

Psalm Sundays

Text
Psalm 122

Topic
**The pilgrim arrives at Jerusalem
and ascends the hill to the house of the LORD**

Title
"House on Hallowed Hill"

Each evening, at 6:30pm, the California Highway Patrol closed off Hwy 198 between Hwy 41 and the Avenal cut-off in order for a film production crew's activities to be uninterrupted by regular traffic.

The film was *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*.

It is the story of businessman Neil Page (played by Steve Martin) desperately trying to get home to Chicago from New York City in time for Thanksgiving dinner with his family.

He encounters a series of travel setbacks and delays along the way, begrudgingly teaming up with a shower curtain ring salesman, Del Griffith (played by John Candy). Together they traverse the Midwestern United States

1 of 12
Psalm 122
"House on Hallowed Hill"



using planes, trains and automobiles in a hilariously frustrating effort to get home.

Hwy 198 was transformed into a wintry Midwest highway. It's the scene where a car pulls up next to them, and the couple in the car keep shouting, "You're going the wrong way!" Once they realize they *are* going the wrong way, it's too late to avoid two semis coming right at them. They drive in-between the trucks, tearing their rental car to shreds.

The car remains comically drivable.

When they arrive at their hotel, John Candy looks at the damage and says, "Well, this isn't so bad - I thought it would be a lot worse than this. They'll be able to buff this out no problem."

Their journey resonates with us because of the common desire to be home, gathered with loved ones, in order to give thanks.

In our psalm we read, "The tribes go up [to Jerusalem]... to give thanks to the LORD" (v4).

The Israelite tribes were going home, as it were, to gather together in order to give thanks.

One of our worship choruses is,

*Here we are, gathered together as a family
Bound as one, lifting our voices to the King of Kings*

2 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



The lyrics resonate with us because, in our twice born hearts, we long to be one with other believers in order to lift our collective voices and give thanks to Jesus.

This psalm is an encouragement for God's people to gather together, and to give thanks. Appropriate, don't you think?

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Gathering Together In The House Of The Lord Encourages Gladness**, and **#2 Gathering Together In The House Of The Lord Evokes Gratitude**.

#1 - Gathering Together In The House Of The Lord Encourages Gladness (v1-4)

Have you ever almost blown-off coming to church, only to power through and attend, and be so glad you did? That is one thing I mean when I say gathering together in the house of the Lord encourages gladness.

Wait a minute. What is this "house of the Lord" business? Doesn't Pastor Gene know that the church is not a building? *Let's tweet about it.*

This building is not the church; **but the church is a building.**

One passage will suffice to prove it is. The apostle Paul told the believers in Ephesus,

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the **household of God**, having been **built on the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief **cornerstone**, in whom the whole **building**, being fitted together, grows

3 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



into a **holy temple** in the Lord, in whom you also are being **built** together for a **dwelling place** of God in the Spirit (2:19-22).

So, yes, it turns out that we *are* a building. We are “the household of God,” a “holy temple,” the “dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Paul went on in his letter to describe the household, the temple, the dwelling place of God, as a regular, local gathering of believers:

- 👤 He explained that God gave pastor-teachers to the church. Not pastor-teachers to believers at large, but to each local gathering.
- 👤 He explained that we are to appoint elders in the church. Not elders to believers at large, but to each local gathering.

That ought to be enough for us to say that not only is the church a building, it is most a building when we are gathered together.

Should we be gathering together now - during COVID-19? What about the mandates to not meet?

There are passionate appeals both to meet and to not meet. The latest polling reports $\frac{2}{3}$ of believers are neither attending in person nor are they watching online.

In the mandates, churches seem to be treated like other venues and ventures. Now I don't fault nonbelieving government officials to think of us as less important than Costco. But the truth is, Costco is not God's household on earth; it is not His temple, nor is it the dwelling place of God in the Spirit

It is, in fact, the most essential building on the earth.

4 of 12

Psalm 122

“House on Hallowed Hill”



Since those things are in fact true of us, we meet. Doesn't mean everyone must attend. There is room for believers to shelter at home, based on their own risk assessment. But this brick-and-mortar 'building' should be open for the real building to meet in it.

You've heard this illustration. Somebody says "Christianity is a crutch." A believer says in response, "It's more than a crutch; *it's a hospital.*"

Hospitals are open, so why not churches? If you think that is a ridiculous comparison, are we not the household, the temple, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit, on the earth? What we provide *is* essential.

We've heard the conflicting medical opinions... We've heard the conflicting political opinions... There are certainly constitutional issues to sort out.

Frankly, none of those should be our go-to reason(s) for gathering. We gather because when we do, we are God's earthly temple.

Psa 122:1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD."

Psalms 120-134 are the "Song[s] of ascent." They were sung as Israelites travelled to Jerusalem to attend one of the three major annual feasts.

I came across something that might interest you. In the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, we read, "Three times a year - on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths - all your males shall appear before the LORD your God..." (16:16). According to Jewish historians, however, this was *not* strictly followed. Here is how one scholar put it:

5 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



During the Second Temple period these verses were not understood to mean that one was obliged to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year, but rather that pilgrimage was associated with these festivals. Pilgrimage was considered a commandment that “has no measure,” as stated in Mishnah, Peah 1:1: “The following are the things for which no definite quantity is prescribed... appearing [before the LORD]...” Thus, the commandment to “go up” to Jerusalem might be observed once every few years or perhaps only once in a lifetime.

Whether it was three times annually or less, the psalm focuses on the pilgrim being “glad” to journey with others.

Meeting together as the dwelling place of God by the Spirit encourages a kind of gladness that cannot be experienced any other way. I’ve used this illustration before. We love Disneyland. You can go on YouTube and ‘ride’ every attraction virtually. But it isn’t the same as being there, hurtling 18mph down the Matterhorn in a bobsled.

Virtual ‘church’ is not church. It’s not bad; it’s just not church. You can’t experience the same gladness any other way than by gathering.

The pilgrim-psalmist is “glad” even though foot-travel travel to Jerusalem was tedious, uncomfortable, and perilous. The pilgrims had to rely upon hospitality along the way, or camp-out. Bandits and beasts beset the byways.

He didn’t see it as a responsibility, but as a privilege.

Psa 122:2 Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!

It’s a verbal expression of gladness for arriving at their destination.

6 of 12
Psalm 122
“House on Hallowed Hill”



Gathering with other believers ought to give you the feeling you've arrived at a coveted destination. You should want to take it all in.

Psa 122:3 Jerusalem is built As a city that is compact together,

Albert Barnes said,

[This] literally [means], "joined to itself together;" that is, when one part is, as it were, bound closely to another part; not scattered or separate. The walls are all joined together; and the houses are all united to one another so as to make a compact place.

Do you have a compact car? A sub-compact? Get a few people in there and you're practically sitting on each other.

The compact construction of the city was a picture of God's desire for His people to be connected, spiritually connected, as one. The New Testament makes this clear when we read, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house..." (First Peter 2:5). We are individual stones that the Lord is mortaring together.

I used to think of that in a static way, meaning that once I was mortared in, that was my place. Now I see it in a more dynamic way. Every time we gather, we are put together in the way that will create the most beautiful arrangement for *that* meeting.

Psa 122:4 Where the tribes go up, The tribes of the LORD, To the Testimony of Israel, To give thanks to the name of the LORD.

7 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



Israel was a tribal people. Twelve tribes, to be exact. They were scattered all over the land, and some beyond its borders. But they were one in their Lord, and as they gathered this was evident.

In the Book of Exodus God said, "And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you" (Exodus 25:16). The "testimony," or covenant, was the Law of Moses by which men might approach God and enjoy fellowship.

While pagan cultures were sacrificing their children to Molech, or performing all manner of perverted sexual practices to fertility gods, Israel had access to the living God, at Whose throne could be found mercy and grace. He had revealed "His Name" to Moses - He revealed His nature, His character.

We see, in the New Testament, that Judaism was a burden laid upon the average Jew by the Pharisees and Scribes. That is how we think of Judaism. God did not lay a burden on His people. He wanted them to be glad in their approach to Him.

How much more, today in the church, ought we be glad? Looking back on Judaism, the writer to the Hebrew believers says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel" (12:22-24).

That's a lot of content. We simply note that the writer was showing his readers that the church is way better off than Israel was. If they were glad under the Old Covenant, we ought to be glad exponentially in the New Covenant.

8 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



In the Revelation, the apostle John saw seven lampstands. Then, as is typical in the Revelation, he was told that “the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”

John also said, “I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man... (1:12-13). Jesus said, “These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands” (2:1).

To put it plainly - **Jesus is present when a church gathers in a way He is not present when you are at Starbucks.**

Some would object, and argue that where only two or three are gathered, Jesus is in their midst. That verse, in the Gospel of Matthew, is smack dab in the middle of the passage on church discipline. The “two or three” are gathered there representing the local church to apply church discipline. It proves what we believe - that local churches must exist and meet.

Jesus is in our midst when we do. And THAT makes me glad.

#2 - Gathering Together In The House Of The Lord Evokes Gratitude (v5-9)

The end of verse four speaks of the believer giving thanks. The remaining verses are a few things to be thankful for.

Psa 122:5 For thrones are set there for judgment, The thrones of the house of David.

Justice. When properly meted out, it is something to be thankful for. We could use some sanctified justice in our world right now.

9 of 12

Psalm 122

“House on Hallowed Hill”



I think the psalmist was looking further, past even our own time. The Lord promised King David, through the prophet Nathan, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (Second Samuel 2:16). Jesus said, at the end of the Revelation, "I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne" (22:16).

"The thrones of the house of David" is a reminder that God will establish His Kingdom on the earth, ruled by Jesus from Jerusalem.

In the church age, God has given authority to the local churches on earth to judge matters. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul dealt with the sin of believers suing other believers. Among other things, he argued,

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? (6:2-5).

We don't think of this as a reason for thanksgiving anymore because litigation between Christians is rampant. It has become acceptable.

Psa 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.

Psa 122:7 Peace be within your walls...

The psalmist-pilgrim prayed for Jerusalem's peace so he could go on ascending there to celebrate the feasts.

10 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



Again, looking forward, we are aware that Israel will have peace for three-and-one-half years when they enter a covenant with the Beast of the Revelation. After that, they will know tribulation like never before.

But then when all hope seems lost, Jesus returns. The Prince of Peace will establish peace on the earth.

Psa 122:7 "... Prosperity within your palaces."

Prospering is mentioned twice. As Jerusalem prospered, those that love the Lord could be thankful that there was no hindrance to their pilgrimage.

We talk a lot about adversity. There are also times of prosperity. They can be dangerous; but with thankfulness at not deserving them, we can enjoy them.

Psa 122:8 For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you."

Psa 122:9 Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.

A peaceful Jerusalem was the necessary context to enjoy the presence of the Lord in His Temple.

This was also the greeting of one Jew to another. As they passed, they would say, "Peace be within you!"

The psalmist was inspired to seek the good of Jerusalem so that all could come and give thanks. He was also inspired to seek the good of individual Jews.

At the end of *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, on the train home, Neil thinks back on things Del said (or didn't say) and he realizes Del wasn't on his way

11 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"



home to spend Thanksgiving with his family. His wife, Marie, has been dead eight years. Neil goes back, gets Del, and brings him home.

That's what we are about, is it not? Inviting folks to salvation, to give the Lord thanks for His work on our behalf.

We are "the dwelling place of God in the Spirit" when we gather together.

Yes, the Spirit permanently dwells in a believer. Yes, God is Omnipresent. But by His own description of the church as a lampstand, Jesus said that He attends our gatherings in a special way.

It's not mystical; it's simply a fact.

- 👤 Gather and be glad.
- 👤 Gather and be grateful.

12 of 12

Psalm 122

"House on Hallowed Hill"

