

A People of Praise

Psalm 48

Series: Psalms
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Hebrews 12:18–29— **Call to Worship**

If someone were to ask you, “What are you most passionate about?” What would you say?

What are those things that most peak your interest and arouse your attention? What are those topics, that when they come up in conversation, you feel compelled to contribute and join in? What are those things that most motivate you and move you to action?

All of us share in likes and passions. God has wired us this way. Though some people are more reserved and others more outgoing, we all have interests that stir our affections and draw us out to be heard.

Maybe you have been around individuals who appear uninterested or unmoved by what is going on around them. But the right topic comes up in conversation and they begin to perk up. You see their countenance light up and they are moved to jump in and contribute. The right sports team takes the field in competition, and they are ready to make their voice heard and let everyone around them know whom they hope will win. Someone asks about the grandkids or a recent fishing trip, and out come the smiles and photos.

All of these things are given by God and are good. They can be enjoyed in ways that honor God and they are worthy of “some” passion and enthusiasm.

But there is something much greater than these—something far more worthy of our affections.

This morning, as we look to God’s Word, I want you to see what should be at the center of our passions as the people God—what should draw us out and engage our hearts and minds and wills and hopes more than anything else.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 48.

This psalm is a celebration of the people of God—but even more—it is an expression of what God’s people most celebrate.

If you are taking notes this morning. There are four parts to this psalm that I want to call to your attention:

- 1) The passion of God's people (1–3)
- 2) The triumph of God's people (4–8)
- 3) The joy of God's people (9–11)
- 4) The story of God's people (12–14)

Psalm 48 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, 76, 84, 87 and 122.

Let's begin by reading the psalm together.

A SONG. A PSALM OF THE SONS OF KORAH.

Psalms 48:1 Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
 in the city of our God!
 His holy mountain,
2 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.

Psalms 48:4 For behold, the kings assembled;
 they came on together.
5 As soon as they saw it, they were astounded;
 they were in panic; they took to flight.
6 Trembling took hold of them there,
 anguish as of a woman in labor.
7 By the east wind you shattered
 the ships of Tarshish.
8 As we have heard, so have we seen
 in the city of the LORD of hosts,
 in the city of our God,
 which God will establish forever. Selah

Psalms 48:9 We have thought on your steadfast love, O God,
 in the midst of your temple.
10 As your name, O God,
 so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.
 Your right hand is filled with righteousness.
11 Let Mount Zion be glad!
 Let the daughters of Judah rejoice
 because of your judgments!

Psalms 48:12 Walk about Zion, go around her,
 number her towers,
13 consider well her ramparts,
 go through her citadels,
 that you may tell the next generation
14 that this is God,
 our God forever and ever.
 He will guide us forever.

Notice first in Psalm 48, the passion of God’s people —

I. The passion of God’s people is God Himself

T—We are a people made for the glory and praise of God.

We see this in verses 1–3. The psalm begins with a burst of praise to God.

Psalms 48:1a Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised...

Although the psalm is about the people God, it is really a song about God Himself. He is the true passion and delight of God’s people. Verse 1 continues by describing the place of praise—

Psalms 48:1b–2 in the city of our God!
 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.

Here the psalmist speaks of Mount Zion—the city of the great King. But what is this city?

The first time we hear of Mount Zion is in 2 Samuel 5. In verse 6 we read of David, “And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land...” Verse 7 then records, “David took the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David.”

Chapter 6 of 2nd Samuel begins with David bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the city with joy. The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol in the Old Testament of God’s mighty presence with His people—it is where He manifested His glory to His people in their worship in the tabernacle. In 1 Kings 8 Solomon moved the ark into the Temple that he had built according to God’s design and to God’s glory.

Zion is Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God, and it is described here in Psalm 48 as the holy mountain, beautiful in elevation. In Israel, the city of Jerusalem is set on a high place. From most places in Israel, when you travel to Jerusalem, you go up to the city. Jerusalem was the holy place of worship in the Old Testament—the place where the people of Israel gathered to celebrate the yearly festivals and remember God’s provision.

This is the city of the great King—not king David, but God Himself in the midst of His people, the joy of all the earth.

We hear the praise of God in Zion resounding in the psalms:

Psalm 9:11 "Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds."

Psalm 3:4 "I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill"—that is, Mount Zion.

But the earthly city of Jerusalem—as the place where God manifested His glory in the midst of His people in the Old Testament—served to point to something much greater. We see hints of this in the prophets. Zechariah speaks of a 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.

Isaiah also looked forward to this day:

Isaiah 2:2–3 It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. [also in Isaiah 51:11]

The Jerusalem of the Old Testament served as a type—a physical place that pointed to a much greater spiritual reality. It is in the New Testament where we see the fulfillment of Mount Zion—God with His people—in the fullest sense. The prophets looked forward to the day when Jesus, who is called Emmanuel, "God with us," would come and dwell with us:

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The true fulfillment of “God with us” is Christ with His bride, the church.

Jesus came to save us—to lay down His life and rise again—that we might be rescued and cleansed and brought near to God. We are His city—a heavenly Jerusalem. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear in the passage we heard earlier for our call to worship.

In Hebrews 12 he speaks of the New Covenant in Christ and tells us in verse 22 that we—

Hebrews 12:22–24 ... 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.

In Christ we are 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.

Paul reminds us in—

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

The city of the Jerusalem is a picture of the church and of the heavenly city to come—God with His people for all eternity. Listen to how John describes this city in—

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.

Revelation 21:9–10 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he 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,

The city of God is the people of God—the bride of Christ, His church. And here is the joy of the city of God.

Revelation 21:3–5 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. **They will see his face**, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

This is Mount Zion, the holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth:

God with His people—now and for eternity.

“God with us” is the essence of who we are as the church and the culmination of all our joy.

What made Jerusalem of old such a beautiful place?

What really made Jerusalem beautiful, was the presence of God in her midst.

Psalm 48:3 Within her citadels God
 has made himself known as a fortress.

The city was built with towers and ramparts and citadels—but its true strength and true fortress was God Himself dwelling with His people.

What makes the church glorious? It is the presence of God — Emmanuel—God with us!

In the Old Testament, God manifested His presence **in His temple** (Jerusalem)

In the New Testament, God manifests His presence **in His temple** (the hearts of God's people). Together, we are the temple of God, made of living stones that cry out to Him in praise. Paul reminds us in—

1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

What will make heaven so glorious? It's not the rewards or the crowns or even loved ones we will see again—It's God. When we are in the presence of God, worshipping there before the throne, we will be caught up in joy and praise, casting our crowns before Him.

This world values many things—gold and silver. Do you know how valuable gold will be in heaven? It will be nothing. It will be regarded like brick and concrete, paving the streets. Do you know what makes heaven so valuable and precious? It's the fullness and presence of God in all His glory! It will be heaven, because we get to be with God and enjoy Him forever!

Brothers and sisters, hear me! There is nothing more worthwhile in this life or the next than knowing and loving and serving God. We are made for Him. And only in Him will we find true joy and satisfaction and fulfillment.

APP: And so I ask you today: Is this your passion?

Those things that we are passionate about, that draw out our affections—they are largely what identify us. They define who we are to those around us—to those who see us and spend time with us.

What identifies you? If I were to ask those who know you best, what are your likes and passions, what would they say? What takes up your time and occupies your thoughts? What do you talk about the most?

Do the opening words of this psalm echo the stirrings of your own heart? Our passion for God—for the things of God—for the people of God—should describe our lives. It should be clearly manifest in our plans, our schedules, our checkbooks. It should be abundantly evident in our decisions, in our daily walk, and in our families.

It should describe our church as we live and walk together—our ministries, our love for one another, our worship.

Of all the things that affect us, we should be most passionate about God and the gospel. When we hear God’s Word, when we sing, when we voice our prayers, when we give our offerings, God should be uppermost in our affections.

Jonathan Edwards, in his book, *Religious Affections*, makes the claim:

“True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”
[Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 23]

And so he writes—

If true religion lies much in the affections, hence we may learn what great cause we have to be ashamed and confounded before God, that we are no more affected with the great things of religion.

God has given to mankind affections . . . that they might be subservient to man’s chief end, and the great business for which God has created him, that is, the business of religion. And yet how common is it among mankind, that their affections are much more exercised and engaged in other matters than in religion! In things which concern men’s worldly interest, their outward delights, their honor and reputation, and their natural relations, they have their desires eager, their appetites vehement, their love warm and affectionate, their zeal ardent; in these things their hearts are tender and sensible, easily moved, deeply impressed, much concerned, very sensibly affected, and greatly engaged; much depressed with grief at losses, and highly raised with joy at worldly successes and prosperity.

But how insensible and unmoved are most men about the great things of another world! How dull are their affections! How heavy and hard their hearts in these matters! Here their love is cold, their desires languid, their zeal low, and their gratitude small.

How they can sit and hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of His giving His infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, and holy, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in His dying agonies, His bloody sweat, His loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory—and yet be so cold and heavy, insensible and regardless!

Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? . . . Is there anything which Christians can find in heaven or earth so worthy to be the objects of our admiration and love, their earnest and longing desires, their hope, and their rejoicing, and their fervent zeal, as those things that are held forth to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

[Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 51–53]

God is deserving of all our zeal and affections. Those affections will be drawn out in many ways in the worship of God, as we see throughout the psalms. At times we will be humbled and brought low to quiet stillness:

Psalms 46:10 “Be still, and know that I am God.
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth!”

And at times we will be lifted up—to raise our hands and our voices as resounding praise gives expression to our joy. The very next psalm begins:

Psalms 47:1–2 Clap your hands, all peoples!
 Shout to God with loud songs of joy!
 For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared,
 a great king over all the earth.

The great commandment is that we love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength; and the second is that we love one another (Matthew 22:36–40).

Our catechism tells us: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

This psalm displays for us what should be the heartbeat of God’s people. He is our passion. But we must confess—along with Edwards—our affections are too often highjacked; our passions misinformed. We make too much of the world and too less of God. Our joy is too often entangled and plundered when it should be free and abundant through all we have in Christ.

The only way this joy will spring up in us is through the power and work of God’s Spirit as He gives life and brings light and enflames our hearts to burn hot toward God—so that the world and its pleasures dim in comparison. We must pray—for ourselves and for one another—that God would capture our affections and that His love would indeed pervade our heart and mind and soul and strength—that we would be a people sold out to Him and to His Kingdom.

Look now at the second part of the psalm (4–8)—the triumph of God’s people.

II. The triumph of God’s people is God Himself

Psalms 48:4 For behold, the kings assembled;
 they came on together.
Psalms 48:5 As soon as they saw it, they were astounded;
 they were in panic; they took to flight.
Psalms 48:6 Trembling took hold of them there,
 anguish as of a woman in labor.
Psalms 48:7 By the east wind you shattered
 the ships of Tarshish.
Psalms 48:8 As we have heard, so have we seen
 in the city of the LORD of hosts,
 in the city of our God,
 which God will establish forever. *Selah*

Verses 4–7 speak of the deliverance of Jerusalem from her enemies. Bible scholars are not certain which time of victory is in view here. There are several possibilities in the history of Israel and Judah.

- 1) It may be in reference to the deliverance from the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir In the days of Jehoshaphat.

We hear of these nations conspiring together in—

Psalms 83:2 For behold, your enemies make an uproar;
 those who hate you have raised their heads.
3 They lay crafty plans against your people;
 they consult together against your treasured ones.
4 They say, “Come, let us wipe them out as a nation;
 let the name of Israel be remembered no more!”

2 Chronicles 20 describes how God defeated these enemies. As His people sang praise to God, all who had come against Judah were routed. Verse 29 records that “the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.”

- 2) It may be referring to deliverance from the armies of Sennacherib, king of Assyria in the days of Hezekiah.

2 Kings 18–19 records how God brought down the invading armies and rescued His people.

But regardless of the specific occasion—we see that the victory belongs to God. Verse 5 of Psalm 48 records the results of the enemies’ plans. The verse in Hebrew is made up almost entirely of 4 verbs. Literally it reads:

“They saw; they were astounded, they were overwhelmed, they fled in panic”

It has the same kind of ring as the words about Julius Caesar and his victories in Gaul: “I came, I saw, I conquered.” But here the kings plotting against Jerusalem are foiled.

The magnitude of the devastation is underscored in verse 7 that speaks of the ships of Tarshish begin shattered. These were the mightiest ships of the day—yet God brings them to nothing.

Ezekiel describes such destruction when he speaks of God’s judgment on the nation of Tyre.

Ezekiel 27:25–27 The ships of Tarshish traveled for you with your merchandise. So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas.
Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas.
The east wind has wrecked you in the heart of the seas.
Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your pilots,
your caulkers, your dealers in merchandise,
and all your men of war who are in you, with all your crew that is in your midst,
sink into the heart of the seas on the day of your fall.

The triumph here of God for His city in the Old Testament, is again a reminder of a greater triumph in the New as God shows Himself strong for the New Jerusalem. Jesus said of the church in Matthew 16:18 that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

History bears out this truth: Though many have tried and will try to silence and oppress God’s people, God and the gospel will always triumph.

Notice the progression in verse 8. The praise of God’s people is continual and ongoing.

“As we have heard” — others have told us of what God has done in the past.

“So we have seen” — God has worked wonders for us as well. He has rescued us.

God is the strength and fortress of His people in the past, and He is our strength and fortress in our day.

APP: And so let me ask you: Is this your testimony? Is God your fortress and refuge?

Are you resting in Him? Have you heard and seen that He is good?

This is worth pondering. We need to stop and take this in.

The psalmist helps us here—inserting a word that is likely a musical cue at the end of verse 8. **Selah** is a musical pause (instructed the musicians to provide and interlude to give people time to respond and reflect before going on).

Notice now in verses 9–11 the joy of God’s people.

III. The joy of God’s people is God Himself

Psalms 48:9 We have thought on your steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of your temple.

Psalms 48:10 As your name, O God,
so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with righteousness.

Psalms 48:11 Let Mount Zion be glad!
Let the daughters of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments!

Here we see the people of God in worship—in the midst of the temple—considering God’s love and faithfulness. But notice the connection between verses 9 and 10. We worship God with the gathered people of God. We remember the gospel and the faithful covenant love that God has toward us in Christ. And as we rejoice together in Christ—this joy—these truths—are uncontainable. They fuel our passions and our lives. Verse 1 spoke of the city of God as the joy of all the earth, beautiful in elevation. God has raised up His people—placed us on a hill—to be the light of the world. As we go out, in the name of God, with His praise overflowing our lives and on our lips—that praise spreads to the ends of the earth. This is God’s design to bring lasting joy and deepest satisfaction and happiness throughout the whole earth.

We have the gospel. We have the truth. And we have the one true and living God who does all things well—whose every work is right and just and pure. And so the psalmist exhorts us in verse 11 to rejoice and be glad.

As God's people, we should be known for our great love and joy and affection for God.

APP: And so I ask you today: Is this your joy?

Have you considered the love and faithfulness of God, exalting Him in worship with His people? And has that magnitude of His grace toward you emanated from you as you go out from here?

Our praise and affection to God should spill out into the world. It is emboldened here in gathered worship as we reflect on God's love in adoration and praise—as we sing and rejoice—as we meditate and pray—as we hear and respond. But this praise **should not** and **does not** stay contained. It is God's design, as He stirs our passions and affections for Him in worship, that our praise overflow into our lives and witness.

In verse 10 His praise reaches the ends of the earth [to every place]

But notice also His praise stretches across time.

In verse 13 His praise reaches the next generation [to every time]

And this brings us to the final part of the psalm—the story of God's people.

IV. The story of God's people is God Himself

The psalm concludes by telling us to—

Psalms 48:12 Walk about Zion, go around her,
number her towers,
Psalms 48:13 consider well her ramparts,
go through her citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
Psalms 48:14 that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will guide us forever.

We are told to walk about Zion—to number her towers, consider her ramparts, go through her citadels. We are to give our attention to the work of God in the midst of His people, to focus intently on all God has provided and done for us. And the psalmist says we must do this, especially so we can tell our children.

How will our children know if we do not tell and show them by our choices and passions—by what we give our time and resources to—that God and His people are most valuable to us? We must bring them and show them, through our words and by our lives, to see the splendor of all God has for His church. We must point them to the gospel, to the promises of God, to His presence with us, to His watch care over us, to His faithfulness and unending covenant. **Invest** yourself in the people

of God. **Walk** daily in the awareness of the presence of God. **Live** in a way that your children, even the smallest child, will be able to perceive that God and His church are your passion and priority—that living for Christ is the rhythm and heartbeat of your life.

And invest yourself fully. *Walk about* means to “surround or encompass”—to gaze upon from every vantage point.

After walking around Zion—numbering her towers, considering her ramparts, going through her citadels—do you see the conclusion? What is the narrative of God’s people? What makes our story so intriguing? What makes the church so beautiful and impressive and desirable?

We saw it at the beginning of the psalm—It is God Himself.

This is what we tell the next generation: This is our God! He is with us!

This psalm begins and ends with praise to God. It frames the song and identifies the church as a people of praise. **We are a people made to praise and glorify Him.**

APP: So let me ask you in conclusion: Have you invested yourself in God and His people?

Are you telling and showing the next generation the splendor of God?

Do you see the common thread that runs through this psalm? Mount Zion, the people of God—we are all about God Himself. He is our passion, our triumph, our joy and our story. He is our Chief Delight.

If you are here this morning and you do you know God—you have not yet seen Him as worthy of all our affections and devotion, as triumphant and sovereign in all His ways, as righteous and holy, worthy of all our joy and delight, as eternally beautiful and glorious—then it is my prayer that God Himself will open your eyes and stir in your heart and draw you savingly to the one provision He has made for sinful people like you and me in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

If you have God, you have everything. If you miss God, you miss it all.

May the fullness of God be yours today in Christ.

Let us pray.

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