

The Lord and His City: Psalm 48

PSALMS OF THE SONS OF KORAH
THE LORD AND HIS CITY
PSALM 48

Be Still

And Know That I Am God

I will be exalted among the nations
I will be exalted in the earth!

Psalm 46:10

Knowing-Jesus.com

T. M. and Susie Moore

A Scriptorium Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Psalms of the Sons of Korah: The Lord and His City

Psalm 48

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Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing

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Introduction to Psalm 48

Psalm 48 celebrates the beauty, holiness, and joy of the city of God, which is what it is because God dwells in its midst. The nations tremble in fear before it, and the city extends the praise of God to the ends of the earth.

God's people are His city – His Church. We shine the light of the Lord into the darkness of our age to further the Kingdom agenda of our Lord Jesus. As we contemplate Him in His beauty and holiness, we become like Him, and take up our mission to make Him known to the world.

Psalm 48 provides an excellent overview of how to think about what it means to be God's city, both as citizens and churches in His larger Kingdom of glory.

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May the Lord bless your work in this study, that you may grow to know Him better, love Him more, and serve Him more joyfully.

T. M. and Susie Moore

1 Sing of His Greatness

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.1-3

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.

Sing Psalm 48.1-3

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehonah*](#))

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.
Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!
God her King is great within her – He, her Stronghold ever sure!
He, her Stronghold ever sure!

Read Psalm 48 (don't forget the superscription!); meditate on verse 1

Preparation

1. How is the Lord described in verse 1?
2. How is His city described?

Meditation

The city of God is where God dwells, where His throne is situated, and where He rules to advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In the days of the sons of Korah, that city was Jerusalem, and God's dwelling place was His temple. In Solomon's day, when the sons of Korah were serving, Jerusalem and the temple were beautiful, magnificent, and glorious.

But it was a fading beauty and glory. Jerusalem and the temple played an important role in their day; but their greatest contribution to the redemptive plan of God was to point forward to the Church and, beyond that, to the city to come in the new heavens and new earth. God dwells among His people today in the Church, in the Person of His Holy Spirit, with Jesus, exalted in glory, directing the progress of God's Kingdom according to His Word.

The focal point of God's city is God Himself. He is great, and therefore, greatly to be praised by those among whom He dwells (v. 1). God is building His city as a holy mountain. Our witness to the world is that God is great, holy, and greatly to be praised; and we bear that witness by our holy lives and our gracious words.

This is surely a theme worth singing about with gratitude and joy.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The beautiful temple, magnificent and glorious in Solomon's day, was susceptible to the same ravages of sin as all creation. Its luster was fading. As Jeremiah bemoaned, "How has the gold become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street" (Lam. 4.1).

But as King Lemuel remarked concerning his wife, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31.30).

There is a way to bear witness to Christ and skirt the horrible ravages of sin and corruption: Fear the LORD!
As Solomon wrote:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Eccl. 12.13).

“Our witness to the world is that God is great, holy, and to be praised”!
Our great God must be praised. And we who are His are tasked with this honor.
We live to be dead to sin and its ravages, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6.11).

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice...” (1 Pet. 1.3-6).

Sing of His greatness. Fear the LORD. Inherit an incorruptible and undefiled eternity. Rejoice!

Reflection

1. The ultimate beauty we long to know is God Himself. Explain.
2. In what sense is “God the focal point” of your life? Your church?
3. Why is it important to praise God, not just occasionally, but throughout the day?

There is no limit, you see, to his greatness. What it means, however, is something like this: It is necessary to praise him and sing to him alone, and this to an extraordinary degree; but the need is to sing his praises both for this infinite and incomprehensible greatness of his being and for the excess of his beneficence to us. John Chrysostom (344-407), Commentary on the Psalms 48.1

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.12-14

Praise God for His Church, for churches around the world, and for your own church. Pray that He will visit His churches with revival, for a great awakening to Jesus throughout the world.

Sing Psalm 48.12-14

(Cwm Rhonda: *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*)

Walk about the blessèd city, see her beauty, see her power.
Count her ramparts, filled with glory, look on ev’ry mighty tower.
Tell her glory to the nations: God will guide her evermore;
God will guide her evermore!

2 Glorious City

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.9-11

We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness,
In the midst of Your temple.
According to Your name, O God,
So is Your praise to the ends of the earth;
Your right hand is full of righteousness.
Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah be glad,
Because of Your judgments.

Sing Psalm 48.9-11

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*](#))

For Your grace and lovingkindness we proclaim Your matchless worth!
As Your Name is, great and boundless, let Your praise fill all the earth.
Let Your people sing rejoicing for the judgment of Your truth;
for the judgment of Your truth.

Read Psalm 48.2, 3

Preparation

1. How is God's city described?
2. What is God to His city?

Meditation

We have seen that the sons of Korah regarded the city of God – His dwelling place – as a “holy mountain” (v. 1). That phrase could be equally translated “the mountain of His holiness”, reminding us that any holiness we know as God's people and city is because He is holy, and is at work within us to show His holiness in and through us.

In verse 2, two additional qualifiers are indicated. God's holy city is beautiful, and it is the “joy of the whole earth”. That makes sense because holiness is truly beautiful and joyful. God calls us to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 11.44; cf. Matt. 5.48), so that we might shine with His beauty and bask in His joy. This happens in a church as it increases in Christlikeness. Jesus is building His Church to resemble Him in holiness, beauty, and joy (cf. Matt. 16.18; Eph. 4.11-16). A primary goal of every church must be for its members to increase in holiness and for the congregation to be a source of beauty and joy in its community, for this is what God intends for His dwelling place.

Note the mystery suggested in verse 3. God dwells in His city, but His city takes refuge in Him. God is the “castle keep” of His city, a strong redoubt against every trouble, the source of all our safety and strength, and the maintainer of our spiritual health and salvation. The more we resort to Him, the more He increases in us, and we increase in holiness, beauty, and joy.

What a glorious city, and what a glorious privilege to be part of it because of Jesus.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

There's something about tall buildings that people find exhilarating.

We think of the Empire State Building, the Eiffel Tower, and Burj Khalifa (a fantastic skyscraper in Dubai that our eight-year-old grandson George learned about; and the name is just so fun to say).

We also think of our enemies seeking our hurt through the bringing down of tall buildings like the now destroyed Twin Towers.

The Bible tells us of tall buildings like the Tower of Babel.
And God's glorious city that is beautiful in elevation—tall, powerful, and majestic.
“The joy of the whole earth” (Ps. 48.2).

God's architecture inspires worship and comfort.

Jesus tells us that, “in My Father's house are many mansions” and that He is preparing a place for us (Jn. 14.2).

And “God...has prepared a city” for us (Heb. 11.16).

John relates his vision of the future about a city coming down out of heaven prepared by God. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21.3).

All these beautiful buildings, grand and elevated, waiting for us in eternity.

But there is another building that we need to tend to now, and that is the temple of the Holy Spirit. And that temple is us. As Paul wrote, “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God...” (1 Cor. 6.19). We are Burj Khalifa. We are called to “shine with His beauty and bask in His joy.”

Jesus says to us, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.”
“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”
(Matt. 5.14, 16).

Reflection

1. Why are holiness, beauty, and joy so important for the dwelling place of God?
2. What does it mean for you to take refuge in God?
3. In what sense are you as a believer the temple of God? How do these verses help you to think about that?

The earth is, by sin, covered with deformity, therefore justly might that spot of ground, which was beautified with holiness, be called the joy of the whole earth; that which the whole earth has reason to rejoice in, that God would thus in very deed dwell with man upon the earth. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 48.2

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.1-3

Pray for your church, her leaders, and her members, that God might bring revival to the church, and you might begin to realize more of His beautiful, joyful, holy plan for you.

Sing Psalm 48.1-3

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*](#))

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.
Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!
God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure!
He, her Stronghold ever sure!

3 The Nations Respond

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.8

As we have heard,
So we have seen
In the city of the LORD of hosts,
In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever.
Selab

Sing Psalm 48.4-8

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehonah*](#))

Earthly kings, amazed and wond'ring, look upon the Church with fear.
See them flee in dread and anguish, knowing that the Lord is near.
For the city of the Savior God will keep forevermore!
God will keep forevermore!

Read Psalm 48.4-8

Preparation

1. How do the nations respond to God's glorious city?
2. What guarantee do we, as His city, have from the Lord?

Meditation

Here is another instance in the psalms of the sons of Korah in which the nations "assemble" before the Presence of God. In Psalm 47, they assemble before His throne in obedient worship and for ready service. Here, their assembling is of a different order.

The nations are troubled as they assemble before the Presence of the Lord in His glorious city – like Herod was troubled at the news of Jesus' birth (Matt. 2.1-3). Why are they troubled? Because they see a power to marvel at (v. 2) which is greater than their power and, therefore, a threat to their autonomy. Even today, nations work to crush the power of the Gospel by lashing out at the Church in various ways. They can't stand the competition, and they foolishly believe that by silencing the Church, they can preserve their right to be gods unto themselves. The Jews and Romans of Jesus' day thought the same thing as they sealed up the tomb where He had been laid.

But their fear and violence are but the birth pangs portending a greater realization of God's sovereignty over the nations (v. 6). Like ships smashed at sea by a sudden storm, God can bring nations to destruction and convert whole peoples from enemies to heirs of His Kingdom (v. 7). When the east wind of the Spirit blows across a nation, nothing that is wicked can stand before Him.

God's city will not be moved (v. 8). God has raised up a city and temple to dwell among the peoples of the world for the extension of His rule of beauty, holiness, peace, and joy to the ends of the earth. We are that temple, that city, we who believe in Jesus and ride the coattails of His resurrection power into making all things new.

The nations may threaten and trouble us, but God has established His city forever. We will not be moved.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The people assemble.
They pass by together.

They look and see.
They marvel and are troubled.
They hasten away.
They are fearful and pained.
They are near destruction.
“Because they see a power to marvel at which is greater than their power and, therefore, a threat to their autonomy.”

The verses, Psalm 48.4-7, are a telling preamble to Jesus’ question to His disciples:
“He asked His disciples saying to them,
‘Who do men say that I am?’
So they answered, ‘John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.’
He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’” (Mk. 8.27-29)

That is the question put to all of us: Who do we say that Jesus is.
And when we answer, then what do we do about it?
Do we look and see?
Do we then marvel and become troubled?
Do we hasten away in painful fear?
Are we near destruction?

Or do we look and see and then speak with confidence?
We can say, with the sons of Korah:
“As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts,
in the city of our God: God will establish it forever” (Ps. 48.8).

In this city we live confidently and joyously because it is a city without end.
It is built on the correct response: “You are the Christ” (Mk. 8.29).
“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid,
which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3.11).

The nations responded and hastened away.
We respond by running into the arms of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, and
saying with Peter, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God” (Matt. 16.16).

Reflection

1. Why do people become troubled when they are confronted with the things of God?
2. Should we expect people to be troubled sometimes as we share the Good News with them? Should this keep us from sharing the Gospel?
3. How can believers encourage one another not to be troubled into silence when it comes to our witness for the Lord?

So what did he hear, and what did he see? That the grace of God renders the city stronger and intact. This, in fact, is its foundation, this its strength, this makes it impregnable—not human aid and help, or the power of weapons or towers and ramparts. What instead? God rules it as his own. John Chrysostom (354-407), Commentary on the Psalm 48.3

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.12-14

Pray that God will revive the Church’s witness in the world – in your community, our nation, and all around the world.

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Sing Psalm 48.12-14

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*](#))

Walk about the blessèd city, see her beauty, see her power.
Count her ramparts, filled with glory, look on ev'ry mighty tower.
Tell her glory to the nations: God will guide her evermore;
God will guide her evermore!

4 To the Ends of the Earth

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.9-11

We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness,
In the midst of Your temple.
According to Your name, O God,
So is Your praise to the ends of the earth;
Your right hand is full of righteousness.
Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah be glad,
Because of Your judgments.

Sing Psalm 48.9-11

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*](#))

For Your grace and lovingkindness we proclaim Your matchless worth!
As Your Name is, great and boundless, let Your praise fill all the earth.
Let Your people sing rejoicing for the judgment of Your truth;
For the judgment of Your truth.

Read Psalm 48.9, 10

Preparation

1. What did the psalmists think on?
2. To what did that meditation lead?

Meditation

Those who know the Lord understand other important matters – such as beauty, joy, holiness, and gladness. That certain people look askance at us should neither surprise nor bother us. Our very existence, witnessing as it does to the Lordship of King Jesus, is a threat to many.

But we don't focus on what others think or what they might do in response to our witness. Rather, we focus on God, His lovingkindness, and the greatness of His Name (vv. 9, 10). We think on Him in His beauty, majesty, grandeur, righteousness, and power; and we long for others to know Him as well. Thus, we embrace His purpose of filling the world with His Presence and praise (Eph. 1.15-23). We want to take our part, as recipients of God's grace, in seeing to it that His grace goes to every place, resulting in increased thanksgiving and glory to God (2 Cor. 4.15).

No wonder Paul instructs us to set our minds on the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3.1-3). Focusing there, we will not give in to the fear of men; rather, enthralled with the vision of Christ in His glory, we will long to see His great Name praised to the ends of the earth, beginning in our own Personal Mission Field.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens...” and so on and so forth.

It's a sweet song, no doubt, about *My Favorite Things*, and it even offers a spiritual bent: “When the dog bites/When the bee stings/When I'm feeling sad/I simply remember my favorite things/and then I don't feel so bad.”

All this wisdom from Rodgers and Hammerstein!

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But God is the originator of this very thought process: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there* is any virtue and if *there* is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4.8).

“...so shall I meditate on Your wonderful works” (Ps. 119.27).

“We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness...” (Ps. 48.9).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3.16).

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.8).

“Focusing there” ...we will be “enthralled with the vision of Christ in His glory” and instead of feeling bad or sad, or fearful or bitten or stung, we will remember the lovingkindness of God and praise Him to the ends of the earth!

Reflection

1. Why is it so important that we practice the discipline of focusing on Jesus, exalted in glory?
2. What can we do to keep the fear of man from throttling our witness?
3. How can praying the psalms help us to keep focused on our beautiful and holy King?

... *wherever the fame of the name of God may be spread, men will know that he is worthy of the highest praise...* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Psalm 48.9*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.1-8

Pray for the nations of the world, that God will prepare the hearts of multitudes of people in every place to hear the Good News of Jesus and enter the beauty, joy, and gladness of His Kingdom.

Sing Psalm 48.1-8

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*](#))

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.
Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!
God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure!
He, her Stronghold ever sure!

Earthly kings, amazed and wond’ring, look upon the Church with fear.
See them flee in dread and anguish, knowing that the Lord is near.
For the city of the Savior God will keep forevermore!
God will keep forevermore!

5 The Privilege of Gladness

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.11

Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah be glad,
Because of Your judgments.

Sing Psalm 48.9-11

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*](#))

For Your grace and lovingkindness we proclaim Your matchless worth!
As Your Name is, great and boundless, let Your praise fill all the earth.
Let Your people sing rejoicing for the judgment of Your truth;
For the judgment of Your truth.

Read Psalm 48.11

Preparation

1. Who can rejoice and be glad?
2. Why can they enjoy this privilege?

Meditation

The indicators suggest that our world is not a happy place. It's wealthier and healthier than ever, but people aren't happy. Drug abuse, suicide, broken homes, war, theft, migration on a grand scale, violence, ecological concerns, terrorism, inflation: All these conspire to make ours an unhappy, depressed, and angry generation. It seems that we can never hit on that reliable spot where happiness is our constant state.

Well of course not. Happiness – true gladness and unfading joy – is the privilege of those who know the Lord, those He has called to Himself, incorporated into His beautiful and holy city, and gives Himself to by His Word and Spirit day by day. Those who dwell in the holy mount with Jesus can be glad for all He has accomplished for us, and for all that He is making of us in His glorious city.

But we should also rejoice because His Spirit is re-writing His judgments on our heart, that we might know God's Law and do it, loving God whole-heartedly and our neighbors selflessly and sacrificially (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Matt. 22.34-40). God's Law – His "judgments" (v. 11) – is the unique possession of those who know the great Lawgiver Himself, and who desire to be great in His Kingdom (Matt. 5.17-19). Knowing, obeying, delighting in, and teaching the judgments of God give us every reason to rejoice in a world that desperately needs to discover the way to gladness.

Gladness and rejoicing are a privilege that comes to all who know the Lord of glory.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Can you imagine anyone being glad or rejoicing about laws?
Let's be more specific. Are you glad and rejoicing about God's Law?
Are you thrilled by the idea of your behavior being constrained?
And that of your neighbor?

I must be honest and say that I am.

What could be more comforting than to know exactly what pleases God?

What could bring more joy than to know that you can count on others following that same Law?

If I know for certain that my spouse will be faithful to me, that is security.

If I know that my children will respect me, and no one will murder me, or steal from me, or lie to me, or

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covet my things; that makes me glad.

And that is the joy that God desires for all of us to live in:
“We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness...” (Ps. 48.9)

We will “rejoice” and “be glad” because of God’s judgments and His Law. (Ps. 48.11)
The positive side to the keeping of the Law is the goodness that exudes from this work.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5.22, 23).

“Against such there is no law” (Gal. 5.23).

This is the privilege of gladness that comes with keeping God’s Law.

Reflection

1. Why is keeping the Law of God a source of gladness and rejoicing?
2. Why do we need a new heart to be able to keep God’s Law (cf. Ezek. 36.26, 27)?
3. What’s the difference between happiness and joy? Between being happy and rejoicing?

Let us observe the beauty, strength, and safety of the church. Consider its strength; see it founded on Christ the Rock, fortified by the Divine power, guarded by Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps. See what precious ordinances are its palaces, what precious promises are its bulwarks, that you may be encouraged to join yourselves to it: and tell this to others. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 48.11

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.1-3

Give thanks, praise, and rejoice in your salvation, and that God has called you to His Kingdom and glory. Let His gladness well up within you and overflow to the people you will see today.

Sing Psalm 48.1-3

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*](#))

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.

Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!

God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure! He, her Stronghold ever sure!

6 This God

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.12-14

Walk about Zion,
And go all around her.
Count her towers;
Mark well her bulwarks;
Consider her palaces;
That you may tell it to the generation following.
For this *is* God,
Our God forever and ever;
He will be our guide
Even to death.

Sing Psalm 48.12-14

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*](#))

Walk about the blessed city, see her beauty, see her power.
Count her ramparts, filled with glory, look on ev'ry mighty tower.
Tell her glory to the nations: God will guide her evermore;
God will guide her evermore!

Read Psalm 48.12-14

Preparation

1. How is the city of God described here?
2. What encouragement should we take from that?

Meditation

I consider this one of the most remarkable passages in the entire Psalter, if not the whole Old Testament.

The sons of Korah begin this final stanza of Psalm 48 by inviting us to consider the strength, magnitude, and beauty of the city of God. The city of God was a physical place in their day – Jerusalem, with Mt. Zion at its center. But in coming to faith in Jesus Christ, believers come to the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, which is bounded only by the work of God's Spirit in the hearts of those who believe (cf. Heb. 12.22-24). All that was written about Zion and Jerusalem in the Old Testament applies to believers and their churches today.

Put succinctly, the Church *is* the city of God, and every local church is some district or neighborhood or suburb of that great city. The sons of Korah guide us in how we should think about our churches, and how we should think about ourselves.

God's city is protected by majestic and fortified watchtowers, manned with shepherds who guard the city against every encroaching foe (v. 12; cf. Ezek. 33.1-11; Jn. 10.11-13). It is strengthened by bulwarks to resist every attack and repel every foe, bulwarks of Scripture, prayer, and good works. Lavish palaces – the transformed lives of believers and their churches – dot the landscape of God's city, showing His beauty and holiness and expressing His joy and gladness. All this must be understood and transmitted to the coming generation (v. 13), that the city may be kept strong and beautiful, and that it may increase to fill the earth with the Presence of King Jesus and His rule (Dan. 2.44, 45; Eph. 4.8-10).

Then this: "For this *is* God..." (v. 14) (v. 13). See this city? See its greatness and beauty and joy, its labor to extend the praise of God to the ends of the earth? See this, and you're seeing God Himself, as much as He

can be seen within this temporal condition. We know the New Testament describes the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), but do we think of this as starkly and significantly as is suggested here? The Church is how God shows Himself to the world?

Is this how you think about your church? Yourself?

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

When we think about church or about ourselves as a good replication of the city of God, we can begin by looking around our own homes. Take these words to heart as you wander around your dwelling place: walk about, go all around, count the pictures, mark well the locks on the doors, and consider the tidiness and beauty.

Now let's wander around the inside of our hearts and minds: What do we see? Go all around, count the time you spend with the Lord, reading His Word and praying; mark well the Law that is hidden in your heart to keep sin out; consider the beauty of love and holiness.

Next to the church: Walk about the congregation; go all around looking for the godly; count the times you've been told to get in the Word and pray; mark well the pastor's preaching on the Law and how to follow God's commands to show love and to resist sin; and consider the righteousness, peace, and joy of the other people there, and in yourself.

Thankfully now to God's city:

“Walk about Zion, and
go all around her.

Count her towers;
consider her palaces...

For this *is* God, our God
forever and ever;

He will be our guide *even* to death.” (Ps. 48. 12, 13, 14)

God wants us to be holy, and to be cognizant of our surroundings in our homes, inside ourselves, and in our churches. We can be as proud of all those places as God is of His. It is His plan for us and for His Church. Here is how He thinks about us: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2.9, 10).

This God has a beautiful city.

This God has a plan for His Church.

This same God has given us His Holy Spirit because this is
how He “shows Himself to the world”.

Through us.

Reflection

1. What do the psalmists intend by likening the city of God to God Himself? How should this instruct and guide us?
2. We are “palaces” scattered about in God's city. What kind of expectation does this hold out for you?
3. What can you do to help make sure that when people see you, they see Jesus?

The Lord and His City: Psalm 48

Let us observe the beauty, strength, and safety of the church. Consider its strength; see it founded on Christ the Rock, fortified by the Divine power, guarded by Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps. See what precious ordinances are its palaces, what precious promises are its bulwarks, that you may be encouraged to join yourselves to it: and tell this to others. This God, who has now done such great things for us, is unchangeable in his love to us, and his care for us. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on the Psalms 48.8-14

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.1-3

Praise God for His greatness, holiness, power, and joy. Pray that you may know more of God's fullness in your life today.

Sing Psalm 48.1-3

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah!*](#))

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.

Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!

God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure!

He, her Stronghold ever sure!

7 Radiant City, Glorious God

Opening Prayer: Psalm 48.1-3

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.

Sing Psalm 48.1-3

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*](#))

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.
Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!
God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure!
He, her Stronghold ever sure!

Read Psalm 48; meditate on Psalm 48.9-11

Preparation

1. What are the primary characteristics of the city of God?
2. What are the characteristics of those who inhabit this radiant city of God?

Meditation

Light is a very powerful metaphor for thinking about God and His people. Jesus declared Himself the light of the world (Jn. 8.12), echoing John's declaration that in Him is the light of life (Jn. 1.4, 5). In Jesus, the light of life, truth, love, understanding, and power over all darkness came to earth. And when He returned to His heavenly throne, He left His light in the Church, the city of the living God.

Psalm 48 works like a prism to separate the eternal and holy light of God into its polychromatic splendor. As God shines His light in and through His city, it becomes recognizable as holiness, praise, beauty, joy, witness, gladness, boldness, and the radiance of every virtue. The light of God shines forth from His city, making the Church the light of the world (Matt. 5.13-16) and empowering believers to roll back the darkness of wickedness and unbelief by their mission of worship, works, and witness (1 Jn. 2.8; Acts 1.8; Eph. 2.8-10). The praise of God reaches to the ends of the earth (Ps. 48.9), generation after generation (v. 13), as believers and their churches contemplate their glorious God and King (v. 9) and radiate light through Jesus Christ.

The unbelieving nations may tremble and flee (vv. 4-6). They may even counsel rebellion or violence (Ps. 2). But they cannot prevail to stop the increase of the light when the followers of Christ, recognizing our calling and banding together as palaces of the Lord (vv. 3, 13), shine the light of Jesus into the darkness of our unbelieving age.

The world is dark because of unbelief. But we can overcome that darkness by basking in the light of Jesus and letting His light shine through us, in all its varied and wondrous colors.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Radiant?

The unbelieving nations “cannot prevail to stop the increase of the light when the followers of Christ...shine the light of Jesus into the darkness of our unbelieving age.”

But what if we do not?

The apostle Paul answers this question succinctly: “For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and *that* I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest *there be* contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced” (2 Cor. 12.20, 21). He wrote this to the church in Corinth. But sadly, it could still be written to many churches today.

A Christmas Disaster takes place each year as we leave the Baby in the manger, and do not follow Him as King of kings and Lord of lords! We smile to see Him sleeping in heavenly peace, but we ignore the fact that He came to make the blessings of the light shine as far as the curse is found – through us!

And because we tolerate this situation year after year, there is no fear of God before our eyes (Rom. 3.18). And because there is no fear, there is very little obedience.

Jesus wants to know whether we truly know Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16.16). For if we know and love Him as such, we will keep His commandments and all His judgments. (Jn. 14.15) These are the demands of a King, not a baby: “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish *in* the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him” (Ps. 2.12).

“The world is dark because of unbelief.” So let us make sure that we believe, and that we serve our Lord who is greatly to be praised. Let us follow His commands and fear Him so that our “light will shine before men, that they may see [our] good works and glorify [our] Father in heaven” (Matt. 5.16).

Let’s not let another Christmas Disaster happen again this year. Let us rejoice that He came as a baby, and embrace Him as the King of a Radiant City and our Glorious God! Believing that makes all the difference.

Reflection

1. Why do you think so little of the many-colored light of God shines throughout our world today?
2. What can you do to turn a Christmas Disaster into Kingdom Advance?
3. How can believers encourage one another to be more consistently obedient to our King and Lord?

... whatever dignity or excellence shines forth in the Church, we are not to consider it otherwise than as the means of presenting God to our view, that we may magnify and praise him in his gifts. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on the Psalm 48.14*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 48.12-14

Praise and thank the Lord that He is building His Church, and not even the counsels and stratagems and powers of hell can stand against it (Matt. 16.18). Commit yourself to being light for Him today.

Sing Psalm 48.12-14

(Cwm Rhonda: [*Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*](#))

Walk about the blessèd city, see her beauty, see her power.
Count her ramparts, filled with glory, look on ev’ry mighty tower.
Tell her glory to the nations: God will guide her evermore;
God will guide her evermore!

The Lord and His City: Psalm 48

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How do we know that the Church may be considered the holy city of God today? How does this psalm teach us to think about the Church's calling in the world?
2. What expectations does this psalm hold out for us as believers and our churches?
3. Why is contemplating Jesus, exalted in glory, so important to our fulfilling our mission as the light of the world?
4. Into what specific forms does the light of God separate as it pervades and radiates through the Church?
5. What's the most important lesson you have learned from our study of Psalm 48? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.