

# The Glory of God's City

Psalm 48:1-14

*Halifax: 6 November 2005*

## Introduction

Last week, we completed another section of Matthew's gospel—

- The next section in Matthew begins at the end of chapter 13, in v. 53, and continues through the end of chapter 14.
  - In preaching from this section, I intend to focus on **What Jesus is Among Us...**
    - It is truly an amazing thing to have the very Son of God come among us!
      - We shall see that when He comes among us,
        - 1) He is an offense to the casual,
          - as He was to the inhabitants of His hometown.
        - 2) He is a terror to the rebellious,
          - as He was to King Herod Antipas who thought John the Baptist had raised from the dead when he heard about Jesus.
        - 3) He is a provider to the hungry,
          - as He was to the 5000 He fed.
        - 4) He is a comforter to the distressed,
          - as He was to His disciples when He walked on the water.
        - 5) and He is a healer to the sick,
          - as He was to the multitudes that came to Him at Gennesaret.
- How everything changes for us when God's Son comes to dwell among us!
  - How I look forward to taking up this section next week.

But as our custom is,

- before we begin this new series,
  - I want to present a psalm to you that relates to this series.
  - This morning I will expound this Psalm to you,
    - and then in the weeks to come, we will sing it in conjunction with the sermons from Matthew's gospel.

The psalm I have chosen for this purpose is Psalm 48.

- This psalm speaks of the glorious hope of God's people in every age...
  - That there is a city whose Builder and Maker is God!
  - We shall see in this Psalm that the Son of God Himself has come to earth to establish this city.

In Hebrew poetry, the central truth of a Psalm is often found in the middle of the Psalm rather than at the beginning.

- This is the case with Psalm 48...

**I. The central truth of Psalm 48 is found in verse 8.**

- It says:

- Psalm 48:8: As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, In the city of our God: God will establish it forever

A. You see that this central verse tells us that God does indeed have a city that He will establish forever.

1. Now of course there is a sense in which God is the Creator of every city,

- There is no city on earth that exists apart from His will...
- But this is referring to a city that is God's city in a way that other cities are not His city.

2. It refers to a city that truly belongs to God.

- It is a city that is rooted in God's covenant promise to Abraham when He told Him,
  - "I will be your God and you shall be my people."
- This promise is repeated again and again in the Bible...
  - All of our hopes are contained in this promise!
    - God was telling Abraham that He would establish a people for Himself out of the ruins of this fallen world!
    - He was telling Him that they would be a people that would truly be His...
      - fully accepted by Him...
      - a people who like Noah found grace in His eyes—
        - a people that would be preserved and kept by Him as His own rather than destroyed with all the rest!

TRANS> In the words of this verse,

- Psalm 48:8: As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, In the city of our God: God will establish it forever...
  - We are not only reminded that there will be such a city,

B. But we are also encouraged to look at how God has already done so much toward the fulfilment of His promise...

1. It says, “As we have heard, so we have seen...”

- In other words,
  - “What God has promised, we have also seen Him do.”
  - He has begun to fulfil His promise in marvellous ways.

2. By the time this Psalm was written,

- There was a whole history of what God had done to build this city!
  - They could look back and see how God had faithfully fulfilled His promise.
  - They could look back and see how He had given a son to Abraham and Sarah when they were barren and past the age to conceive a child...
  - They could look back and see how He had marvellously brought His people out of Egypt by a mighty outstretched arm.
  - They could see how God had sustained them in the wilderness.
  - They could look back and see how He had brought them into the land of Canaan, displacing nations that were greater and mightier than they.
  - They could see how He had faithfully chastened them and sent judges time and time again to restore them.
  - And probably, this Psalm was written after some particular deliverance when God’s enemies had come upon the city in vain...
- Those to whom this Psalm was first presented had a whole record of what God had done to establish and preserve a city for Himself.
  - They could say:
    - “As we have heard, so we have seen.”
    - What He has promised, He has also performed.

3. But how much more can you say that—you who live in this present day!

- a. We have seen the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven to redeem us!
- We have seen His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary
  - We have seen His miracles and wonders performed on the earth when He was among us.
  - We have seen His suffering on the cross for our sins.
  - We have seen His resurrection and ascension.
  - We have seen the giving of the Holy Spirit.
  - All these wonders have been performed in order to establish God’s city!

- b. And since His coming, there has been still more...
  - We have seen the gospel go out to the Gentiles...
  - We have seen the destruction of Jerusalem...
  - We have seen the church carried by Him through times of apostasy and decline to rise again and again...

TRANS> Truly, our God has worked to establish a city for Himself!

- When you see what He has already done,
  - what assurance you ought to have that He who began this good work will certainly complete it!
  - He will bring His city to that glorious state that is described in Revelation 21 that we read about a moment ago!
- God's building of this city is the very heart of Psalm 48!
  - Now let us go back to the beginning of this Psalm where we are told **why** God establishes this city.

## **II. God has established this city to worship Him.**

A. There was a crying need for such a city...

1. Verse 1 says,

- "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised!"

a. Notice that the name "LORD" is written with all capital letters!

- When it is written like that, it refers to the name Jehovah or Yahweh which means "I am"
- It speaks of God as the self-existing one...
  - He is the only being in the whole universe that is uncreated and un-derived.
  - He is entirely independent—
    - And everything is entirely dependent on Him.
    - You could not think another thought or take another breath without His leave.

b. We do not grasp how great He is!

1) We sometimes think that something in this created world is great—

- Whether it is the complexity of DNA
  - or the vastness of the heavens with all their galaxies,

- or the beauty of a landscape,
- or some person that has won our admiration—
  - an incredible athlete, a courageous military general, a beautiful actress, a brilliant professor, or a very godly self-sacrificing saint!

TRANS> And I would agree... there are many great ones in the earth.

2) But how much greater is the Creator of all these!

- If these things that He has made and that He nourishes and upholds are worthy of praise,
  - How much more is their Maker?
  - He is on a whole different level than us—
    - He is Jehovah...
    - He belongs to the uncreated realm, and we to the created.

c. Indeed Jehovah is great and greatly to be praised!

1) His praise ought to correspond with His greatness.

- As He is great, so His praise ought to be great.
- It is just plain inappropriate and improper to have such a great God who is not praised.
  - It is the great sin of the world!

2) We ought to stand in awe of the glory of this Great God who fashioned the world and everything it contains!

- This one who is infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection!
- This one who all sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.
- There is none who remotely equals Him!
  - He is over all and above all, and there is none that can be compared with Him.
  - He is great and greatly to be praised!

2. But there is a terrible defect in the world...

a. that we have not given proper praise to our God!

- 1) And I don't just mean that we have not praised Him as we should because we are too little to praise Him—
    - that though we have given Him all that we can, it is not enough...
  - 2) The problem is much greater than that!
    - I mean that we have not even given Him proper praise according to our capacity as creatures!
    - We have not done even what we are able to do!
- b. To leave out the proper praise of God is the grand omission!
- 1) Even if you were to do everything else that you ought to have done and omitted this one thing,
    - you have entirely failed to do what you ought to have done!
    - You are worse than dead, because you have lived for entirely the wrong purpose...
      - You have spent your energy on all the wrong things.
      - There is this obligation that is the whole reason you are made...
        - an obligation that grows out the nature of things as they truly are.
  - 2) Jehovah is there, Great and greatly to be praised,
    - and you are here for no other reason but to glorify Him...
      - but there you are doing everything else!
    - Now I don't mean that you are to ignore His creation and live as monks and nuns...
      - I mean rather that you are to give Him glory in and through all the things that He has made...
        - He is very bountiful with His gifts and you are to praise Him for all these
        - He is the source of them all.
- c. We don't praise God as we should because this world is a fallen world.
- In Adam, we have all died.
  - We died to what we were created to be and fell under the displeasure of our Creator.
    - Now we are fit only for His judgement!
    - He is great and greatly to be praised, but we do not praise Him!
      - The world is fallen from its great purpose.

TRANS> But here is the excellent thing about Psalm 48!

B. Psalm 48 speaks of a city where God **is** praised!

1. The excellence of this worshipping city is described in the first three verses!
  - a. The chief excellence is that God is worshipped here as He ought to be worshipped!
    - 1) It is here in this city that He is greatly praised!
      - When God first called Israel out of Egypt, He called them out in order that might worship Him.
      - He instructed them carefully about how He was to be worshipped...
        - He showed them through the establishment of the tabernacle and the priests and all the sabbaths and ceremonies how He was to be praised in His city.
    - 2) At the end of verse 1, the city where He is worshipped is referred to as His holy mountain...
      - **Holy** speaks of something that is consecrated to God...
        - Something that is devoted entirely to Him and is for His use!
        - It does not belong to anything else, but is here entirely for God.
  - b. Verse 2 informs us that this holy worshipping city is beautiful in elevation!
    - 1) It is raised above all the other cities of the world because it is here and here alone that God is rightly worshipped.
      - Other cities may worship their gods, but their gods are all idols.
      - Their worship is not only inadequate; it is offensive to the true God because it denies His glory and mocks Him.
      - God forbade sacrifices from any other place than the place He had appointed—
        - After the temple was built, it was only at His holy mountain at Jerusalem that sacrifices were to be made.
        - This place was elevated in beauty above all others because it was here that God was worshipped in the beauty of holiness.
    - 2) And because this is so, Mount Zion is here called the joy of the whole earth.
      - Now perhaps here Jerusalem is spoken of as the joy of the other nations as people from these nations came up to worship God here...

- But I would suggest that the joy spoken of here is not the joy of the other nations in Jerusalem, but the joy of God Himself!
    - His city is to Him the joy of all the earth!
    - It is here that He delights to dwell because it is here that He is praised and worshipped according to His will!
      - There is no-where else on earth that He delights in!
      - It is here and here only that He is acceptably worshipped!
2. But what is it that makes the worship of God in His city superior to all other cities?
- a. Well my friends, I will put it to you like this...
- The reason the worship of Jerusalem is superior to all other worship in the earth is because God is worshipped in this city by His Son!
  - It is the city of the great king—which king is none other than King Jesus!
    - He is the founder and builder of the City of God!
    - He left the glories of Heaven and was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary in order that there might be in this fallen world a city that worships God as God ought to be worshipped.
    - He leads God’s people in the true worship of the living God, and without Him, there is no pure worship.
- b. Under Moses, God presented His will for His worshipping city!
- 1) He gave them the Ten Commandments in which He commanded them to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and in which their neighbour must be loved as themselves.
    - This is the only acceptable way to live before God...
  - 2) But because of His people’s failure,
    - He also appointed an elaborate system of ceremonies in which they were to draw near to Him through priests offering sacrifices to take away their sins.
    - Now these sacrifices could not make the worshippers perfect because they were just provisional...
      - They were appointed in connection with God’s promise to provide a sacrifice for His people that would truly make them acceptable to Him.
        - by which His city would become the joy of the whole earth.
- c. And now, my friends, that sacrifice has come!



- 1) King Jesus, who is also our great high priest has come and offered to God not the blood of bulls of goats, but His own blood!
  - By this sacrifice, the City of God worships God acceptably!
  - Our worship is acceptable because King Jesus who represents us before God is acceptable!
  - Jesus is the one who brings us acceptably in God's presence!
- 2) God the Son Himself is in our palaces and He is our refuge!
  - God the Son Himself has come down from heaven to establish worship that is pleasing to God the Father!
  - This kingdom of perfect righteousness is established by Jesus Christ.
    - You enter this City in the right way when you enter it by faith...
      - wholly resting on Jesus Christ as your priest who has offered Himself to make the whole city a city of pleasing praise to God.

TRANS> Right here in the middle of this fallen, ruined, world that cannot worship,

- God's Son has established a city where God is worshipped in holiness...
  - And this city is to God the joy of the whole earth.
    - In this city, He says, "I am well pleased!"

### **III. And because God is pleased with His worshipping city, He takes special care of her.**

- **I want to show you three ways that this special care is seen.**

A. First, God's special care for His city is seen in that He will bring all her enemies to shame.

- This is explained in verses 4-7
  1. Our enemies are those who oppose the true worship of God.
    - a. They are happy in Satan's service.
      - They do not want to serve God, nor do they want others to.
      - They are the sons of Adam and they want to continue in his rebellion.
    - b. They do not like the fact that Jesus Christ has come into the world and established a kingdom of righteousness!
      - They will praise God in their own way, perhaps, like Cain,

- but they are not interested in praise that requires them to rely on the righteousness of God's Son.
  - Such a thing is unacceptable to them!
    - Like the Greeks, it seems foolish to them to think that God would ever do such a thing as die for the sins of His people...
      - and besides, in worldly wisdom, why would such drastic measures be necessary to sanctify worshippers?
      - The cross is an offense to them.
  - They say,
    - We will bring acceptable worship to God without crosses and incarnate bleeding saviours and all that...
      - We are fine without all this, thank you very much!
      - However, deep down they know that their worship is not acceptable and they deeply resent those who worship God through the crucified Christ...
- c. And so these enemies join together to try to oppose the city of God.
- Verse 4 says, "The kings assembled."
    - They ban together against the Lord and against His anointed.
  - They do this in a thousand different ways...
    - Whatever way seems the most promising is the way they take...
- 1) At one time they put on a lab coat and come with high sounding arguments,
    - claiming creation of world by God as described in the Bible is impossible...
  - 2) At another time, they sit in the philosopher's chair and come with accusations against God...
    - claiming that God is unjust because of the suffering of children in the world or such things...
  - 3) At another time, they put on a tie and come with a sales pitch...
    - trying to promote the worship of false gods or draw our hearts after the things lusts of this world that are passing away...
  - 4) At another time, they put on their sword and come against us with bloody persecution...

- united together in efforts to destroy the city of God.

TRANS> There are a thousand different ways the unite together against the Lord and His city...

2. But our text tells us what happens to these enemies!

- a. They come with great confidence to attack the city of God,
  - They come supposing that they will succeed!
  - They come with the hubris of Pharaoh when Moses told him that the Lord said, "Let My people go."
    - Like Pharaoh they say, "Who is the LORD that I should obey Him?"

- b. But sooner or later, they are overtaken with dread terror!

- 1) Suddenly they see what the City of God is really like!

- v. 5 says:
      - They saw *it, and* so they marveled; They were troubled, they hastened away. Fear took hold of them.
      - Many times this happens in passing flashes...
        - Terror comes upon them and they realize for a moment that they are daring to fight against God...
        - They often shake these thoughts off and continue their campaign,

- 2) But the time is coming when they will no longer be able to escape their terrors!

- The terror will come to lodge in their heart and they will scatter for safety!

- a) This happened to so many of Israel's enemies...

- We might think of the story of Gideon when the huge and fierce army's of Midian became terrified of him...
      - We might think of the great army of king Sennacherib who spoke with such boldness on one day...
        - and fled the next when he saw that God was defending his city.

- b) This happens in those societies when the gospel takes root and God blesses His people so that people are afraid to speak against them.

- They run to the closet with their perversions and their idols.
      - There is no heart left them.

- They are embarrassed to raise their foolish arguments against the truth because there is too much light.
- c) But you can be sure that our enemies will be brought to utter shame on the day of judgement!
- It is then that the light of the truth will shine so brightly,
    - and the authority of God will be so manifest,
    - that they will cower in fear!
  - Not one will be left to oppose the true and acceptable worship of God through Christ.
- 3) The Psalm uses two vivid pictures to illustrate the nature of their terror...
- a) It will be like that of a woman when her labour pains come upon her.
- Once her hour comes, there is no turning back!
  - She is committed whether she likes it or not...
    - Thus it will be with them—a feeling of utter helplessness under the mighty power of God.
- b) It will be like the ships of Tarshish when they are torn apart by the east wind!
- Again, there is a feeling of utter helplessness!
  - The realisation that nothing can be done.
3. Consider also that God’s judgement comes upon them **from** His city...
- a. They come against God’s city because this is where God is revealed and where He is worshipped in truth...
- b. But it is this same city that is the agent that judges them...
- For God has appointed the Lord Jesus Himself, the King of the city of God to be the judge of all men.
  - They will have to answer to Him and He will be the One who sentences them and visits them with their final destruction.
    - What terror they will experience when they stand before Him as their judge whose city they came to overthrow—
      - only because they refused to delight in the true worship of God that He establishes!
4. And so Christian, you need not fear these enemies of God’s kingdom...
- Your Lord will deal with them soon enough!

- Let them assemble together,
  - they will soon scatter in terror and be brought to ruin...
  - And the City of God will continue unharmed.
    - Let these thoughts engender boldness when your devotion to Christ is challenged by the assembled enemies of our Lord.

TRANS> All our enemies will be brought to shame...

- That is the first way that God's care for His city is seen...

B. Second, God's special care for His city is seen in that He will give perfect joy to all her citizens.

- This is brought out in verses 9-11.

1. Verse 9 shows how the citizens of His city think on His lovingkindness!

- It is something that is a frequent source of their meditation.
  - a. Lovingkindness is Hesed—God's covenant love, His promised mercy to His people!
    - It is the promise of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ...
    - Of justification by His righteousness...
    - Of the gift of the Holy Spirit by whom we are given a new heart and made more and more like Jesus!
    - Of adoption into God's family...
    - Of the promise of the resurrection and an eternal inheritance in heaven...
  - b. God's people are seen here going up to His temple where this covenant mercy is proclaimed in the ordinances of worship—
    - In our time, it is presented to us through the ministry of the word and sacraments.
    - We gather together to hear the gospel and we rejoice as God's people because of what God has done for us!
      - We think about it and we marvel when we come into our assemblies!
      - We say,
        - "How great is God's mercy!"
        - "He has made me glad through His work!"
        - "What great things He has done for us!"

2. And so as God reveals His mercy to us, His praise goes into all the earth!

- This is brought out in verse 10
  - a. After Jesus came and did His work,
    - the glorious news of salvation could not remain in Israel!
    - It begged to be published in all the world!
      - “Look at what God has done for His people”
      - “Go tell it on the mountain!”
    - The happiness and joy of God’s people could not be contained.
  - b. And so it is that wherever God’s name is published—His name as the Saviour of His people—even the name of Jesus...
    - We declare that (as v 10)
      - “His hand is full of righteousness!”
    - The righteousness referred to in this context is God’s faithfulness to do what He has promised...
      - His hand is full of all the things He had promised to His people!
        - Who could have imagined when God first promised to be a God to Abraham and His seed what God had in store for us!
          - That the Son of God would come from heaven to redeem us!
  - c. In those places where this revelation of God’s name is received, He is praised!
    - The nations of the earth begin to join in the praise of God!
    - They join themselves to King Jesus and so to His glorious city where God is praised!
      - They cannot keep silent because God has made them glad!
3. And so we read in verse 11:
- “Let Mount Zion rejoice, Let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of your judgements!”
  - a. God keeps His city praising Him by doing all that He has promised for them!
    - When they come into His service, they find true joy!
    - A joy that is not superficial but grounded in the blessing of God.
  - b. No one but God can truly make you happy.
    - He alone has the key to open the door of happiness.

- If you are not rejoicing, you need to go back to verse 9 and think on His lovingkindness...
  - Think deeply about what Christ has done for you when you were utterly helpless and without hope.
  - Think deeply about what God has yet promised to do and how He is utterly faithful to do it all.
- c. Consider that the praise of God is not complete until He makes us perfectly happy...
  - He has begun to do so, and He will complete work.
    - Yes Christian, I know you have many sorrows in this world...
      - But rest assured, all your sorrow will be turned to joy!
      - God's reputation is at stake!
        - If He does not make His people happy, it brings reproach on Him.
        - You can be certain that when all is done, we will rejoice.
        - Revelation 21 will be accomplished!

TRANS> This is the second way that God's care is seen for His city.

- First that He brings all her enemies to shame...
- Second, that He makes her perfectly happy...

C. Third, God's special care for His city is seen in that He will preserve her forever.

1. In verses 12-14, we are called to take a survey of this city and to see how secure it is!
  - a. Count the towers, mark the bulwarks, consider the palaces.
    - My dear brothers and sisters, are you resting in the work of Jesus Christ?
      - Has the Son of God died in your place?
      - Has He brought righteousness to the city of God?
      - Has God made a divine promise concerning Him?
  - b. How secure are these things?
    - What accusations can reach you inside this mighty fortress or righteousness?
    - With what battering ram can Satan bring down the walls of this city that Jesus Christ has built?

- Can he undo the efficacy of that blood that was shed to take away your sin?
  - Can he destroy the city of life that God's Spirit has planted in you?
  - Can he penetrate the walls to draw you away with his enticements?
  - Can he penetrate these walls to drive you out of the city by persecution?
- c. No, as the beloved apostle John says,
- "The wicked one touches him not..."
  - God has a special eye upon His city to uphold it and protect it...
    - He will always have a people to praise Him.
2. Brothers and sisters, you are exhorted here to tell your children about this city.
- a. Fathers, do not let your children grow up without hearing of this great city that God has built!
- Do not let them grow up without hearing what King Jesus had done to establish this city!
  - Let them hear it from you each day!
    - Let them see your joy and gladness!
    - Tell them what we have in Christ and urge them to drink from this fountain!
- b. How this admonition it needed!
- There have been so many generations that grew up that did not know God because their parents did no tell them!
    - They grew up with a form of godliness, but they were not true worshippers of God through Jesus Christ!
    - They did not bring to God the worship that God loves...
    - They were cut of from the Son and they perished.
- c. Nevertheless, you can be sure that God will continue His church to the next generation.
- It may not be to your children if you do not consider God's great mercies that you might tell them...
    - But He will always preserve a remnant according to election.
    - The church will never perish!
3. And the great news is that God will not lose one worshipper—ever!



- a. Verse 14 explains that this God (who established this city of praise) will be our God forever and ever.
  - As our Lord Jesus argued with the Sadducees when they denied the resurrection,
    - God is not the God of the dead but of the living!
    - That means that if He is our God, we will not die but live!
- b. Yes, when you enter into the city of praise that Jesus Christ has founded,
  - You will be found worshipping God forever and ever.
    - He will be your guide even to death...
    - You will still be found praising Him in this glorious city of praise!
      - You are forever established in this noble duty that is the very purpose for which you were created and without which you can only be miserable forever!
- c. I want you to think about how long forever is!
  - We think five years is a long time, but this is forever!
    - After 5 billion years have passed, you will still have forever left, and you will not be finished praising Him.
    - This is the glorious hope of all the citizens of the city of God.

## **Conclusion**

O Come, let us joyfully live together in this glorious city of God that Psalm 48 glories in!

- What delight our God takes in us because of Jesus our King!
- What a privilege it is to worship God acceptably through Him!
  - He will surely destroy all our enemies!
  - He will surely make us glad!
  - He will surely keep us praising Him forever and ever!