

Text: Psalm 122

Title: “The Address of Peace”

Open your Bibles once again to Psalm 122. Yesterday I was putting up my outside Christmas lights and I had Pandora playing Christmas songs on my phone. There are songs that I have been hearing at Christmas since I was a boy. Most of them have absolutely no redeeming value at all, but it’s fun to listen and remember. Well the OT people of God had songs that they sang during their holidays or holy days. As they travelled to Jerusalem for one of the three big festivals or holy days of worship they sang songs. We have them collected in Psalm 120-134. They are called Psalms of Ascent because they were ascending up to Jerusalem, but they were also ascending spiritually as they prepared to worship. These psalms are helping us worship our way through the holidays. Read Psalm 122:1-9.

Now the first part of this psalm is focused on...

1. THE PLACE OF PEACE ... JERUSALEM (vv.1-5)

Psalm 122:1-2 - I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.” Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

The name Jerusalem means “the dwelling of peace” or “the city of peace.” In the last part of the word “Jerusalem” you can pick out the word “salem” or “shalom,” the Hebrew word for peace.

We talk a lot about Jerusalem and for our children or for those of us who are geographically challenged you may not know where it is. If you got on a plane at DFW to fly directly to Jerusalem you would fly across the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea and at the eastern end of the sea you find Israel, and about thirty miles inland from the sea is the city of Jerusalem.

In biblical times Jerusalem was the capital of Israel for most of its history. The city was a Canaanite city until it was finally conquered by King David. He made it his capital and later his son Solomon built the beautiful Temple that became the center of Israel’s worship. It was the national and spiritual home of the nation of Israel.

In NT times Jesus’ family made a journey to Jerusalem right after His birth to dedicate Him at the Temple in Jerusalem. And then His family made regular treks to Jerusalem as He grew up attending the great holy days. As they traveled in a caravan Jesus and His earthly family probably sang these very Psalms of Ascent.

Much of Jesus life and ministry took place in and around the Temple in Jerusalem. It was here that He came into conflict with the Jewish leaders who, with the Roman authorities, conspired to kill Jesus. He was crucified, buried and rose from the dead in Jerusalem. From just outside Jerusalem Jesus ascended back to heaven with the promise that He would come again. The Bible teaches us that one day Jesus will return and many scholars believe that the first place He will set foot when He returns is Jerusalem. At the very end of time the Bible it says that God

will recreate a New Heaven and a New Earth, and our eternal home as believers in the Lord Jesus will be what the Bible calls the New Jerusalem. So you can see how important it has been and always will be.

But in the days when the psalms were written people would come with glad hearts to worship in Jerusalem. It was the center of their worship where they went to meet God. So you can imagine what was in the psalmist's heart as he sang "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let's go to the house of the Lord.'"

I wonder when we come to church on Sundays and gather with the Lord's people, the Church, do we come with that kind of joy and expectation? Rejoicing is a deliberate choice we make to worship God for all He is and all He has done for us. The OT people of God worshipped at Temple, the house of the Lord. Now the temple of God is not a building but a people ... the Church. And we need to joyfully exhort one another to gather together to worship. "Let's go to the house of the Lord."

I might add that it's also a great invitation to make to people who are not yet part of our church. In this season of the year studies have shown that people are very likely to accept an invitation. So invite them to our beautiful Christmas concert next Sunday evening. Invite them to the Christmas Eve service.

So the psalmist is standing in the city and as he looks around he is amazed at all the awe-inspiring features of the city where the tribes of Israel gather. So there is the place of peace, but then there is also...

2. THE PRAYER FOR PEACE (vv.6-9)

Psalm 122:6 - Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure.

It's almost like the songwriter is standing in the place of peace ... the city of peace ... but he senses that the peace is vulnerable. Peace can be disturbed; the city of peace can be attacked. And it was ... many times in the years to come. Battles and wars would rage in and around the city of peace throughout its history. So there is this yearning and longing for peace.

ILLUSTRATION – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the greatest poets in American history. In the middle of the Civil War his son, Charles, was severely wounded in one of the battles and Longfellow had to travel to bring his injured son home. He saw the ravages of the war and on Christmas Day 1863 wrote the famous poem that says, "I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play. And loud and deep the words repeat of peace on earth, goodwill to men. Then in despair I bowed my head. There is no peace on earth, I said. For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men."

So the psalmist exhorts us, literally, "pray for the peace of the place of peace." So there is a city whose name means peace, but there's a missing peace. And that sounds a lot like our world ...

and a lot like our lives. Every day the peace is threatened. The peace that you have right now can be disturbed without warning.

ILLUSTRATION – I have a good friend whose life has literally fallen apart in the last year. He was forced to retire from his lifelong career. Then his wife decided she didn't want to married to him anymore and she divorced him. His children have turned their back on him and his health is failing. Peace can be so quickly disturbed in our lives. So we pray for peace.

The word “shalom” is one of the richest words in the Bible.

SLALOM HEBREW GRAPHIC - Shalom (peace) ... a GREETING ... a BLESSING ... a LONGING

GREETING - Shalom is used to both greet people and to say goodbye, but it's more than that.

BLESSING – In **Numbers 6:24-26** there is a prayer that the priests of Israel were to pray over the people of God: **The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.**

LONGING - Shalom is more than just peace; it is complete peace. It is contentment, completeness, wholeness, wellbeing, harmony and even salvation. It's a longing that all of us have, isn't it. We want our lives to be whole, not fractured. We want to know contentment, not continual striving after stuff. We want our souls to be well, not sick. We want our relationships to be harmonious, not filled with conflict and strife. That's the longing in every human heart.

And here's the deal: The peace the psalmist prayed for and that Israel longed for would not be found in a place but in a Person ... the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah saw this:

Isaiah 9:6 - For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:7 - Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The address of peace is a Person ... Jesus Christ.

3. THE PERSON OF PEACE ... JESUS

Now I've said before in this series that if we are careful in our study of these psalms we will catch sightings of Jesus. The longing expressed in the heart of the psalmist in each of these songs is finally and ultimately met in Jesus, though in a literal sense the psalmist didn't know

this. As believers we know that the fulfillment of everything Jerusalem and the Temple represented are found in Jesus Christ.

And of course, at this season of the year we focus on God's great gift of His Son, Jesus, the Prince of Peace. The Bible says Jesus came...

Luke 1:79 - to shine (a light) on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

When the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds out in the fields that night they said...

Luke 2:14 - "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

King Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is the only one who can ultimately bring peace to our lives. From the NT we understand that...

JESUS MAKES PEACE WITH GOD POSSIBLE.

There will be no real peace in our hearts until we have made peace with God. Because of our sins we are at war with God. We have rebelled against Him and His just punishment is on us. But He did something amazing ... He sent His Son to be born into this rebellious world, to suffer for our sins on the Cross so that when we trust in Him we can be declared not guilty.

Romans 5:1 - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Jesus makes peace with God possible. Then...

JESUS BRINGS THE PEACE OF GOD

In a personal relationship with Christ true peace becomes possible in this stressful world filled with trouble. Jesus said...

John 16:33 - "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

And the Bible teaches us that the way we access this peace is through prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So there's peace with God that leads to the peace of God, but also...

JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE OUR PEACE WITH OTHERS

Romans 12:18 - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Ephesians 4:3 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

ILLUSTRATION – Earlier this week the peace in San Bernadino CA was shattered through an act of terrorism. And it disturbed the peace in our hearts as well as we think about what hateful people can do. In the aftermath leaders across the nation did what is normal ... they offered their prayers and support. But what was not normal was the shocking response of the New York Daily News. In response to the gestures of prayer support by leaders the Daily News ran the headline, "God Isn't Fixing This." It was the Daily News' skeptical way to say, "Quit praying to God about this. We have to take matters into our hands and do something about the violence."

It may seem that as you are going through a peace-shattering experience in your life that "God isn't fixing this," in spite of our repeated prayers to Him. Yes, it does seem that way. But we need to know that one day He will fix it ... and it won't be through gun control or tighter borders. He will fix it when the Prince of Peace, King Jesus, returns to set everything right.

Until then we must hear the invitation of Jesus to us personally:

John 14:27 - Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Let Jesus be the missing peace in your life.