

Subject: *The Pure Joy of Going to Church*
Scripture: *Psalm 122:1-9*

There are special times in life that give us pure joy—one that comes to mind on Mother's Day is the birth of a baby. Another time of joy is our wedding day, and another is the day we graduate from school—all of these are times of great joy. But there is another time of joy I want us to think about today—the pure joy of going to church. David describes it in Psalm 122.

First, I want us to consider the historical background of this psalm. It is one of the Songs of Degrees or Ascents (Psalm 120-134). These were sung by Jewish pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to worship at one of the three annual feasts in Jerusalem (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles). These were called songs of degrees or ascents because Jerusalem was high in elevation and because people were going to the Temple which sat on an elevated place known as the Temple Mount. These were occasions of great joy. We understand how they felt on this first Sunday back in church.

1. The Joy of Gathering with God's People

Notice the references in verse 1, "I" (David) was glad when "they" (God's people) said unto "me" (David), let "us" (God's people) go into the house of the LORD.

Church is the place where we meet with God and we gather as His people. What a joy and privilege it is to come together with like-minded people for one purpose: to honor the one true God and to worship God in spirit and truth.

***John 4:23-24**²³ But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.²⁴ God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

We sing that song: "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God."

When we go to church we celebrate our identity as God's people. We confess our faith in Christ and our dependence on Him. We need Christ, and we need one another.

John Wesley said: "There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian."

We need to have our personal time with God (our devotional time, quiet time), and we also need to have our corporate worship with other believers. Nothing can take the place of that.

***Hebrews 10:25** Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

2. The Joy of Giving God Praise

The OT saints brought animal sacrifices to the Lord. We don't do that because Christ gave His life on Calvary as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. But there is a sacrifice we bring...the sacrifice of praise.

***Psalms 100:1-4**¹ Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. ² Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. ³ Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*

We have so much to be thankful for, so many reasons to praise Him. We praise God for who He is and we thank Him for what He has done.

***Psalms 103:1-2**¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. His holy name represents all He is. His benefits represent all He does.*

People will try to convince you that they can worship God on the golf course or on the lake as well as they can worship Him in church. We know that's just an excuse. Billy Sunday said an excuse is a skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. When you're on the golf course you're not thinking about God's grace, you're thinking about golf. When you're on the lake you're not thinking about God's forgiveness, you're thinking about fish.

We're glad when we go to church because we get to focus our minds on God and all His blessings and we get to praise Him for those blessings.

***Psalms 34:3** O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

3. The Joy of Getting God's Perspective

When we come to church we get to hear and study and apply God's Word to our lives. We get our focus on the things that really matter. We get truth and the truth sets us free. We get information that leads to transformation.

When we go to church we need to hear God's Word and be reminded of some things and get our focus right. We need to know how good God is, how awful sin is, how long eternity is, how horrible hell is, how wonderful heaven is, how precious Jesus is, and how important our mission is. We need to know these things and be reminded of these things because during the week it's so easy to lose our focus.

Psalm 73 – This is the testimony of a man named Asaph, who was actually a worship leader, but he lost his focus.

There is nothing any better than meeting with God's people in God's house on God's day and singing God's songs and hearing God's Word. What could be better than that?

Psalm 122:1 describes the pure joy of going to church. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody could say that and mean it? Sadly, that's not how everybody feels. It may not even be true for everyone in your family.

I want to close this message with a challenge to all families. First to all the mothers, I want to remind you of the powerful influence you have in your home, especially your influence in the things of God. You set the tone. You set the mood. You control the environment. Thank God for mothers who say, "I was glad when they said to me..."

President Abraham Lincoln said, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

Now I want to say a word to the rest of us. All of us are not mothers, but all of us have mothers or we had mothers at one time who loved us and cared for us. Many of us have or had mothers who could say: "I was glad when they said..." But the question I want to ask is this: Do you have that same kind of joy? Can you say, "I was glad when they said to me..." Do you have the joy of the Lord? Is going to church a blessing or a burden? Have you lost your joy or did you ever have it?

David prayed in another psalm: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12).