

The Glorious City

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Our text for this evening is Psalm 87. Psalm 87, and I invite you to turn there with me. One of the surest signs that a man or a woman has started to grasp the significance of Scripture and is on a track for accelerated spiritual growth is when it starts to dawn on him or on her that the Bible is much much much more than a mere book of morals to be followed, that the Bible is even much much more than simply a book of how to come to personal salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us and the Bible leads us to Christ. Oh yes, most certainly, the Bible does consequently tell us how to live once we have become Christians and thus impacts our morality. Yes, of course, that's true, but the Bible is more than that. The Bible is much much more than that in the scope of the philosophy that it teaches, in the scope of the worldview that it imparts and the way that it teaches us even a philosophy of history that we're going to see here this evening, we start to see that there is this great expansive view of the world of spiritual truth of the invisible realm as well as the visible, the past, present and future from eternity past to eternity future, the Bible is a sweeping revelation of God of far reaching consequence that goes far beyond its implications for us in our individual lives, that's my point, and when we start to grasp something of that, it enables us to say, "What kind of philosophy of life, a philosophy of history, is the Bible teaching us?" Because think about it, beloved, the Bible impacts nations. It speaks to what will happen to nations and that is far beyond the impact that it might have on our own individual lives.

So as we come to recognize that, we come to revere and respect this book even more for the profundity of its revelation from God, and also to expand our minds and expand our hearts and to give us things to consider and ponder that go far beyond the things that just relate to our individual lives. I would never want to be a seeker-sensitive pastor. I would never want to have a congregation that simply wanted me to tell them what would help them tomorrow because that is just such a small, tiny, puny, restricted view of what God has given us in Scripture, to think and to approach the Bible that way is a travesty and is a distortion of the purpose of the Bible before you even begin.

So tonight we come to what I believe is just one of the most staggering texts in all of the Bible for all of its obscurity, not many of us could quote much from Psalm 87 before this evening. There is a hymn that is built on verse 3 but Psalm 87 for all of its compact brevity is one of the most amazing staggering passages of Scripture that a man could ever

come to and study and contemplate, and that's our privilege to consider it here this evening. I'm so glad that you're with us.

Verse 1, beginning in Psalm 87, the inscription reads, "A Psalm of the sons of Korah. A Song." Verse 1,

1 His foundation is in the holy mountains. 2 The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the other dwelling places of Jacob. 3 Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah. 4 "I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me; Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.'" 5 But of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; And the Most High Himself will establish her. 6 The LORD will count when He registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah. 7 Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, "All my springs of joy are in you."

This short Psalm is difficult. It is more difficult even than it might appear on a first reading. If you read this as a relatively new Christian, not familiar with some of the geographic references even, for example, it would be hard to make much sense out of what this text has to say. This is not a text that someone would necessarily turn to first in their daily devotions, but one of the benefits and one of the things that I want you to see as we approach this tonight, one of the benefits of teaching through the Bible sequentially, systematically, verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, is that it forces you to come to texts and to deal with texts and to wrestle with texts that you otherwise might overlook because their significance is not immediately obvious to you, and this is one of the ways that we as a church, we as a congregation together, you and I as a body of believers, we submit ourselves to God's word, we humble ourselves before it, is that we go through and we say we'll deal with every text that we possibly can in a systematic way and we'll just let God lead our lives and lead our body through his word rather than artificially picking and choosing what it is that we want to hear. When a church does that, when a pastor does that, when a Christian does that even, you could say, ultimately what you find is that the Bible is just giving you back what you brought to it in the first place because you just went looking to see what you wanted to find rather as opposed to just saying, "What does God have for me in this word," as we go verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter and letting God expand our mind and our understanding and our perspective on what he has revealed to us.

Psalm 87 is not a text that I ever would have chosen to speak on. It wouldn't have even occurred to me, honestly, to speak about it if I were just going to pick and choose Psalms to speak on. But tonight as I stand here, I am profoundly grateful to God for you, of course, and for the opportunity for us to open up this magnificent text of Scripture. As I said, this short Psalm is difficult. One commentator said this, he said, "Exegetically, this brief Psalm is one of the most problematic in the whole Psalter." So of 150 Psalms, this would rate as one of the most difficult ones to understand and to interpret, and so we come to it with a sense of humility tonight, not wanting to be so dogmatic that we think

that we have things figured out that other men have wrestled with over the years, so we're going to just try to address it on its terms and let it speak to us tonight.

What we have here today, another thing that I love, I've just really fallen in love with the Psalms more than I expected to when we started doing this some 4 ½ years ago. One of the things that I've just really appreciated about sequentially teaching through the Psalms is finding that the Psalms that are next to one another often have connections to each other. When the Psalms were put into their final form by whoever did that, perhaps it was Ezra, we really don't know, but the Psalms were placed together next to one another and there are themes that cross Psalms and you go through a section of three, four, five Psalms and you start to see that there are themes that are echoed as you go from one to the other. That's another thing that you would miss if you picked and chose just random Psalms to teach on. What we find here in Psalm 87 is that Psalm 87 is expanding on a very crucial text that we saw last time in Psalm 86.

Psalm 86:9, I encourage you to look at that as I'm just now starting to get wound up here. Psalm 86:9 says,

9 All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You,
O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name.

It's a text that speaks to the worldwide worship of God, the worldwide worship of his Incarnate Son, and this Psalm 87 as we're going to see is an expansion of that which was set forth for us in the immediately prior Psalm. And this is what I was alluding to as I introduced the text just a few moments ago, is for us to step back and to recognize and to realize that there is a place and time for us to set aside our own individual thoughts, our individual plans, our individual problems, what does this text mean to me, that kind of mindset that we all know so very well, and to realize that when you deal with the totality of Scripture, you are introduced to things of such great profound transcendence that transcends centuries, let alone to say transcending our individuals lives, things that transcend localities, things that transcend national borders and speak to something of worldwide import in what is being said. Surely, Psalm 86:9 is a text like that when it encompasses every nation in the world and says there is a coming day when, "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord." Well, that dwarfs anyone of us. It dwarfs our church. It dwarfs anything in the news today to recognize that there is a time like that that is coming, and that there will be such a universal recognition of the Lordship of Christ and that nations will bow before him and honor him and glorify his name, you just start to realize this is staggering and you start to realize that, you start, it just humbles you before the text and you start to say to yourself, "Who am I and what is my sin-filled tongue to be able to speak of such majestic glories as this?" Right?

So Psalm 87 is building on what we saw in Psalm 86:9. Psalm 87 is not a prayer as other Psalms are. The Psalmist in Psalm 87 is not struggling with issues of faith and doubt. There are many other Psalms that deal with that. Psalm 87 has a different purpose in the Psalter. He's talking about something in a different realm, something of transcendent value, of transcendent import, and it's our privilege to follow after it here this evening.

Psalm 87 is not a personal prayer, it's not a statement of personal faith, what Psalm 87 is, is a poetic statement about the city of Jerusalem and we're going to see that in Psalm 87 Jerusalem is extolled as the glorious city, the glorious city, which we could use as our title for tonight's message, in fact, we'll not only use it for the title of tonight's message, we'll also use that as our first point for the evening, "The Glorious City."

Now in the Old Testament, God manifested his presence in a special way in the temple at Jerusalem. That's just a matter of common fact. You can read about that during the reign of Solomon, the temple was built and everything was sanctified and God's Shekinah glory came and rested there. The temple was the place where God manifested his presence. Now to get into the immediate thought and realm of the mind of the Psalmist here, understand that the Psalmist is recognizing that God in a special unique way has manifested his presence in the temple at Jerusalem in Old Testament days.

Now what does that tell you immediately about that geographic area, the area of the city of Zion, Zion being a poetic name for Jerusalem? Well, you start to say, "Wow, the Creator of the universe, the God of Israel, the God who would one day become Incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ chose that place as the place in which to manifest His presence." The blessedness of God was manifested in the city of Jerusalem in a way that was different from any other city in the world. Talk about the great cities of the world today, you might mention New York, Chicago, Singapore, Paris, depending on your personal preferences and prejudices about things, but there is no city in the world that has been blessed like Jerusalem to be the place where God's presence was uniquely manifested. So there is this recognition that there is a unique glory about the city of Jerusalem that the Psalmist wants to expound upon as he writes in this Psalm.

So think with me just a little bit as we go along here. The temple, then, was the appointed place for worship. God revealed, manifested his Shekinah glory in the Holy of Holies there. This is unique. There is nothing like it anywhere. The greatest cities of the world cannot claim to have had that manifestation of God in their presence and so when the believing heart is thinking rightly, it recognizes that there was a special privilege that was given to the city of Jerusalem that was not given to anyone else. Jerusalem, therefore, had a unique prominence among the cities of the earth and that's what he's saying here in verses 1 and 2.

Look at it with me. He says,

1 His foundation is in the holy mountains.

Notice how abrupt this statement is. The Psalm is marked by these abrupt statements that aren't expanded on. It's kind of a staccato, bullet point thing that doesn't expand on everything that could be said and so you're just given brief statements of themes that are intended to stimulate your thinking. "His foundation is in the holy mountains," and then he goes on and says in verse 2, "Yahweh, the LORD, the covenant-keeping God of Israel."

2 The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the other dwelling places of Jacob.

There is a special favor of God that was placed on Jerusalem. The temple was built on a mountain that towered above the city. As I said, Zion is a poetic name for Jerusalem. We'll see this manifested in some of the Scriptures that we're going to look at later on this evening, but it speaks to the spiritual significance of the city in the Old Testament, and it says right from the beginning that the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places of Jacob. There is a special favor upon this city that was not given even to the other cities in Israel. None of the other cities were the location of the temple where the worship of the believing saints would be done; where people would gather and celebrate the presence of God; and where atonement would be made for sin in the Old Testament economy. This is magnificent. This is set apart. Things are given to this place that were given to no one else of the most profound significance possible.

Now, it says, "The LORD loves the gates of Zion." The gates of a city were traditionally the center of its city and its business and its social life, and so the center of a city kind of defined its purpose, its meaning, its social significance. What the residents of the city had was manifested in this place of a public gathering. The gates of Zion, oh, are you kidding me? The gates of Zion, the center of life of this city had a special purpose. The gates to this city gave access to the worship of the one true God and God chose the elevated hills upon which Jerusalem sits so that it might be called his royal residence in Old Testament times, a unique privilege of unspeakable consequence so that he says in verse 3, again in this short, brief, staccato fashion,

3 Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God.

Glorious things are spoken of you. This is where God has revealed himself. This is where God can be met and be worshiped in that Old Testament economy, and Jerusalem was the city of God, the city belonging to God, the city in which God met his people for worship. Think about that, the manifest presence of God in this one location. No other dwelling place in Israel received a gift like that.

So as I'll go into in a moment, what you need to recognize is this, is that what made Jerusalem special was the fact that God had chosen it. Jerusalem enjoyed a derived glory, a derivative glory that before David came and established his throne in Jerusalem, the geography was there but it wasn't special before then like this. It's not that there was an intrinsic glory to that specific geographic region. What it's saying is that Jerusalem was on the receiving end of a gift of grace from God to be appointed for such a magnificent purpose as this; something given to Jerusalem that was not given anywhere else. It was the city of God, you could think about it this way, it was the city of God because God set his love upon it. God chose to love this place, to love Jerusalem, to make himself known there.

Turn back to just kind of remember some of the Old Testament perspective on these things pertaining to God and Israel and choosing them as a nation. Turn back to Deuteronomy 7, beginning in verse 6,

6 For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Talking about the Jews not having an intrinsic merit of their own but that God chose them as a people and made them his possession out of all the peoples who were on the face of the earth. We get that in a personal human level that God chose a people like that. In this dispensation, God has chosen the elect, the believers in Christ to be his people in a unique way, set his love upon them, not for any intrinsic merit of their own but for his own purpose. According to his own will, for his own pleasure, for his own love, he set his affection on the nation of Israel, he sets his affection on the elect in Christ.

Well, there's a parallel to the fact that God did something similar to this place, this city of Zion, and go on in verse 7, you see,

7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

You were in slavery. You were this pathetic small group of people in slavery in Egypt, no land of your own. You were a people but you weren't a nation and look at what God did for you. He chose you and brought you out. This is Moses speaking just as they're on the brink of entering into the Promised Land. He says, "Remember where you came from. You were no one special. There was no merit in you, but God according to His own love and His own purpose chose you, blessed you and brought you out so that you were on the verge of entering into the land that He promised to you." It's for God's sake. It's according to God's love, God's purpose, and it's in that spirit that we speak of Jerusalem as being the city of God. Not because God had to do it there, it's where he chose to. It's where God was pleased to manifest himself.

Look at Psalm 78 where you see this distinguishing grace of God, this distinguishing choice of God, resented by men who believed that God owes everyone an equal opportunity. On what basis would we place such obligations on the holy Creator of the universe, we as sinful creatures who have fallen short of his glory and who are rebels against him? On what basis would we obligate him to treat all men the same if it pleases God to choose some and not others? This is just the pride of man rising up in rebellion against the free sovereign grace of God to do with what is his according to what he wants to do.

So in verse 67 of Psalm 78 we see that God,

67 ... rejected the tent of Joseph, And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim

These are tribes of Israel. He did not choose to manifest his presence in the geographic regions of their tribe but instead, verse 68, he

68 ... chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. 69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has founded forever.

God in free sovereign wisdom according to what pleased him and pleased him alone, said, "I will manifest My presence in Zion, in Jerusalem, in the place that I have chosen."

One other passage for you to see, Psalm 132:13. I do want you to see this. Psalm 132:13,

13 ... the LORD [Yahweh] has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation.

And so God chose this city according to his own divine purpose because it pleased him to do so, just as he chooses some to receive salvation in Christ because it pleases him to do so.

Now let's take this, pause for a little bit and come to the realm and the area of personal salvation. Someone might well ask, "Why did God choose me?" Someone who knows that he's in Christ, someone who knows that she is in Christ and is conscious of the sinful condition in which God, and from which God saved them, might ask, "Why would God do that? What was there about me that would prompt Him to choose me?" And the answer to that question is there was nothing in you to choose you, that is precisely the point. There is nothing in any man or any woman that distinguishes them from someone else to make them a more likely candidate to receive God's grace in Christ. When God saves someone, when Christ saves someone, it is because it pleases him to do it. He does it according to his own wisdom, his own will, his own love, and that is the final and ultimate answer to the question. It's not because of anything that was in you or was in me that God saved us. There wasn't anything in us that prompted his electing choice. God chose us according to his sovereign purpose, his sovereign love, and his sovereign grace, sovereign in the sense that it was a free, uninfluenced, unrequired decision on his part.

Now, that completely levels the pride of man and magnifies the grace of God in such a way that those of us who are in Christ can only respond with pure unreserved worship that says, "O God, thank You for Your grace to this unworthy sinner! You did not have to choose me and yet You did. You had every right to judge me and yet You won't. I was full of guilt and vileness and corruption and Your hand of mercy came upon and washed me and cleansed me and brought me into Your family that I might be with You forever. God, I am dwarfed by Your grace. I am dwarfed by the majesty of salvation. I am

humbled before You. Everything that I have is nothing that I deserved." Scripture says what do you have that you didn't receive?

So we find this principle of God's choice in bestowing blessing, we see it in a national realm with Israel, we see it on an individual realm among Christians, we see it in the realm of his choice of Jerusalem. God does not choose people or places according to anything of their merit or what they deserve, he does so according to his own divine purpose. To alliterate it further, he does it according to his own divine pleasure. It pleased him to do this and when we are contemplating Zion, we realize that there is a privilege that was given to Zion that was not given to anyone else.

So Zion – watch this – Zion has a derived glory according to Scripture, according to the purposes of God. As with the place, so also with people, sticking with the alliterating "P" here tonight for as long as I can carry that out. As with people, as with believers, then, electing love – oh! If you haven't worked through this, I would really listen to what I'm about to say. Electing love does not bring pride to the one who has been chosen by God, properly understood, electing love does not bring pride over personal merit, far to the contrary what electing love does is bring praise to the heart for undeserved grace. God chose me for salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world. I do not boast in anything of myself in the result of that because I know there wasn't anything about me to prompt that in him. So rather than making me boast, it humbles me completely. I received a gift I did not deserve and so what my response is, is not to boast in me but to boast in the cross of Christ, to boast in the God who bestowed upon me such undeserved grace, and to boast even further and to proclaim as far and wide as opportunity brings itself, that God offers grace to every man, woman and child who would come under the sound of the Gospel and freely offers them the fullness of salvation if they will but receive it. And those who turn away have only their own hardened hearts to blame. There is no unwillingness in God to save based on these things.

So Zion is a glorious city. It brings us to point 2 as the Psalmist speaks of the glorious future. The glorious future, and as glorious as the first three verses have been, there is a greater crescendo that is being built toward here. You could say that, I really hadn't thought about it until just this moment in the way that we have understood these first three verses, there's a bit of a glance back that looking at the Lord's love for the gates of Zion and remembering something of the history and the way that that manifested itself, but what we're going to see now is we're going to look to the future. God now speaks in the first person as this Psalm continues in verse 4.

Look at it with me. He says,

4 "I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me;
Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia: "This one was born there." 5 But
of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; And the
Most High Himself will establish her. 6 The LORD will count when He
registers the peoples, "This one was born there."

Notice that repeated theme, "This one was born there," verse 4. Verse 5, "This one and that one were born in her." Verse 6, "This one was born there." Notice the theme that this section brings up. We'll explain that in just a moment. In a general way, what we find here in this section is that the God who founded this city is declaring who has the right of citizenship in this glorious city. Who has the right of citizenship. Who can claim a portion in this blessing that has been given to Zion. And what it's saying is, is that the gates are open to those who know him, who know this God.

Look at verse 4 with me there at the start, "I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me." So God has revealed himself in this city and he has revealed himself so that he might be known. One of the wonders of God's revelation of himself is that he revealed himself that he might be known. He's revealed himself in a general way to all people in creation, Psalm 19:1-6 talks about that, something of his nature and divine power can be known through creation, but what this is talking about here in verse 4 is something deeper, something more profound. It's not talking about a casual knowledge of mere acquaintance, "Oh, I've heard about Him. I know something about that," like I know that there's an Empire State Building in New York City. You know, I know something casually in that way. That's not what this is here. This is the language of true worship in confession, of real confession and obedience to him. To know God in that way, to know God not simply as some kind of remote, vague Creator that we call upon in darkness when we're in the midst of our trials, but rather to know him according to his revealed perfections; to know him according to who he really is; and to not simply know him that way but to relate to him by faith, to relate to him in worship, in real confession of him, to come to him in yielded loving submission to him that says, "I will have You as my God. I know You as my God. I worship You. You are my God and I am Your servant." That kind of knowing. That kind of knowledge is what is being spoken of here. Who counts as a true citizen of Zion? Who has part? In other words, you can state the question this way, who has part, who has a portion, who is under the beneficial consequences of the fact that God has revealed himself in Jerusalem? Are you with me? Are we tracking here? Or am I, have I missed the boat?

Let's just back up a bit. God has revealed himself in Jerusalem and that means that Jerusalem has a special place of honor because of the honor that God bestowed upon it by blessing Jerusalem with his presence. Now, beloved, God revealed himself – we're slowing down here. That's good. God has revealed himself in order that he might be known. God revealed himself with the purpose of creating and forming for himself a people who would belong to him and would worship him, who would know him, truly know him. Our Lord Jesus prayed, "Father, I pray that they would know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." A real knowledge of worship, consecration, conversion, sanctification, set apart for him. "I am Yours," that God would have a people that belonged to him, that were uniquely devoted to him in their affections and aspirations; that he would be their God and they would be his people. To know him like that. God revealed himself in order to make that happen.

Now the question is: who, then, is it that benefits from this revelation? What is the goal of that revelation? The goal would be that there would be people that know him like that.

So we could ask the question, then: who counts, who is numbered among the true citizens of Zion? Now that question matters. That question matters. Perhaps in a way that was more significant in times past than it is in our day and age, even though it matters here for us today, to belong to a city was to have right of residence and protection from that city. If you were a citizen of the city, you know, say you were within the walls of the city, you were entitled to the protection of the city walls, protection of the city army, the city king, if you want to say it like that. You were under the realm of the protection of that city. You belonged there, get it? You belonged there. There were benefits that were yours. So when we ask the question, then, who is a citizen of Zion, we're asking who has the right to dwell in the presence of God? Who knows him? Who is under his protection? Who benefits from this revelation of God that he has made in this place? And God answers the question but it's not in a way that you would expect at all, especially in Old Testament times. You wouldn't expect this answer at all. You would expect in a context like this when a Jewish writer was writing a Jewish poetry about a Jewish city, you would expect it to exalt the exclusivity of Israel and the tribes of Israel. You'd expect it to list out tribes of Israel as those who belonged there: Dan, Judah, Benjamin. You'd expect to see that. This is not that at all.

Now remember we're reading Psalm 87 with an echo of Psalm 86:9 in our minds, "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name." We've been prepared for what we're about to see here. What we see here is those who have right of citizenship in Zion is not a recitation of Jewish tribes but instead a representative list of five nations that surrounded Israel in Old Testament times. Rahab was another name for Egypt, which you can see in Isaiah 30:7. We won't look there. Babylon, traditional enemy to the north. Philistia lay to the west of Israel on the Mediterranean coast. Tyre was a commercial center to the north of the land of Israel. Ethiopia, your translation may say Cush, was to the south of Egypt. What's this verse doing? It is picturing God reading from the book of life.

Look at it with me. Verse 4 he says, "I shall mention these nations among those who know Me." Verse 6, "The LORD will count when He registers the people." This verse is picturing, this section, I should say, is picturing God reading from the book of life – and watch this – he is including foreign peoples with his own people, Israel, as he declares those who have right of citizenship in Zion.

One commentator said this and I quote, and beloved, remember we're talking about nations here. We're talking about something transcendent here. This commentator said this and I quote, "Foreign nations are here described not as captives or tributaries, not even as doing voluntary homage to the greatness and glory of Zion, but is actually incorporated and enrolled by a new birth among her sons."

This is a statement of staggering prophetic grace. God is saying, "I will include other nations within the realm of the benefits of My revelation that I made of Myself in Zion. The enemies of My people will one day be reconciled to Me. They will have a right of citizenship. I will treat them as though they were actually born there. So full, so free, so complete will be the privilege that is theirs that I will read off their names and by

sovereign prerogative I'll say, 'This one was born there.' Born there. Birthright citizenship. Having all of the full privileges of someone who was literally physically born there."

And this registry which God is describing – oh, this is so beautiful, this is so beautiful – this registry means that these people who once were enemies will one day have the right of entry to the city. They will belong there.

Look at Revelation 21 to just get a sense of this in biblical terms. Revelation 21:24. I used to say frequently as I was preaching, "I think this is my favorite text in the Bible." I stopped saying that after I said it about 12 or 15 different texts. It just starts to sound foolish after a while, but this Psalm 87 is really really precious, beloved.

In Revelation 21:24, let's start in verse 22, it's looking forward to the New Jerusalem in the eternal state. It says,

22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 26 and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The point being is that it is described here as though there is a registry of people who belong there and when their name is listed in the registry, they have a right to enter. They belong there. The blessing of this place is something in which they have a portion and to which they are entitled to by grace. So going back to Psalm 87, you get a picture of this, of God talking about Zion and answering the question, "Who benefits from this? Who has the right to be there?" and he's reading foreign nations who are not recipients of the promises that were made to Israel. It's expanded beyond Israel.

In what sense were they born there? They were born there. You read this Psalm for the first time and the second time and the third time and the fourth time and that just sounds really kind of weird at the start. What is the point of this? What is he saying? He said it three times, it must matter. They were born there? Think with me here. The depths of the profundity of this text cannot be sounded. They cannot be reached. We can only dip our toe in the depth of the water and realize that there's far more below that we will get, but it is evident that he is not talking about people who were physically born in the city. They were not physically born there because, you say, "Why do you say that?" Because by natural birth, they're associated with the surrounding nations. Then this can only mean one thing, it can only mean, quoting James Montgomery Boice, "it can only mean that it will be set down in the official records as if they had been born there, meaning that they will be given the status of true citizens." They have been given something which was not

their right by natural birth. God, in grace, by a second birth, by a new birth, by a spiritual birth is giving them privileges that they had no claim on. They were born there. By declaration of God, they have all of the rights and claims and privileges of a citizen who was literally born physically there.

God says, "The benefits of My revelation that I made in Jerusalem will expand to nations who were outside the walls, who were outside the promises." That, beloved, is a staggering staggering staggering staggering statement of grace. The consequences of this are incalculable. They have received a second birth that ties them to Jerusalem. Nations who were formerly hostile to Israel will one day come to worship there, to worship the God of Israel, to worship God as he has revealed himself, now in the fullness of revelation, we understand to worship Jesus Christ himself, the full and final revelation of God who will be manifest in Jerusalem.

The prophets speak of this often. Often. Turn to Isaiah 19. Bear with me here. Isaiah 19 in verse 23. We're going to have to press the accelerator a little bit here so that we don't go until midnight. Isaiah 19:23 says,

23 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. 24 In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

Saying, "This is going to expand to nations which were once the enemies of My people. One day I'll call Egypt My people. One day I'll call Assyria My people."

Turn a little further deeper into your Old Testament to the book of Micah which is in the center of the 12, the minor prophets, the so-called minor prophets. Micah 4. It goes Jonah, Micah, Nahum, there in that center part. Looking forward to a day still future to us when nations come and worship the true, the one and true, the living, the only God. Micah 4:2,

2 Many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD

Nations, beloved, nations. Nations.

let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Do you see the parallelism, Zion, Jerusalem? That there is a coming day where God will be manifest once again in Jerusalem and nations will come and gather and say, "We want

to hear from this God." Now beloved, that hasn't happened in the past 2,500 years. That tells me that this day of which the prophets speak is still future. This is still future to us, not to be explained in a spiritual redefinition of who Israel is, not to say that the church has replaced Israel and Israel has been cast aside. No, no, Scripture would indicate that God is still going to do something future that will represent the fulfillment of all of these magnificent promises.

Look at the book of Zechariah 2 and go to Zechariah, not Zephaniah, because that would be easy to do. Zechariah 2:10. Oh, this is so so amazing! I might just preach until midnight. If you need to go, you can go. Zechariah 2:10. Hey, get back here! No, no one, no one was leaving. That was a joke for those of you on the live stream, those of you sitting up front. It was a total joke.

Zechariah 2:10,

10 "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD. 11 "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people.

Do you see it? Do you see it? This statement, "They will become My people," is what Psalm 87 is describing in verses 4 through 6.

Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. 12 "The LORD will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

There is another coming day. Zechariah 8:22. I don't know how many times God would have to say nations to make us think that he meant nations. Zechariah 8:22,

22 'So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.' 23 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'In those days [those days still to come] ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'"

Then in chapter 14, verse 16. I'm giving you a sampling here. This is hardly comprehensive or exhaustive. I just want you to see that this is a repeated theme. We're not making this up, as I like to say. I'm not capable of making this stuff up.

Zechariah 14:16,

16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

How can we summarize this, simplify it, tie it up into a simple statement? The past hostility of nations against Israel and against their God will one day yield to future worship. There is a coming time of glory, of peace when Christ reigns from Jerusalem and the nations will come and participate. We have a foretaste, we have a sampling of that today, now in the church as Gentiles believe from every tongue and tribe and nation. That's a foretaste but it's not the final fulfillment. It couldn't be. The fullness of what the prophets foretold is yet to come. Jesus Christ will be universally recognized as the King of kings and not merely individuals but nations as nations will come and offer their worship.

Beloved, beloved, it will be glorious. We have reached the limits of human language to express the magnificence and the exalted wonder of what that will be like. The reality will go far beyond the boundaries of human words here this evening, but it will be glorious and the point of Psalm 87 is it will be in Zion, the city of God, when this takes place.

We've talked about this in Old Testament temple terms, can I remind you that God revealed himself further in Christ in Jerusalem? Steve Lawson said, this is a somewhat lengthy quote and just kind of tying up the nature of Psalm 87 and the emphasis on Jerusalem for us to see in a compact place the wonder and the magnificence of the way that God revealed himself in that glorious city. I quote, "It was in the holy city Jerusalem that Jesus died for sins and became a curse under the law for sinners. It was in Jerusalem that Jesus rose from the dead triumphant over the grave. It was from the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem that Jesus ascended back to heaven. It was to Jerusalem that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. It was in Jerusalem that Christ built the first church and it will be to Jerusalem that Jesus shall return at the end of this age, and it will be in Jerusalem that Christ will rule and reign over the earth for 1,000 years. How special is Jerusalem to God? So should it be to all who love him as well."

Nations, beloved. This is a staggering picture of grace and grandeur. It is staggering to think of the future course of history, staggering to think that in this convoluted mess of hostility toward God in which we live among nations here today, to think that one day Christ will return and reverse it and there will be a joining of nations to come around his name to worship him. It is staggering to think of this Lord whom we love by faith, not by sight right now, being visible on the earth, reigning and being loved, being worshiped by nations. It is staggering, beloved, to think of the grace that God has in store for nations who know him not.

It's overwhelming, isn't it? This is a lot better than we can imagine. This takes our thoughts to realms of God's plan, God's purpose for the world, for nations, it takes us to the surpassing supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ. So great and so worthy is his intrinsic worth that nations when he comes back will recognize it. Staggering to think of the grace that will allow the conversion of nations who were once hostile to him. This is all beyond our ability to comprehend and it leaves you, it leaves us wanting a capstone. The combination of all of these things cries out for a response because our hearts are ready to explode with the magnificence of what Scripture reveals.

Well might we hide our face at the glory of these magnificent truths, at the magnificent God who planned such grace for undeserving people. It cries out to burst out of us and that's why the last verse of Psalm 87 is there. Point 3: the glorious response. The glorious response. We saw the glorious city, the glorious future, and now the glorious response. In that great day of which we have been speaking, joyous worship will mark all of God's people. Verse 7,

7 Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, "All my springs of joy are in you."

This is a picture of joyful music and even dancing. I think the ESV uses the word "dance" or "dancing" in its translation here. In that day, that day in which Christ reigns, that day when nations are gathered around him to receive from him, to learn from him, to respond in worship, it is going to be a time of explosive joy, of magnificent expression of responding to the fact that the Son of God is now present and in our midst and reigning on earth and nations will rejoice over that, and Jerusalem will be celebrated as the glorious city of God.

"All my springs of joy are in you." The spring, the fountain, the originating source of all of this comes back to this geographic location. God revealed himself in the Old Testament, in the temple at Jerusalem. Christ came and made himself known and made atonement for sinners at Jerusalem. And now in the future, in the day yet to come, Christ will be there again, again manifesting and revealing God in a way that will compel in joyful willing response from those that God has converted. And when he is in the midst, the celebration will be unlike anything the earth has ever seen, and yet the city, the city is just a setting. The city is the setting for the King. It's like having a ring where a magnificent diamond has been set upon it. The ring is the setting so that the diamond can be displayed. Jerusalem is the ring where the diamond of our gracious Lord will be displayed.

Christ will reign from Jerusalem. Nations will rejoice and those of us that know Christ today will be a part of that celebration as well. What a magnificent day that will be when we are resurrected and join in this worship of him. Revelation 20:4 speaks of it. Revelation 20:4,

4 ... they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

And the sum is this in verse 6,

6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Our Father, we look forward to that great day. We are staggered at the magnificent plan that You have. We rejoice in the grace that You will show to nations. Today, Father, we

rejoice in the grace that You have shown to us. We respond to You, Father, with this joyous worship, this gladness of heart, this recognition that we are in the presence of One far greater, far more gracious, far more wonderful than anything that we would ever be, far more wonderful than eye could see or ear could hear or tongue could tell. So great is Your glory beyond all of our human comprehension and human senses, our God, and we rejoice, we thank You in advance that You will show grace to nations yet still in the future, to share in this, to participate, to have privilege, to have ownership in the way that You have manifested Yourself starting from that geographic center in Zion, the city of God, fulfilled now in the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So Father, fill us with hope. Fill us with anticipation that drowns out the countervailing noises of anxiety and difficulty and adversity in this present little window of life. Father, let us find our great hope and our great anticipation in the fact that You will one day be more greatly glorified than You are right now, You will be more widely and more famously known than You are right now, and when You are exalted and recognized like that, Father, it will be the fulfillment of our highest aspirations, that You would receive more glory from men than You do right now. We thank You, Father, and honor You and worship You that You have included us in your plan that we might partake of these glories, though unworthy in ourselves.

Father, I pray for those that are here that have still spurned Christ, that are still turned away, hard of heart. Father, may the magnificence of the glories of which we have spoken create in them an urgency to come to Christ that they would not be left behind of such magnificence, but they would come with a joyful willing heart to embrace Christ, confessing sin and giving themselves to Him freely, fully, that they might participate in the worship that is the ultimate outcome of life on earth. For these things, Father, we pray. We honor You and we bless Your holy name in Christ our Lord. Amen.

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