

WORD ON THE WEB 18 – PSALM 112 ‘Worship’

Dear All

Greetings in the strong and precious Name of Jesus and welcome to Word on the Web 18.

Today we’re looking together at Psalm 122 – the third of fifteen ‘Songs of Ascent’ sung as the people made their way up to Jerusalem, Mount Zion, to worship. ‘The presence of the Lord among his people is what makes this city so wonderful’ (Philip Eveson). The first verse sets the tone for the whole Psalm – ‘I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord”’, and v.2 anticipates the end of the journey – ‘our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem’. One commentator sums up the nine verses thus – ‘The Psalmist recalls his eager expectation as he sets out in the company of others to come up to the holy city. He speaks of the greatness of Jerusalem as the centre of the religious life of the nation, and prays for its welfare’. This ‘Song of Ascents’ was written by the Shepherd-King David, along with Psalm 124, 131 and 133 in this ‘Psalter within the Psalter’ (Spurgeon).

Whilst Jerusalem is named three times – v.2, 3 and 6 – the key theme is ‘Worship’, and it is on that key theme we focus. Warren Wiersbe helpfully outlines the Psalm under three headings, commenting that ‘From David’s words in this Psalm, we can easily discern the kind of heart believers need if we are to please God in our worship’. We follow his exposition closely. Using his out-line we see

- i. A Heart for God – v.1-2**
- ii. A Heart for Praise – v.3-5**
- iii. A Heart for Prayer – v.6-9, thus**

Firstly, A Heart for God – v.1-2

v.1 – ‘I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord”’. A stronger translation is ‘We will go to the house of the Lord’, and speaks of determination and dedication. In King David’s day the Tabernacle of ‘holy tent’ was set up in Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant in it. The Ark of the Covenant was a chest overlaid with gold that contained a pot of Manna, the rod of Aaron, and the tablets engraved with the ten commandments. For the Israelites the Ark of the Covenant meant God’s presence. Under Solomon the Temple was established in Jerusalem – again housing the Ark. That’s the meaning of ‘the house of the Lord’ – v.1. There is no doubt that David frequently went there to Worship God ... he loved God’s house because he loved God himself – have a look at Psalm 27v.4, 65v.4 and 2 Samuel 7v.1-3, for example. He rejoiced at an opportunity to go with other worshippers to praise the Lord. As Wiersbe says – David ‘had a heart for God and for God’s house. David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13v.14)’ – are you? Am I?

As this Psalm was used by Pilgrims coming a distance their hearts would be set on the Lord. Of course today, in the light of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we don’t need to go to Jerusalem to worship – we’re heading to the New Jerusalem (Rev 21v.1-5), but we are to have a heart for God. As the Lord Jesus said in John 4v.23-24, in the context of a dialogue with a Samaritan woman (which included in v.20 the words ‘Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain (Mount Gerizim), but you Jews claim that that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’) – ‘a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for these are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth’ ... a Heart for God.

Secondly, A Heart for Praise – v.3-5

Back in Exodus 23v.14-19, Deut 12v.5-7, 11-14, 17-19, 14v.23, and 16v.2 and 16 – the Lord had told his people that one day there would be a central place where they could worship, and that place was Jerusalem. He instructed David that the place on Mount Moriah (1 Chronicles 21-22) where he had built the altar was to be the site for the Temple and he also gave David the plan for the structure (1 Chronicles 28). Jerusalem had been a Jebusite stronghold before David captured it and made it his capital city, ‘the City of David’ (2 Samuel 5v.6-10). It had strong defences. Jerusalem was located on the border of Judah and Benjamin and thus would help to bind the Northern and Southern tribes together. Israel’s first King was Saul who was from Benjamin, and David the second King was from Judah.

Thus when the Psalmist looked at the city he thought of both security and unity – v.3; ‘Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together’, or as the old Prayer Book renders it ‘a city that is at unity in itself’. The people were bound together in their worship of the Lord and their respect for the throne. V.4 – ‘That is where the tribes go up – the tribes of Israel – to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel’. Wiersbe comments – ‘The 12 separate tribes, plus the tribe of Levi, shared the same ancestral history, participated in worship in the same Holy City, and were governed by the same divine laws. The Church today already has spiritual unity (Eph 4v.1-6), but we must endeavour to manifest and demonstrate it before a watching world (John 17v.20-23). As for security, Jesus promised that the very forces of hell could not stand before the onward march of his Church (Matt 16v.18)’. As for Jerusalem, Mount Zion, it was ‘an almost impregnable citadel.’ – security, unity.

The praise of the Living God is central ... the tribes went up 'ascended' v.4 'to praise the name of the Lord'. The phrase 'according to the statute given to Israel' refers to the Lord's command to go up to Jerusalem on the three great pilgrim feasts of the OT people of God already mentioned (They were Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles – see Exodus 23v.14-19 for example). They went up to the city to praise and worship God – not simply to view the sights as magnificent as they were! - . In-deed there was much to see, but to praise the Lord and give him thanks was their most important task and their highest privilege. At the same time the people gave their allegiance to the dynasty of David, for the Lord who commanded the feast also established the throne. That's v.5 – 'There stand the thrones for judgement, the thrones of the house of David' – and remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'great David's greater Son' – We owe him our allegiance as well as our Praise and Thanksgiving – he is 'the King of Kings and Lord of Lords' – and his judgement is perfect.

A Heart for God

A Heart for Praise

And Thirdly, and Lastly, as we come to Worship we need - A Heart for Prayer – v.6-9

v.6 – 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem'. One commentator says that this is a prayer that Jerusalem 'might live up to its name'. The 'salem' part of Jerusalem is a form of 'shalom', meaning 'peace'. At the heart of the Psalm is a desire for the well being of the City. Derek Thomas points out that the three-fold use of the word 'within' in v.7-8 helps us to define what he prays for. , Thus v.7 Peace 'within your walls', Security 'within your citadels', 'Peace be within you' – a freedom from disharmony and division. It is the welfare of 'family and friends' v.8 and 'the house of the Lord our God' that concerns him. This prayer can legitimately be applied to

the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thomas comments – ‘Division hurts the people of God, individually; but it hurts the body too. We ought to be concerned about the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ’

v.9 – ‘I will seek your good’ – ‘It is the devotion of a heart touched by the mercies of God, and the joy of fellowship that results from it ... “I want to be the answer to my own prayer; I will labour for the good of the Kingdom of God. I will live and die with God’s glory in view.” (Thomas).

Yes, we should pray today for the peace of the physical city of Jerusalem, and ultimately that in that city and everywhere people may come to know peace with God through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, but so too for peace within the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, a pointer to the New and Heavenly Jerusalem. We are to cultivate a heart for prayer.

Jerusalem needs peace! and oh, how our fallen world and church need peace! As Robert Alden comments – ‘The Christian knows, however, that no enduring peace will come apart from the Prince of Peace who lived, died and rose there so many years ago’.

There is a lot more that could be said, but time escapes us – please supplement these brief notes with your own personal reading and reflection...

Let me now conclude with the following quotations, and a verse from John Newton’s hymn ‘Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God’ –

William MacDonald comments “What the Godly Jew desired for Jerusalem, we should desire for the church ... It is through the peace and prosperity of the church that blessing will flow out to the world”.

Philip Eveson, speaking of the Jerusalem which is above – ‘We pray for the peace and prosperity of this city until all whose names are in the book of life are brought in and the Lamb and his people are forever together in the home of righteousness, where there are no tears and no curse.’

Eveson again – ‘As Christians we belong to that heavenly city and are marching toward it. Do we love God’s city which is made up of brothers and sisters in the Lord? Do we prize this city more than all the architectural splendours of the world?’.

Rhett Dodson – ‘the Psalm emphasises God’s chosen city as the place of worship’ It is a ‘type’ and ‘as a type, Jerusalem pointed to heaven’. ‘between the OT picture of Jerusalem and the ultimate reality of heaven, there lies an intermediary New Covenant reality ... the Church of Jesus Christ, which itself points beyond itself to the eternal.’

Hebrews 12v.22 says – ‘But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God’. John Newton wrote –

**‘Saviour, since of Zion’s city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in thy name.
Fading is the worldling’s pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion’s children know’**

Worship ...

- A Heart for God**
- A Heart for Praise**
- A Heart for Prayer**

IN JESUS NAME, AMEN.