

The City of God

Psalm 87

Series: Psalms
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Delivered at Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida
August 11, 2013

Psalm 48 — **Call to Worship.**

INTRO:

Consider for a moment: If you got into a conversation with someone, a person you just met, and they said: “Tell me about yourself.” What would you say?

What defines you as a person? How would you identify yourself to others? What labels would you use? What matters to you the most?

Maybe it’s being a Mom or Dad.

Maybe it’s being an American.

Maybe you’re a fan of an athlete or a sports team.

Maybe it’s a job that you find rewarding or a hobby that especially interests you.

You like to tell people, I’m a musician, an artist, a writer, a computer geek...

AND if they were then to examine your life, what would they find?

What labels would stick? What do you talk about most?

What do you spend your time doing? Where do your thoughts go?

Where do you spend your money? What do you invest in?

There are many things in this life that compete for our interest and for our time. Many of them are good things. But for a Christian, for one who is committed to following Jesus as Lord, there is one thing that rises above all others, one thing that is primary.

What should define us above all else and set the contours of our lives is belonging to God and to His people. As Christians we are born again and placed into a family—members together of the body of Christ. **Our lives together are bound up in Christ and His church.**

Open your Bibles this morning to Psalm 87.

This is a psalm that celebrates our identity with God and God’s identity with us—His people. God has rescued us from the sin that enslaved us. And He has brought us together as His church for His glory and praise. As His people, we are now rooted and refreshed in Him alone.

If you are taking notes this morning, I want to point out five truths from this psalm that display this identity between God and His people:

- 1) God establishes His people (1, 5b)
- 2) God loves His people (2)
- 3) God makes His people a praise (3)
- 4) God makes even His enemies to be His people (4–6)
- 5) Belonging to God and His people is our wellspring (7)

Let's begin by reading the psalm together [READ Psalm 87]

A PSALM OF THE SONS OF KORAH. A SONG.

Psalms 87:1 On the holy mount stands the city he founded;
2 the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.
3 Glorious things of you are spoken,
O city of God. Selah

Psalms 87:4 Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—
"This one was born there," they say.
5 And of Zion it shall be said,
"This one and that one were born in her"
for the Most High himself will establish her.
6 The LORD records as he registers the peoples,
"This one was born there." Selah

Psalms 87:7 Singers and dancers alike say,
"All my springs are in you."

We see all through this psalm how God has identified and invested Himself with His people.

Notice first —

1. God establishes His people (1, 5b)

Psalms 87:1 On the holy mount stands the city he **founded**;

And down near the end of verse 5 we read of Zion

Psalm 87:5 ...for the Most High himself **will establish** her.

Psalm 87 is one of the Songs of Zion. These are psalms that speak of Mount Zion, the city of God. They include this psalm —as well as Psalm 46, 48 76, 84 and 122.

Psalm 48 (that we read earlier as our call to worship) describes the beauty and joy of this city.

Psalms 48:1	Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God!
2	His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.
3	Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress.

Here God is praised! Here God makes Himself known! Here is joy and beauty beyond measure. But what is Zion? What is this city that God has founded?

The first time Mount Zion is mentioned in Scripture is in 2 Samuel 5. In verse 6 King David and his men go to Jerusalem to fight against the Jebusites, who were then the inhabitants of the city. In verse 7 we read, "David took the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David."

In the next chapter of 2nd Samuel (chapter 6) David brings the Ark of the Covenant into the city in a triumphal celebration. As we saw a few weeks ago in our study through Exodus, the Ark of the Covenant represented God's presence with His people—it was placed in the holiest place in the tabernacle (and eventually in the Temple with Solomon in 1 Kings 8).

So Jerusalem, or Zion, with the Temple and the Ark, became known as the dwelling place of God. In the Old Testament it was the physical city, set up in the high elevations of Israel.

It was here in these hills that God made known His work of redemption:

In this place Abraham (whose offspring would be a blessing to the nations) was told to offer Isaac.

David conquered, built his palace and ruled as king.

Solomon later built the Temple as the gathering place for worship and representation of God's abiding presence with His Israel

Here worship was offered to God day after day, year after year, with the festivals and sacrifices that pointed God's people to His work of redemption.

And outside the gates of this city, Jesus was taken and crucified; here He died, was buried and rose again on the third day

Jerusalem is an earthly city—the place where Israel gathered for worship, where God manifested His glory in the midst of His people in the Old Testament.

But Jerusalem also served as a type—a picture that pointed to something much greater. In Jerusalem of old the priests served in the Temple offering sacrifices day after day. Israel gathered to celebrate festivals and rejoice in God's goodness and provision. But that earthly temple, with all the sacrifices and festivals, pointed to a much greater provision—a greater prophet, a greater priest, and a greater king—Jesus Christ.

Isaiah hinted at this when he brought God's Word concerning the foundation of the city.

Isaiah 28:16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
 "Behold, I am the one who has **laid as a foundation** in Zion,
 a stone, a tested stone,
 a precious cornerstone, of a **sure foundation**:
 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

What was Isaiah speaking of? Who did he have in mind? The New Testament tells us. Jesus pointed to Himself when he asked the chief priests and the Pharisees in—

Matthew 21:42 ... "Have you never read in the Scriptures:
 "The stone that the builders rejected
 has become the cornerstone;
 this was the Lord's doing,
 and it is marvelous in our eyes'?

Peter said plainly in his sermon in—

Acts 4:11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

Paul concurs, speaking of the church, in—

Ephesians 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

It is in the New Testament, as God sets in place the Chief Cornerstone, where we see the fulfillment of Mount Zion in the fullest sense: God dwelling with His people.

Jesus, Emmanuel, came and tabernacled among us. He laid down His life and rose again from the dead that we might be rescued and redeemed. In Christ we are brought near to God. In Him, we are made citizens of God's city—a heavenly Jerusalem.

Hebrews 11 speaks of Abraham looking forward to God's work, even to the time of Christ.

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

The chapter goes on —

Hebrews 11:16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Chapter 12 in Hebrews more fully explains what this city is:

Hebrews 12:22–24 But you have come to **Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

It is not the rebuilding or flourishing of a physical city of brick and mortar that God has promised here, but a spiritual, eternal city founded on the work of His Son by the power of His Spirit.

Hebrews 13:14 For here [*on earth*] we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Paul reminds us in—

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven,
and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

In Galatians 4:26 he refers to “the Jerusalem above” as “mother of us all.” In Jesus we are made citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and members of the assembly of the firstborn—the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, rescued and redeemed by His shed blood.

We don’t have time this morning to explore all the references, but this picture of the church, rescued and made perfect in heaven as a Celestial City, is carried throughout Scripture: from the longings of Abraham in the Old Testament to the glimpses of eternity given to John in Revelation. Listen how John describes the City of God near the end of the Bible:

Revelation 21:2–3 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Later in verse 10 when John is shown “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” he says that an angel—

Revelation 21:10 ... carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

Zion is the city of God, the people God has established and brought to Himself. We are secure in His mighty power, purposes and promises.

The final and ultimate fulfillment of Mount Zion is Jesus Christ and His Church.

We see in Psalm 87 that not only has God established His people—

2. God loves His people (2)

Psalm 87:2 the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.

God has set His love upon His people. He delights in being our God. He draws near. He inhabits our praise. Zephaniah 3:17 reminds us that God is in our midst. He is mighty to save. And He rejoices over us with gladness. He quiets us with His love. And He rejoices over us with singing.

It is amazing enough to think that God would save us by His mighty power—that He would bring us from death (that we deserved) to life and establish us on the sure promises of His Word. But God also **loves us**. He **desires us** for His dwelling place—

Psalms 132:13 For the LORD has chosen Zion;
 he has desired it for his dwelling place:
14 “This is my resting place forever;
 here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
Psalms 78:68 but he chose the tribe of Judah,
 Mount Zion, which he loves.

This is amazing! God loved us when He called us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He loved us when He sent Jesus to die for us. And He loves us when His Spirit opens our hearts and draws us to Himself. He loves us as a member of His bride, the church, where He calls us to walk together and love one another and keep watch over one another. And He will love us one day when He presents us as a pure and spotless bride—a holy city—with Him forever in glory.

Like the Chief Cornerstone, we are loved and precious in God’s sight:

1 Peter 2:4–6 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:
 “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
 a cornerstone chosen and precious,
 and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

We are accepted in Him and when we place our trust and hope in Him, we will not be let down.

God loves the gates of Zion and the gates of hell will never prevail against her.

Now it would be enough for God to establish us as His people, and love us as His people, but He is not finished. We read also in verse 3—

3. God has determined to make His people a praise (3)

Psalms 87:3 Glorious things of you are spoken,
 O city of God. Selah

God has made us to be vessels of His mercy and grace. He has put us on display before a watching world that we would show forth His power:

power to change lives
power to bring light to darkness,
power to raise the dead to new life

As God’s people we are reflection of His glory.

Psalms 50:2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
 God shines forth.

He made us. We are those living stones, built together into a house of grace to display the depth and wonder of His grace. God is building his church. He is designing His city to reflect His wonder. And we are to pray to this end. And so Isaiah encourages us to pray and give God

Isaiah 62:7 ... no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

Zephaniah tells us that this is God's purpose for His people.

Zephaniah 3:20 At that time I will bring you in,
 at the time when I gather you together;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
 before your eyes," says the LORD.

Now, again, it would be enough for God to establish us as His people, and love us as His people, and make us renowned and praised among the peoples of the earth as He magnifies His grace and power in us, but there is more! And what God says next about His people is even more startling and amazing. We learn in verses 4–6 that—

4. **God makes even His enemy to be His people (4–6)**

Psalms 87:4 Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
 behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush —
 "This one was born there," they say.
5 And of Zion it shall be said,
 "This one and that one were born in her";
 for the Most High himself will establish her.
6 The LORD records as he registers the peoples,
 "This one was born there." Selah

Do you see what the psalmist is saying here! This is mind-blowing! This psalm is celebrating the conversion of God's enemies. Those who were once far off are now described as being born in Zion.

Rahab refers to Egypt. We learn this in—

Isaiah 30:7 Egypt's help is worthless and empty;
 therefore I have called her
 "Rahab who sits still."

Babylon was the capital of Assyria, the other superpower of the day.

Now think for a moment: What would Israel think when the names of Egypt and Babylon were mentioned?

Egypt—the place of **slavery and bondage**; Babylon—the place of **oppression and captivity**. How can **they** possibly be of Zion? The psalm continues with Philistia—the Philistines who fought against Israel and captured the ark. Tyre (a Phoenician city) and Cush (Nubia, south of Egypt). All of these were ancient enemies of Israel. They were against God! At enmity with Him!

But here we see these very nations described as **born in Zion**: “This one and that one were born in her.” Psalm 87 looks forward to an amazing day of grace when the nations would flow into Zion to worship the one true God. It is an amplification of a promise in the preceding psalm—

Psalms 86:9 All nations whom You have made
 Shall come and worship before You, O Lord,
 And shall glorify Your name.

Zechariah speaks of this day when the nations will be brought to Zion:

Zechariah 2:10–11 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.
And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

And Isaiah —

Isaiah 2:2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
 That the mountain of the LORD’S house
 Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
 And shall be exalted above the hills;
 And all nations shall flow to it.

Later in Isaiah, in a more familiar passage, we hear the theme again:

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come,
 and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
2 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
 and thick darkness the peoples;
 but the LORD will arise upon you,
 and his glory will be seen upon you.
3 And nations shall come to your light,
 and kings to the brightness of your rising.

The passage continues speaking of those born into God’s people coming from distant places.

Isaiah 60:4 Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
 they all gather together, they come to you;
 your sons shall come from afar,
 and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.
5 Then you shall see and be radiant;
 your heart shall thrill and exult,
 because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
 the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

What did Isaiah foresee? When did the light shine?

When were sons and daughters brought into God's kingdom from afar?

This day that Isaiah and the prophets spoke of was fulfilled in Christ. It is in Jesus that we see the nations brought together, and those who were once enemies made to be friends. This psalm looks forward to a day when the riches of God's grace would be made known to all nations:

The truth that God would make His enemies—Gentiles who were far from His grace—to be brought near to Him was a great mystery. Paul speak of his own ministry to make this mystery known in—

Ephesians 3:3–6 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel**, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Those who were once far off—are now citizens of Zion—"fellow heirs, of the same body, partakers of the promises that God gave to His people in Christ through the gospel."

We read of those ancient enemies of Israel again through the book of Acts as the gospel spreads and takes root. Here are two brief accounts:

Acts 2:5–11 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

In chapter 15 Paul and Barnabas reported on the success of their labors.

Acts 15:3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

Our God is a God who makes His enemies to be His people!

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

"Once Your enemies, now seated at Your table!" We who were far off are brought near and made to be worshippers of God.

Psalm 87:4 says, "Among those who **know** Me..." To know God is to be brought into a relationship with Him. Isaiah had prophesied of Egypt, speaking of this day of grace:

Isaiah 19:21 And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them.

The Lord knows who are His.

Psalms 87:6 tells us that the Lord records those who belong to Him. We read in—

Hebrews 12:22–24 But we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn **who are enrolled in heaven**. . . .

God not only establishes us as His people, and loves us as His people, and makes us to be a praise to reflect His glory, He makes even His enemies to be His people.

The shed blood of Jesus ransomed a people for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9–10).

So what should be our response? Look now as we close at verse 7. Here we see the response and conclusion of those who were leading God’s people in worship.

Psalms 87:7 Singers and dancers alike say,
 “All my springs are in you.”

5. **Belonging to God and His people is our wellspring (7)**

All our life is bound up in belonging to God and to His people.

Being in Him and numbered with His people is our identity.

This final verse of the psalm is difficult to translate. Some of the words are unclear as to a precise meaning and so our English translations have some differences.

The New King James reads in verse 7:

Psalms 87:7 Both the singers and the players on instruments say,
 “All my springs are in you.”

The word used here in Hebrew [*cholelim*] could be “dancers” or “pipe players.” But in either case it refers to those leading in worship (the processions during the festivals or the music accompanying the sacrifices). And their testimony is this: “All my springs are in you.” In other words, belonging to God and being in the company of the people of God is our fount. It is what matters to us most. It is our source of all life and blessing. It is the identity that shapes who we are and defines our priorities, our hopes, our plans, our expectations. It is our joy in the morning, the theme of our songs and the words on our lips through the day.

This is how we are to respond—with joy—loving what God loves, declaring what God has done for us and in us, doing what God calls us to do, being where God delights to be—in the midst of His people, where His power and grace are on display—for His glory.

Isaiah describes it this way in his brief hymn in chapter 12—

Isaiah 12:3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
4 And you will say in that day:
 "Give thanks to the LORD,
 call upon his name,
 make known his deeds among the peoples,
 proclaim that his name is exalted.
Isaiah 12:5 "Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
 let this be made known in all the earth.
6 Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
 for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

My question for you this morning, as we close, is this:

Does this describe you? Does this define who you are? Does it shape your plans, your time, your investments? Is this what matters to you most?

How much do you value belonging to God and belonging to and being with the people of God?

The Bible knows of no such thing as a rogue Christian. There is no following Jesus and being His disciple apart from belonging to His people and walking with His people. There is no loving God without loving His people, His church.

If you are here this morning, and being a member of a church is not something you see as valuable or desirable, then I implore you to consider the words of Scripture. My prayer for you is that you would learn to love what God loves and value what He Himself has determined to redeem and bring to glory. The church, though blemished and still at war with sin this side of glory, is still His work of grace and a marvelous testimony to His power to change hearts and lives.

And if you are here this morning and you have never known the joy of belonging to God and belonging to His church, I pray that this might be the day when He in His mercy finds you and draws you to Himself. May you find the joy of knowing Jesus and bowing to Him as your Lord and King, being made a citizen of the City of God.

Let us pray.

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