." Pointing your zeal to doing things *God's way*, is harder and often longer and often seems foolish. But notice what happens next time David takes the ark up to Jerusalem, in 1 Chronicles 15:

Then David said that no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him forever... So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. And the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord.

A zeal "according to the Word of the Lord" is a zeal that will end in rejoicing, not in tragedy. Often we believe that we have tried zeal and seen it fail, but really we have just tried headstrong foolishness. True zealousness is a fervor for doing, as Francis Schaeffer put it, "God's work in God's way."

Why is zeal so hard? **Secondly, it might be because we believe we are too poor, too sinful, or too unrighteous to be welcomed by God.** Why get all excited to worship and come before God, if we believe there is a good chance we will get rejected? So apathy and apprehension set in. Often this is compounded by how we've been treated by other Christians who have also misunderstood zeal for God. Claiming a right desire to be zealous for the righteousness of God, far too many Christians fall into a wrong desire to withhold the presence of God from those that don't meet certain legalistic demands. If you don't wash up right, you can't come to the table.

This is wrong on many levels. Firstly, it does not accord with the witness of Jesus himself. Jesus had intense zeal for God's house, it *consumed* him, the Scriptures say. When he makes a whip and clears out money changers and vendors from the temple, he is showing that he is serious about the holiness of God. But at the same time, Jesus models a radical welcome for sinners, outsiders, poor



and unclean. The only ones he turns away are the self-righteous, not the needy. Even in that story of the temple, his anger stems from the fact that through unjust business practices, the merchants were excluding foreigners and the poor from God's house! If you feel too poor, needy, foreign, or sinful to come undignified into God's house, read the stories of Jesus. You are just who he yearns to accept and welcome.

Righteousness is required to enter in before God, this is true. We do need a right understanding of God's holiness. Notice the prayer of **verse 9**, and in David's story, the joy of the saints comes *after* the clothing of righteousness. But I want to say this very clearly. The righteousness required to zealously approach God is not self-righteousness. It does not come from meeting moral, cultural, or economic standards. The righteousness required to zealously approach God's presence is an *alien* righteousness, a righteousness that isn't our own but comes from outside of us. If we want to truly be zealous and undignified before God, we need help.

Which is exactly what this psalm is preaching. The role of David for the Israelites headed for worship is that of forerunner, model, and intermediary. **Verse 1**, God is called to remember his promises "in David's favor". The Israelites headed towards Jerusalem are pleading God's favor on the basis of David's status. This is one of the oldest Psalms in the Bible. We know this because it is quoted in 2 Chronicles 6, when Solomon is consecrating the new temple. Solomon calls on the faithfulness of God to David, which is what is happening in **verse 10**. Solomon is the anointed one, the king of Israel, and his petition, based on his Father's favor, is that God would keep Solomon's face oriented towards the presence of God.

This is likewise our petition. We ask God—keep my face on you. Keep my zeal for you. And in asking this, we are also asking God, "don't turn your face from me". But what I want you to see is that the answer to this appeal for presence, this petition for zeal, is not internal. The answer is not reolite law-keeping or self-motivation. The answer is found in one, who like David, was the great anointed one, who endured hardships and swore to the Lord. But this anointed king is greater than David—he doesn't appeal on behalf of David's favor, he *is* David's answer. He doesn't just appeal to the promise of God, he *is* the promise of God. I am speaking, of course, of Jesus Christ, who called himself "the Son of David", the fulfillment of God's promises to David and the true king of the universe.

## **The Answer of Promise**

*The acceptance and favor of David's Son is passed down to us through the covenant.*

God's response to the petition of presence for his people is to point them to his promises. That promise starts with David. Bracken preached this story this spring actually. It's fascinating that when David says to God "I want to build you a house", God's response is "no, I will build you a house". This is the covenant, or binding promise, that God makes with David in **verses 11-12**.



But it's not just David who has been chosen, it's also David's city, Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem, that receives a promise. This is always how it happens with righteous or blessed kings. When they flourish, their kingdoms flourish. So the people of Israel know that if God made a good promise to David, then they get to be a part of that promise as the inhabitants of David's city.

Which is how it works with us. The great news that true Christianity offers, that no other religion or belief can, is that by sheer grace we inherit the blessings of God through a representative. If we have a good king, we get all the good stuff of the kingdom. And what our faith teaches is that God wasn't satisfied with any king or any kingdom. David brought great blessing, but David was flawed. Remember when in his lust for power he takes Bathsheba for himself and betrays and kills her husband, God makes sure to note the consequences of David's sin. Although his line *will* continue, his sons will be wicked and always at war with one another. So David will have to wait for a future ancestor to fulfill his promise.

So God isn't satisfied with *any* son of David, but instead sends *the* Son of David, his son, the God-man Jesus. He is the one who truly, **verse 12**, keeps covenant or obeys God truly, with perfect zeal and wisdom. And Jesus, the true king, establishes a city, a true Jerusalem, where God will dwell forever. This is the new heavens and earth, that hope we have for a place where we can once again be with God.

Jesus is the one spoken of in **verse 17**, the horn of God that pronounces victory and joy, the lamp of God that shows us the way to God, and the one who is crowned with a crown like the sun, triumphing over and shaming all the darkness.

Notice then how the promise of Jesus the king speaks to our desires to come to God with undignified zeal. We are given to apathy because we've tried to be zealous for God, but screwed it up. We were zealous for the wrong things, unable to really listen to God's word and wait on God's will. But Jesus is the son who, **verse 12**, keeps the testimonies of God. He is perfectly obedient, doing the hard work of God in God's way—going all the way to the cross—not unwillingly, but lovingly, even with joy as Hebrews says. His zeal is never misdirected or not in accordance with God's word, because he is the word of God, perfectly in tune with the Father, his very image. And so his zealousness never leads to tragedy, but always leads to joy. Trusting Jesus will never let you down. Uzzah died because of David's miscalculated zeal. Jesus died already, absorbing the holiness of God, so that following him will never lead to tragic death but only life. When you trust Jesus the king, you can do so undignified.

And to our objection that we are too poor, sinful, or weird to come to God with undignified zeal, Jesus' kingship also has an answer. **Verse 15**, all who come to him are satisfied, and the poor are blessed abundantly. He doesn't cast any out, there are no qualifiers to his provision. **Verse 16**, he answers the prayer from earlier: he clothes us with righteousness, salvation from sin. He gives us his standing before God, his kingly robes, in exchange for our filthy ones, so that in righteousness we can shout for joy.



The point, very simply, is that Jesus is the true Davidic king who brings the presence of God. Something remarkable happens in **verse 12**, in the promise of David. God says that the “sons of the covenant keepers” will sit on the throne forever. Meaning that if there is a son of David who *really* keeps God’s covenant, then those who follow after him will also be secure forever. And this is where the gospel of Jesus goes nuclear. It’s not simply that we are allowed to sit under king Jesus as citizens of his kingdom. “Christ” means “anointed one”. And when we repent of our sin and follow Jesus, we are so swallowed up in Jesus that Paul says we are “in him” and so, like in **verse 10**, we are also “little Christs” or “little anointed ones”, Christians, who are calling out to God: “do not turn away our face!”

But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. *John 1:12*

If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him *2 Timothy 2:12*

Q. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ, and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity.

*Heidelberg Catechism, #32*

If you are in Jesus, if you put your trust in him, then you now reign with Christ. All the acceptance and favor of Jesus rests on you. In fact, the *very presence* of God, the Spirit of Jesus, dwells in you. David danced before the ark of the covenant, but Jesus dances before *you* as he ushers you to your final resting place before God, the heavenly city where he reigns and you are right beside him.

Remember how the song “Undignified” taught me in middle school to reenact the zeal of David? We also have a way that we reenact the zeal of Jesus every week. It’s called the Lord’s Supper. In the supper, we re-enact the undignified (shameful) death of Jesus as he brings us to God. Jesus didn’t just strip off his robe, he went totally naked and shamed to the cross. But in his resurrection, he rose in victory so that we who die to ourselves can rise with him.

If this is true, than Christian, little Christ, you have no reason to be ashamed. You have no reason to come timidly to God. You have every reason to shout, to raise your head and your hands, and worship with zeal and fervor. Let’s do so now in this supper.

