



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 22 Issue 9

February 26, 2023

A Life Devoted to Worship, 2

Psalm 122

In Proverbs 4, we are called to this:

Proverbs 4:23, "Watch over your heart [mind] with all diligence, for from it *flow* the springs of life."

What does this mean? How do we do it? To answer this, consider that on account of the Fall, man became enslaved to Satan on many levels, one of which was in the realm of his

mind. Speaking of Satan, Paul wrote this:

2 Corinthians 4:4b, "...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving..."

Accordingly, when God redeems a sinner and so brings them from spiritual death to spiritual life, one of the many changes that occur is that their minds are illumined.

1 John 5:20a, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding..."

With this, we might think that living according to our redeemed mind would be simple. Yet it is everything but simple. For we still have in our being a fallen nature. Paul describes it in Romans:

Romans 7:18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not."

The result is a battle where the redeemed mind and our fallen nature lock horns in a massive conflict.

Romans 7:23a, "...I see a... law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind..."

What then determines which aspect of our nature wins? In the words of Augustine, "The one you feed."

Galatians 5:16, "But I say, walk by the Spirit [which involves submitting in our hearts to the Spirit-inspired word of God], and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."

So, what we walk by and sow to — the flesh or the Spirit — determines how we will live. Solomon put it this way:

Proverbs 23:7a, "For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so *is* he..." (NKJV)

It is in this context that God calls us to "Watch over your heart with all diligence..." (Proverbs 4:23a).

And it is this which lies behind the Songs of Ascents. As God's people — living as pilgrims in this fallen world — made their way to Jerusalem in order to worship the Lord, God gave them fifteen Songs to Sing. Now, these songs were NOT the "playlist" God prescribed for His children so that they could be entertained on their way to Jerusalem. RATHER, God wanted the content of these Psalms to frame the minds of all His pilgrims

and so determine how they think, what they desire, and so how they process the fallen world. Paul gives us this exhortation:

Romans 12:2a, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

That is the purpose of the Songs of Ascents. Each Psalm was written and placed in this section to strengthen and encourage us that we might NOT grow weary as we struggle under the burdens of life.

Previously, we noted from Psalm 122 that redemption makes us “true worshippers of God” — which is the focus of this Psalm.

<p><u>Fifteen Words of Exhortation for Christian Pilgrims</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Psalm 120: We must ensure that the burdens of this life drive us to Christ.2. Psalm 121: In our burdens, we must know that God walks with us; He will never abandon or forsake us.

The Priority of Worship, vv. 1-2.

Psalm 122:1, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’”

It would have quite understandable for the weary pilgrim when once he arrived in the holy city to (1) Secure their housing, (2) Go to the market and get some food, or (3) Call upon a family member or a friend. Yet God wants our lives to be geared toward worship! Recall, this Psalm utilized the literary tool known as Inklusio. With this, a passage of scripture is bracketed by a word or theme with the implication that everything in between the brackets is to be interpreted in light of the brackets.

Recall the example in Mark 11 where we read of Christ’s cursing the fig tree (vv. 12-14), the cleansing of the temple (vv. 15-18), and then a reference to the fig tree again (vv. 20-21). The implication is that the cleansing of the temple must be interpreted in light of Christ’s cursing of the fig tree.

And so it is with this Psalm. With “the house of the Lord” as its book ends (vv. 1 & 9), we see that God’s intention is that we understand that this Psalm is all about being worshippers of God and speaks of a life that is arranged and so geared toward God’s worship! So, in our doings, thoughts, and interactions, God wants us to adopt the mind of a living sacrifice who understands the purpose of his life is the exaltation of God!

That brought us to the next section of this Psalm, vv. 3-6 in which David used “Jerusalem” to instruct us as to that which Provides/Protects/Ensures our life of worship. In this regard, recall that the Bible uses “Jerusalem” in three different ways.

- The literal capital city of Israel/Judah.
- The redemption we enter into on account of the saving grace of Christ (Galatians

- 4:24-26). Paul calls this “the Jerusalem above.” (cf. also Hebrews 12:22-24)
- What we enter and so become in the next age (Revelation 21:9-10), “the New Jerusalem.”

Now as we are in Christ, our focus no longer is the literal city. Accordingly, the focus we have as we examine the Songs of Ascents will be either “the Jerusalem above” (the salvation we have entered through Christ) or “the New Jerusalem” (what we mean today when we speak of Heaven). The clear application of this Psalm relates to “the Jerusalem above” and so our salvation. With that, David began by describing the protection that “Jerusalem” provided for the worship of God.

The Provision of Worship: Unity, vv. 3-5.

David began with an illustration of this unity. Recall, David used two facets of “Jerusalem” to encourage us when it comes to our call to worship. He used Jerusalem’s compactness.

Psalm 122:2-3, “Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that is built as a city that is compact together.”

Recall, from a distance the city of Jerusalem looked like ONE MASSIVE UNIT. With its eight-foot-thick wall that surrounded the city to its buildings/houses which were attached together, it would have been hard from a distance to say where one building/house ended, and the other began. In this setting, “the house of the Lord” — and so, God’s worship — was well protected.

David also used Jerusalem’s priority in the lives of God’s people. Still speaking of Jerusalem, David observed this:

Psalm 122:4a, “To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord- an ordinance for Israel...”

The fact that ALL the tribes went up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord testified to the role of “Jerusalem” in unifying the nation. Recall 2 Samuel 5 when David became king, the nation was divided. Not only was it composed of twelve tribes each with its own history, BUT it also was divided along the lines of those who favored Saul and those who favored David.

So, what did David do? He conquered a Jebusite city and made it the capital of the nation. He then changed its name from “Salem” (which translated meant “peace”) to “Jerusalem” (which translated means “Foundation of Peace”). David intended “Jerusalem” be the foundation of peace and so that which united the nation.

Applied to us, the more we are united around and value “the Jerusalem above” (that is,

our common salvation), the better will be our worship. How so? THE battle common to us all is that of endeavoring to worship the Lord in a fallen world which hates Christ and so loves to tear us down. The more we realize the commonness of this calling, the more we will draw near to and so encourage each other to “play the man” and so offer to the Lord a sacrifice of praise in the midst of the burdens of life. That is the focus of this section

The End/Telos of our Connectionalism/Unity, v. 4b.

Psalm 122:4b, “To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord — an ordinance for Israel — to give thanks to the name of the Lord.”

That is what occurs as we understand the commonness we have as a result of the cleansing work of Christ. It is because of this calling we have concern and affection for each other — regardless of our socioeconomics, race, age, gender, past, or sin. We see this joint concern throughout Scripture. For example, recall the exhortation given in Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some [In other words, ‘not compromising our worship’], but encouraging *one another* [To do what? worship!]; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

Do you see? Our joint calling to worship and serve the Lord is strengthened and encouraged by our fellowship with each other — that is, our unity of purpose! — which brings us to a very important verse in which David speaks to the maintenance of our unity.

The Maintenance of our Unity, v. 5.

Psalm 122:5, “For there thrones¹ were set for judgment [lit. ‘justice’^{2,3,4}], *even* the thrones of the house of David.”

At the gate of Jerusalem there were thrones/chairs on which elders ruled on judicial cases brought by citizens in dispute (Ruth 4:1–12; Job 29:7).⁵ These would be akin to a lower court in our justice system. If justice was not met at one of these chairs/thrones, the parties in dispute could then go to the palace and the seat of the king/his throne... to receive justice.^{6,7,8}

David understood that THE only thing that could destroy our unity of purpose and thus our Worship of God is sin. Think about it. Prior to being saved, we were autonomous beings and basically did what we wanted. Now, if this “autonomy” persists into salvation, our worship will be compromised as we all will be focused on ourselves. How

difficult it would be to worship the Lord with one set on doing their own thing.

Yet salvation brings a person into a relationship with God in which we now sit under the authority of God's word, "His throne of justice." Because this is the case, though we are separate individuals with various and sundry passions, objectives, and goals, nevertheless insofar as all in this body is in submission to God's word, there will be a unity which enhances our communion and so our worship. We see it in 2 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain [participate in and so enjoy] the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Once again, we see it... we were saved to worship and so make much of Christ. Based on this, what is the call?...] So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught [in other words, the teaching of God's word], whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us."

Our corporate submission to God's word is crucial to our unity which in turn is crucial to the worship we offer to God! And so, thinking of Jerusalem, David draws our attention to those "chairs"/"thrones" everyone saw when they entered the city — "chairs" which proclaimed an important message: The unity of our fellowship is based upon our submission to God's word, and so Justice!

Accordingly, what is Bethel and the people of this church outside of a corporate passion and commitment to the word of God — reading it, learning it, submitting to it, and so encouraging each other?

What is the objective? Obedience for obedience's sake? NO! It is that each and everyone of us would come to a fuller understanding of the Lord by which we make much of Christ where "He increases and we decrease" (John 3:30)

With that, we come to the final section of this Psalm which discusses the impact of our unity when it comes to our worship; it will result in prayer.

[It Will Result in Prayer, vv. 6-7.](#)

Psalm 122:6a, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem..."^{9,10}

Based on everything we have seen thus far, this will be the natural result. What happens when we set our hearts on pleasing ourselves and so use the Church/"the Jerusalem Above" as a means to self gain? We just saw it. Our unity will be compromised such that our fellowship will become more about our work, our play, our political views, rather than our calling to live unto the praise and glory of God. When

this occurs in any church, it becomes “a whitewashed tomb”!

Accordingly, we don't want any to forget this calling or this priority or this passion. So, what do we do? We “pray for the peace of Jerusalem”! What does that mean? We pray that God would:

- Enable all in this body to profit from the word and so to be in God's word.
- Strengthen and encourage the members of this body to serve Christ in spite of the daily burdens that press upon them.
- Encourage the members of this body to understand that they are a living sacrifice whose call it is to offer themselves daily unto the Lord for His purpose and glory.

For truly, when any member of this communion is built up, the entire body is strengthened! That is what is behind this prayer. And if there were any doubt, David made it explicit when he gave a sample prayer for us to use in this regard.

A Sample Prayer

Psalm 122: 6b-7, “May they prosper who love you. [This is NOT talking about financial prosperity or physical health. First and foremost, this is talking about spiritual prosperity where the living sacrifice offers himself to the Lord even when it is perceived that the Lord's providence involves bitterness and trial] May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.”¹¹

This really is a bold prayer — NOT ONLY on account of its content, BUT ALSO because it encompasses NOT just the people we like and love, BUT ALL in the body of Christ. That would include these things:

- Those who aren't so nice, or pleasant, or pretty.
- Those who have hurt us, ignored us, neglected us, or have at times trampled us underfoot.
- Think of it... in the history of God's people, how many kings were good? How many genuinely reigned in order to help and encourage God's people? Not many! Yet if unity is our passion, then we will want even the king to be blessed, “May prosperity be within your palaces!”

Such is the radical nature of Christianity. We pray for the good of each other, even the one who has hurt us. And this is possible because in Christ our focus is NOT on ourselves or our neighbor, BUT on the Lord and so His good, His honor, His exaltation, and His praise. When that becomes our passion, we will want everyone in Christ to prosper and so grow in grace — which leads to the second consequence, it will result in a conviction as it relates to ourselves.

It Will Result in a Conviction as it Relates to Ourselves, v. 8.

Psalm 122:8, “For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, ‘May peace be within you.’”

David is finished praying. Now he is describing what comes next. To say, “May peace be within you” and really mean it, is to be one who lives unto that end. This is what James was getting at when he wrote these words:

James 2:15-17, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.”

So, biblically speaking, to be one committed to the peace of God’s people is to be one who then labors for that peace. And finally, notice the third consequence when “peace” is our focus; it will result in a commitment to the body.

It Will Result in a Commitment to the Body, v. 9.

Psalm 122:9, “For the sake of the house of the Lord our God [for the sake of God’s worship] I will seek your good.”

The “good” is in reference to “Jerusalem” which once again by application is the body of Christ, the “Jerusalem Above.” That means that NOT ONLY do we long to grow in our ability to profess the truth of God’s word, BUT we labor for each other to do the same. And when that is lacking in a brother or sister’s life, in love we endeavor to help them.

Galatians 6:1-2, “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.”

Because of our commitment to the worship of Christ, our life’s calling is NOT only to know Christ ourselves, BUT to labor for the rest of the body to know, love, and serve Him. By necessity, this means involving ourselves in the lives of others by which we encourage, build up, and bear the burdens of the body!¹²

That’s one reason we are so high on the discipleship ministry in which many of you are involved. You may or may not know, BUT one of the main pillars of this ministry is encouraging those participating to involve themselves in the lives of one another.

2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

See, biblically speaking, it is NOT enough that you are growing in grace, that your love for Christ is deepening, and that your apprehension of the grace of God has increased.

The question is: Are your brothers and sisters in this body enjoying this growth?

Truly, discipleship is NOT about personal maturation, BUT corporate maturation! Imagine being in a body where all are united in this one quest: to love and know the Lord Jesus Christ more deeply AND to encourage each other in this glorious pursuit! It would be a taste of heaven on earth!

That no doubt is why in this third song of ascent, we its members are called to pray for its peace, work for its peace, and so live for its peace. Murdoch Campbell put it this way:

One great evidence of our being in the way to that glorious city is that there is nothing in this world that commands our concern or interest more than the prosperity of God’s Zion and of all those who seek its good in every part of the world. (Campbell, 1970, p. 177)

So, worship is our calling. As that is the case, lets us ensure that the very institution God established to promote that worship is healthy. And that begins on the individual level and hence our call to engage each other in Christ.

References

- Boice, J. M. (2005). *Psalms: Psalms 107-150 (Expositional Commentary)*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Campbell, M. (1970). *From Grace to Glory: Meditations on the Book of Psalms*. London: banner of Truth Trust.
- Dr. Daniel J. Estes, P. D. (2019). *Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Volume 13) (The New American Commentary)*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group.
- Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford (Author), R. A. (2014). *The Book of Psalms (New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT))*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Spurgeon, C. (2004). *Treasury of David, Psalm 120-150*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic.

End Note(s)

¹ “‘Thrones’ may be a reference to the king’s courts, located in the palace of the monarch or in other government buildings, but they may be something more, something the pilgrim actually

saw as he or she passed through the gates of the capital city. We remember that when Absalom was trying to win the allegiance of the people, to turn them from obeying and serving his father David, he stood in the gates of the city to offer judgment to those who came to it with their legal suits. Judgment was often rendered at a city's gates (see Ruth 4:1–12; Job 29:7), and “thrones for judgment” may be something pilgrims actually noticed when they entered the city.” (Boice, 2005, pp. 1084-1085)

² “Dispensing justice is one of the two God-given functions of right government. The other is defending its citizens against violence either from within or from without (see Romans 13:1–7). When the kings of Israel took this responsibility seriously and gave just judgments, the city and nation were blessed by God and prospered. When they neglected this duty, the nation was troubled, and the result was often civil war, as in the days of David and his rebellious son Absalom.” (Boice, 2005, p. 1085)

³ “The thrones of justice (*mišpāṭ*) ... the thrones of the house of David in v. 5 refer to the role of the monarchy in ancient Israel as dispenser of justice to the people.” (Nancy L. deClaise-Walford (Author), 2014, p. 901)

⁴ If discontented with the petty judgments of their village lords, the people could bring their hard matters to the royal seat, and the beloved King would be sure to decide aright; for the judgment-thrones were “*The thrones of the house of David.*” (Spurgeon, 2004, p. 28)

⁵ “The reference to God’s ‘statute,’ or law, in verse 4 also leads the writer to think of how Jerusalem was the center for dispensing legal justice to the people.” (Boice, 2005, p. 1084)

⁶ “Mays points out: ‘Pilgrimage season was likely a time when conflicts and disputes unsettled in the country courts were brought to the royal officials and their successors.... The peace of the community depended on the establishment of justice. Pilgrimage is a journey in search of peace.’” (Nancy L. deClaise-Walford (Author), 2014, p. 901)

⁷ “In addition to its theological significance, Jerusalem also had an important political and judicial function. The royal authority of the house of David was based on the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 132). The king was obligated to judge in righteousness (Ps 72:1–2), and this judicial rule protected the opportunity for Israel to continue to worship the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem.” (Dr. Daniel J. Estes, 2019, p. 457)

⁸ Recall, it was at one of these “thrones” where David’s son, Absalom, endeavored to steal the heart of the nation by ruling in favor of the more powerful side. The result was that if the king ruled in favor of the weaker side, the more powerful individual/family would think of Absalom as an ally. Recall 2 Samuel 15:2-3, “And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and it happened that when any man had a suit to come to the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, ‘From what city are you?’ And he would say, ‘Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.’ Then Absalom would say to him, ‘See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king.’”

⁹ “Each verse ends with the second feminine singular pronoun suffix- *k* (referring to the city), giving the stanza what Gerstenberger describes as a ‘homophonous’ quality... Of the ten Hebrew words that make up vv. 6 and 7, six contain the letters *šīn* and *lāmed*: *ask* (*ša^alū*); *well-being* (twice) (*šālôm*); *Jerusalem* (*y^erūšālāim*); *may they be at ease* (*yīšēlāyū*); and *tranquility* (*šalwā*)-acoustically and visually emphasizing the theme of well-being.” (Nancy L. deClaise-Walford (Author), 2014, p. 901)

¹⁰ “In a church peace is to be desired, expected, promoted, and enjoyed. If we may not say ‘Peace at any price,’ yet we may certainly cry ‘Peace at the highest price.’ Those who are daily fluttered by rude alarms are charmed to reach their nest in a holy fellowship and abide in it. In a church one of the main ingredients of success is internal peace: strife, suspicion, party-spirit, division,- these are deadly things. Those who break the peace of the church deserve to suffer, and those who sustain it win a great blessing.” (Spurgeon, 2004, pp. 28-29)

¹¹ “Military defenses constructed by humans can fall, leaving a city subject to defeat (cf. Isaiah 30:25), and in the time of Nehemiah the walls of Jerusalem had to be rebuilt to restore protection to Jerusalem. This prayer, then, is a call for the Lord to provide what human efforts alone could not secure.” (Dr. Daniel J. Estes, 2019, p. 458)

¹² “This is not a onetime prayer or idle words unmatched by deeds. The psalmist wants to work for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem too. Hence, he ends his composition with a vow: ‘For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity’ (v. 9). It is a firm resolve.” (Boice, 2005, p. 1085)