

SERMON: THE JOY OF GOD'S HOUSE

Psalm 122:1-2

(1) I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord. (2) Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

Introduction

The writer of this Psalm was a true lover of God's house. He gladly accepted the invitation to go up to Jerusalem where his people were assembling to worship God. It was probably for one of the three obligatory feast days: Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. Three times a year all the males of Israel were required by God's law to attend these feasts in Jerusalem. Even though it was an obligation, to him it was not a distasteful thing; it was not an unpleasant duty to be reluctantly performed or shirked whenever possible. Worship to this individual was a joy because his heart was in it.

Theologians who delve into what we call textual criticism have many questions about this psalm, especially the first verse, which is in our text. The tense of the verbs are ambiguous. When was the statement, "I was glad." made? Was it made at the very beginning of the dialog, or just before they entered Jerusalem? Whatever the answer, the fact remains, this individual was glad. Did the incident occur during the exile or during the post-exilic period? Whatever the answer, the fact still remains, that this guy was glad. Was David putting into poetic words what he had heard someone else say? Did David pen this after his fleeing from Saul had ended? What anyone might say after delving into the original language and the exact context of this text, one cannot deny that this guy was glad-he was very glad. He was rejoicing. He was rejoicing with the thought of entering the house of the Lord for worship. Maybe he thought about the manifestations of God. Maybe he thought about the attributes of God. Maybe he thought about the mercies of God. The fact still remains, he rejoiced at the mere thought of entering the house of the Lord. The anticipation made him rejoice.

Let me be clear, Christians do not worship exclusively in one spot, for Jesus revealed to the woman at the well, who by the way was the victim of an evil system which made it legal to pass a woman from man to man, that God is everywhere and is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Local church sanctuaries, however, are places where Christians go to experience God's presence in a unique way.

Private worship, in the form of quiet meditation and prayer, private reading and study of the Scripture, private singing and dancing, is good and necessary, but Christians also need the strength that comes from corporate worship.

It is not an "either-or" proposition. It is a "but-also" proposition. We need both public and private worship. Each one has its own unique flavor. I can remember when my daughter, Carmen, was a toddler and I would ask her, "Do you want chocolate or vanilla

ice cream?” She would nod her head in the affirmative and quickly reply, “Uh-huh! Yes, daddy.” By those words she meant, “I want both; please don’t make me choose.” I would then give her a scoop of chocolate and then a scoop of vanilla. This principle is true in a broader sense: our bodies need both vitamins and minerals. We cannot emphasize one good thing to the exclusion of another good thing. I say again, we need both private and corporate worship. To paraphrase Spurgeon, “If we only exercise one form of worship, we become a bird with only one wing. Flying then becomes virtually impossible.”

The last time we had full in-person worship in this sanctuary was March 8, 2020. Since then, we have gathered virtually with the use of technology. Thank God for technology. Today many of us regather “in-person” in this holy house to worship God in the beauty of holiness. Like the Psalmist in our text we are glad-very glad! I believe those who did not come in person are just as glad as they can see the church is flourishing in spite of Covid-19.

We can identify with the Psalmist. The implication is that He had not been to the temple for a while. Perhaps he was a shepherd who finally had someone to relieve him and watch the sheep so he could go to the temple. Perhaps it was a frail elderly person, who needed physical assistance to make the journey to the temple and now that help had arrived. Perhaps travelers had been afraid to make the journey because of political or military turmoil. Now there was peace and travel had resumed. Whatever the context, this individual was glad with a capital G!

Exposition

1. A Special Invitation

(Let Us Go.)

(The Key Word Is “Us.”)

(The Whole Is Greater Than The Sum Of The Parts.)

(Group Effort Increases Exponentially-Deuteronomy 32:30.)

2. A Special Place.

(The House of The Lord.)

(Designed For Worship-Form Follows Function.)

3. A Special Time

(Every Sunday Is a New Testament Feast Day.)

(It Is Intentional-Yet Spontaneous.)

4. A Special Routine.

(Kneeling, Lifting Of Hands, Clapping Of Hands, Singing, Skillful

Playing Of Musical Instruments, Praying, Preaching, Teaching,

Fellowshipping, Meditating, Dancing, Shouting the Joy of the Lord.)

5. A Special Experience

(Vertical Connection with God.)

(Horizontal Connection with the Saints.)

(We Swim In His Presence.)

Closing Thoughts

I will close by telling you of a little lady I pastored in Gulfport, Mississippi. Her name was Mother Cora Kimble. God had given her a unique personality; she was feisty in a spiritual way. When she was present you knew it, especially at church. On Sunday mornings when she was asked how she was doing, her reply was unique. She never said, "I am blessed and highly favored." She said, "I'm more gladder now." She would continue by saying, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'let us go into the house of the Lord.' Now that I am here I am more gladder. If I was any more gladder, I couldn't stand it. I'm glad to be in the service one more time."

I think Mother Kimble, who lived a hard life and had every reason to be pessimistic, was on to a great theological principle. If some of the ancient Jews found joy in worshipping God, how much more joy should we have in our worship. We have a higher revelation of Him because we have the entire Bible, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. Our worship should be more fervent and more vibrant. In fact, it should be "off the chain!" Give God Glory! Give God All the Glory!

Related Scriptures

Psalm 84:1-5

Psalm 100:1-5

End Note

I can't resist sharing this with you, especially since we are concentrating on corporate worship today. Hebrew words have a tri-literal root- a root consisting of three consonants. The vowels are secondary but can add meaning. So the tri-literal root can have a "thought connection" and the vowels can have a completely different "thought connection." One of the Hebrew words for worship, *shachah*, means to bow down or to lie prostrate before a greater power. *Shachah* is also related to the Hebrew word for swim; they have the same tri-literal root. When one is swimming he or she is usually lying flat or prostrate in the water. More importantly, when one is swimming he or she is completely immersed in the water. When we worship we are completely immersed in the presence of God. In other words, we are swimming in God's presence. At least, that is the way I see it. Scholars may disagree.

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