

CITIZEN BRAIN

PSALM 87 JUNE 27, 2018

Turn with me to Psalm 87 this evening. Tonight I'd like us to look at this great little song and I'd like us to do something a bit different. Typically we teach out of the New King James version, but I'd like us to go through this text using the New Living Translation. As I came across this Psalm in my *own* reading, I was doing so in the NLT and it just really ministered to me. I was *refreshed* and felt excited to take a look at it with you here tonight. The rendering in the NLT helped me understand the lyrics and the images very clearly and vividly.

Of course, the Bible was not written in English. Whatever version we use is the work of teams of scholars and linguists who are taking ancient languages and conveying the message into terms we can understand today. And when they do that, they utilize different *styles* of translation. One type is called *formal* equivalence, another type is called *dynamic* equivalence. Every translation uses both but will rely more on one style or the other. So it can be very helpful to read God's word in a couple of translations. In fact, we'd recommend it. You should have a favorite, go-to version. But also take a look at some of the other major versions. It can be particularly beneficial to read regularly out of one translation that is more on the *formal* equivalence side, like the New King James, the New American Standard or the ESV, and then to *also* read one of the versions that utilizes more of the *dynamic* equivalence, like the New Living or the or the NIV or the Amplified Bible.

So tonight, if you're using an app, I'd invite you to switch over to the NLT. If you don't have an app, we'll have the verses up on the screen. I hope it's as refreshing to you as it was to me.

Psalm 87:1-7 - A song. A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

¹ On the holy mountain stands the city founded by the Lord.

² He loves the city of Jerusalem more than any other city in Israel.

³ O city of God, what glorious things are said of you!

Interlude

⁴ I will count Egypt and Babylon among those who know me— also Philistia and Tyre, and even distant Ethiopia. They have all become citizens of Jerusalem!

⁵ Regarding Jerusalem it will be said, "Everyone enjoys the rights of citizenship there." And the Most High will personally bless this city.

⁶ When the Lord registers the nations, he will say, "They have all become citizens of Jerusalem."

Interlude

⁷ The people will play flutes and sing, "The source of my life springs from Jerusalem!"

These days immigration is a huge topic of discussion and disagreement. It's a dominant feature of the news not just here in the States, but all over the world. *Who* can become a citizen and *how* should they do it? A lot has changed since the Ellis Island era. Between 1892 and 1954 *15 million* people were processed through Ellis Island. Out of those millions only about 80,000 were turned away (that's just 2%), due to disease or defect of some kind.¹ And about 80% of the people who came through finished the process in just a few hours.² They walked off the island with no paperwork, no ID, just a warm welcome and an expanse of opportunity.

¹ <http://www.american-historama.org/1881-1913-maturation-era/ellis-island-immigration-process.htm>

² <https://www.history.com/news/immigrants-ellis-island-short-processing-time>

Psalm 87 is a great song for spiritual immigrants. It's all about the city and citizens of the Lord's Kingdom. While it has many parallels in the Church today, its *complete* fulfillment will not be realized until the Lord is ruling and reigning from His throne in Jerusalem during the 1,000 year Kingdom on the earth, when all nations will gather together to worship and be blessed by Him. That's the ultimate fulfillment of what we read here. In the mean time, we in the Church recognize we are *already* citizens and can, therefore, embody and enjoy portions of what will be totally realized in the future.

The text breaks up nicely into 3 parts, separated by those *Interludes*. In verses 1 through 3 we see the **city**. in verses 4 through 6 we see the **citizens** and in verse 7 we see a **celebration**.

First, the city, beginning in verse 1.

Psalm 87:1 - ¹ On the holy mountain stands the city founded by the Lord.

The song opens with a wide shot of Jerusalem, high up on a hill. Many classic films have some iconic wide shots. Even if you haven't seen the movie *Psycho*, you've probably, at some point, seen that image of the Bates home, looming above the motel. *That's* an image of horror. Here we have an image of *holiness*. Jerusalem is there on the *holy* mountain. Derek Kidner writes: "*Its hills are hills of holiness because [God] is there, it is not the other way round.*"³

Jerusalem is a city *founded* by God in holiness. It has been set apart and consecrated for specific purposes in His will. God has *plans* for this city and those plans have not been canceled or transferred to anywhere or *anyone* else. Though God's program for Israel has been put on hold during this Church age, it will be completed. These are well-laid plans, which are a long time coming.

This idea of founding a city reminds us that God is a builder. He builds cities, He builds a Body, He builds somebodies. God is at work not just on the *global* level, but down on through to nations and communities, families and individuals. And here is the character and motivation for that work:

Psalm 87:2 - ² He loves the city of Jerusalem more than any other city in Israel.

Love is what prompts the Lord's work. His love for you is so great that He sacrificed His only Son that you might have the opportunity to be reconciled to Him. God's love is a great, intimate affection. We saw that in our *Faithful Sayings* series. We see it all over both the Old and the New Testament. God's love is *personal* and affectionate and so His *work* is personal and affectionate. Not just personal, but *particular*. Now, perhaps we see verse 2 and think, "Well that sounds unfair or exclusive." Well, we'll see in a moment just how *inclusive* God is, but it reminds us that God has *personal, particular* plans. When it comes to Jerusalem, He *does* have more in store for her than He does for, say, Farmersville. He has a particular plan and will that He is most definitely accomplishing. And, when it comes to eschatology, much of that will centers around the earthly city of Jerusalem.

Psalm 87:3 - ³ O city of God, what glorious things are said of you!

Some of these great things are found in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 2 we learn about how the Kingdom will be established there and the nations will flow to the city to be taught by the Lord. In Isaiah 14 we see that it will be the place of refuge for the poor of His people. In Isaiah 4 we see Jerusalem as a place of cleansing and shelter and glory, the site of God's tabernacling with man.

³ Derek Kidner *Psalms 73-150*

These words in verse 3 are not only a great *promise*, they are a great testament to God's incredible *grace*. Because Jerusalem doesn't have such a great track record. You know, when the World Cup comes around or the Olympics, lots of different cities campaign, each making a case for *why they* are the most worthy to be the host of the games. When places like Qatar are selected, there's often an uproar. Look at their corruption! Look at their human rights violations! They're not fit to host!

Well, Jerusalem would *not* win a human campaign for capital of the Kingdom. She was the city that crucified the Messiah. She's the one who killed the prophets. In Revelation she's referred to as Sodom and Egypt because of her immorality. And yet, God is able to redeem and make right even a city like *that* because of the power of His love and the wonder of His grace. He's able to not just *save* the city from the scrap heap, but to *transform* it and make it glorious. And what makes it truly glorious? Well, it's the place where God will mingle with His people face to face. In verses 4 through 7 the song now turns to look at the **citizens** of this city.

Psalm 87:4 - ⁴I will count Egypt and Babylon among those who know me— also Philistia and Tyre, and even distant Ethiopia. They have all become citizens of Jerusalem!

Think for a moment about the magnificent scope of this verse. First of all, these cities can represent every direction of the compass. North, South, East and West. Second, they represent those both far and near. Third, each of these locations represent some of the greatest enemies of God or the pinnacles of wickedness and sin. But, even still, God's saving power is enough to make them all citizens of Jerusalem. There is no one *too far* or *too bad* to become a child of God. The Lord has a place for *anyone* who is willing to come through the gates. And when a person becomes a spiritual citizen, they receive much more than a green card or a passport, it means becoming a member of the King's family, brought into His very house. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:19 - ¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God

How does this transaction take place? The Psalm points it out there, "Those who *know* [the Lord]" become citizens. To 'know' the Lord means to be not only *aware* of, but *familiar* with Him. To enter into an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ the King. In shorter terms: To be born again.

Verse 4 shows a wonderful snapshot of the Millennium, as people from all over the globe stream into the Lord's city, not as tourists, but as *citizens*. We see a parallel and foreshadow in the Church at Pentecost. On that day, thousands from cities and countries far and wide were suddenly born into the Church, unified together and made instantly into the house of God. And, like the citizens in Psalm 87, each were given full-fledged membership in the Church.

Psalm 87:5 - ⁵Regarding Jerusalem it will be said, "Everyone enjoys the rights of citizenship there." And the Most High will personally bless this city.

No special interest groups that get certain categories excluded. No cronyism. *Everyone* enjoys full membership in the city. That's not only true of the Millennium, it's the plan for the Church as well. The Bible declares that we are *all* royal priests, called by God in unity. We each have particular assignments, abilities, gifts, skills and opportunities, but every member of the Church is to enjoy the same rights and access to the Lord. There's not one priest class and one amateur class. God does not show favoritism. He's broken down the walls that divide us. Now, this ideal is *not* fully realized in the Church today. We've *yet* to be perfected and glorified. But we can look forward to the fullness of

this promise in the Kingdom. A Kingdom of blessing, not one we will want out of. Seems like everyone wants out of California (though you may be surprised to know that it's not even in the top 10 states that people are leaving). But often times people are so dissatisfied with their state or their nation they try to find a way to leave and find a 'better' spot.

It's interesting: Even places like Norway, which is always listed as one of the "best places to live" has this problem. Last year it was reported that many workers are *leaving* Norway, despite its reputation. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that you have to pay above 50% in taxes. But the *Lord's* Kingdom will be a place not just of fairness, but of rights and enjoyment and abundance and blessing, as God uses His immeasurable power to minister to the people of the earth. There will be no such thing as a 'second class citizen.' That's the Godly plan for the future, and it's also the plan for the Church today. We're to operate with this mindset even now as we patiently await the Lord's coming. A mindset of grace and unity and love, even for our enemies.

Psalm 87:6 - ⁶ When the Lord registers the nations, he will say, "They have all become citizens of Jerusalem."

This verse reminds us of what we read in Hebrews chapter 12:

Hebrews 12:22-23a - ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are registered in heaven*

In our Psalm we see the Lord publicly numbering His people. He calls the roll aloud, as if announcing the lineup of His team. The immediate question is: Is your name on this list? Will your name be called on the manifest of heaven? Are you a citizen of the Kingdom? We've already seen that there is space available for anyone. The way to be registered in the Lamb's Book of Life is to *know* God. To be in relationship with Him. That you come to Him for rescue and shelter, confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead. If you will believe you will not perish, but will be given the gift of everlasting life and citizenship in God's Kingdom.

As we glimpse into the 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth we note something interesting: There seems to be some sort of national distinction *even in the Millennium and Eternal state*. You read about the 'nations' in Revelation 20, 21 and 22. And while the word *can* be translated as 'peoples', it's clear that there will be at *least* 3 categories in the Kingdom and Heaven: The Jews, the Church and the Gentiles. Maybe more.

Commenting on this, Dr. John Walvoord wrote:

"It is an error...to assume that national identity will be lost in eternity. Just as there will be individual identity, so also there will be racial identity, and individuals will inevitably carry throughout eternity an identification related to some extent to their place in the history of the world. Hence, Israelites will be Israelites throughout eternity and Gentiles will be Gentiles as well."⁴

Having thought about the glorious city and the many citizens, what is left but to sing a song of joyful celebration to the God who makes all this possible?

⁴ <http://walvoord.com/article/306>

Psalm 87:7 - ⁷ The people will play flutes and sing, “The source of my life springs from Jerusalem!”

You may not be able to play an instrument or carry a tune on this side of eternity, but you *will* be able to then. And just as we’re invited to enjoy many aspects of our citizenship right now in the Church as we await Christ’s return, God would have us *right now* be people who regularly offer full-throated praise like we see in verse 7. We certainly don’t have to wait for the Millennium to be people who worship with excitement and exuberance. Even tonight we can acknowledge and celebrate the Lord’s grace and His work and His generosity toward us.

I love that last line: The source of my life springs from Jerusalem. Not because the city is special, but because of God’s presence. He is our Savior, our Sovereign, our supply, our *source* of life. The song closes with the image of streams pouring out of human hearts, just like Jesus talked about in John 7. That His people would have rivers of living water flowing out of them, not just in heaven, but as they walk with Him on earth.

And so, as we anticipate this glorious future, we should examine the present. What’s flowing out of my life? Is it praise? Unity? Thankfulness? Anticipation? Godliness and glory? Is our life singing Psalm 87 as we journey home to the heavenly city? We’re looking *forward*, like Abraham did, but we remember that, as the Church, we are the city on the hill *right now*. And the Church is to be defined by grace, unity, compassion, praise, preaching and proclamation. That’s the Christian life, given to us as a gift, who were once strangers, but now have been made citizens.

In 1929, my grandpa Gennaro sailed from Naples to Ellis Island with his mother and 2 siblings. They came to the harbor, past the Statue of Liberty, through the gates and into the Great Hall to be registered. Once finished, they settled in Connecticut and began a new life as Americans. Like many in his generation, as he grew, he wasn’t interested in teaching his children the old language or the old ways. They were citizens of America and he wanted to live accordingly. He went by his new American name - ‘Gene’ - and even joined the US Navy, fighting in the Pacific during the Second World War. And while, he was not an example of *Godliness*, he does demonstrate what it means to take on a new citizenship. At age 9 he was a son of Italy, and then one day he became an American. We have a much, much better transaction: We’ve traded a citizenship in the kingdom of death for the Kingdom of Life. From darkness to light. Let’s live as citizens today. In imitation of our King, in anticipation of His coming, and in joyful praise for who He is and what He’s done.