

Psalm 122

I. SINGING OUR WAY HOME

- A. Throughout history, the people of God have always sought to understand their lives and their situations within a Biblical framework. Because of this, we have always sought to “find ourselves” in the stories of the Scripture and the movements of God’s redemptive purposes revealed within them.
- B. Christians have always sought to understand their lives and their situations within a Biblical framework and employing Biblical categories. Paul tells the Corinthian church to understand and apply the Scriptures of the Old Testament in this way — highlighting that these were given as *examples* for us.

¹For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶Now these things took place as examples for us... (1 Cor 10.1-6)

- C. Because of this, there is a necessary and important element of the life of the church (particularly in seasonal moments) to seek to understand what God is doing in light of Scriptural patterns, Scriptural stories, and Scriptural practices.
- D. The Scriptures are intended to interpret, give shape to, and inform our lives. Engagement with the Scriptures is not simply about studying (to understand), memorization (to know/recall), or even about learning doctrine (what we are to believe). One essential aspect of engagement with the Scripture is seeking to let the Scriptures inform the way we *see the world* (God, ourselves, others, our situations, etc.) in order to shape our affections and desires, which in turn shapes our virtuous participation in God’s world.
- E. **Songs of Ascents:** These 15 Psalms (Pss 120-134) were designed as a “hymnbook” for God’s people on their pilgrimage toward the city of God. In the OT, God’s people were commanded to come up to Jerusalem three times a year (at the three major feasts) to offer worship to his name. These psalms were designed with a specific “narrative arc” that allowed the children of Israel to remember the journey of being called up to the place where his glory dwelt. Singing these songs fulfilled several functions in the life of God’s people:
 - 1. These songs reawakened a belief in God’s active provision and protection of his people.
 - 2. These songs reawakened a longing for God’s presence among God’s people.
 - 3. These songs reoriented one’s life around God’s purposes.
 - 4. These songs reactivated faithful participation around God’s calling for his people.

II. DELIGHTING IN GOD’S PRESENCE (PS 122.1-2)

¹I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go up to the house of the Lord!” ²Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!

- A. Within the Songs of Ascents, this psalm holds a particular place demonstrating the heart cry of the pilgrim — looking for and longing for the place where they encounter God’s presence and experience the joy of fellowship with God’s people.
- B. **I was glad:** David reflects upon the gladness within his heart in journeying toward the place where God’s glory dwells. For those who are a part of God’s family, there is a joy and delight that comes with pursuing the face of God.

- C. Many people experience the rhythms of pursuing God with a sense of drudgery or duty — but the aspiration of all those who are a part of God’s family is to experience the rejoicing gladness of the heart in coming before the face of the Lord and living in his presence.
- D. **When they said... “Let us”:** One of the glorious realities of this psalm is that it invites us to see the particular beauty of gathering together with God’s people in the pursuit of his presence and purposes. Throughout the Scripture there is a high value on the corporate gathering as the place where the family of God meets with the Lord, worships and adores him, hears his word, and participates in the means of grace he has ordained.

³You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel (Ps 22.3)

²⁴Let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb 10.24-25)

- F. **House of the Lord:** This is the place where God’s glory dwelt. In David’s time, the house of God was a tabernacle that housed the ark of the covenant. Here (and only here) was where God chose to dwell in the fullness of his presence and glory. A saint has a particular passion to be in the presence of God and will order their lives around pursuing living in this reality.

⁴One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. (Ps 27.4)

³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness... (Matt 6.33)

III. REJOICING IN GOD’S CITY (PS 122.3-9)

³Jerusalem — built as a city that is bound firmly together, ⁴to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. ⁵There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David (Ps 122.3-5)

- A. Now David turns from delighting in the glory of coming up to God’s house, to speaking of the glorious realities of the city of God.
- B. **Bound firmly together:** David speaks of the glorious reality of this city being knit together. This speaks of the structure, order, and purpose of a city built as it should be.
- C. **The tribes go up... to give thanks:** Jerusalem was the place ordained by God for the tribes to come and inhabit as the place of his praise (see above on House of the Lord). The people of Israel were commanded to go up to Jerusalem three times a year for the feasts.
- D. **Thrones were set:** This speaks of the city as the place where God’s order and judgment (evaluations) were given. God’s authority was to come out of the place where he dwelt.

IV. THE GLORIOUS REALITY OF GOD’S PEOPLE-CITY

- A. In the New Testament, Christ has reoriented the worship, the temple (house of the Lord), and the city of God around himself and his work. Through him we come to see that each of these things served as a type of the eternal and perfect realities that he would inaugurate in the new covenant and in the age to come.
- B. In Revelation 19-22, we see that both **the city** (New Jerusalem) and **the people** (God’s redeemed from every tongue, tribe, and nation) are called the “Bride”. This demonstrates that there is a unique relationship between the people of God and the city of God in the new creation.

⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19.7-8)

²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... ⁹[the angel] spoke to me, saying, "Come and I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰And he... showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21.2, 9-10)

- C. No longer are the people of God required to come up to a particular place or a particular city to worship. In Christ, ***we now come to the heavenly Jerusalem to worship in the true house of God*** (where his glory dwells).

²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." (John 4.21)

¹⁸For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest... ²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12.18-24)

- D. The people of God ***are now*** and ***are being built into*** the temple of God.

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2.19-22)

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2.4-5)

- E. The glorious reality of gathering as the people of God (and the ministry of the church) is that ***God is building his people together as his glorious house where his glory dwells.***
- F. Our hearts should be glad as we consider the call to "go up" to the house of the Lord — both in the place of gathering for worship and for the places we are called to build the "city of God".

V. BUILDING THE HOUSE: THE FALL AT REDEEMER KANSAS CITY

- A. As the Lord has been at work in our church over the last season, I believe that he is calling us into a season of "***building the house***". This is in line with the vision of what God has put in front of us to become and build a praying church that pursues his presence and his purposes for Kansas City.
- B. At the heart of every pursuit, allotment of resources, and ministry in the life of our church is the intentional and consistent commitment to pursue God's presence as the ***foundational reality*** of our church's life. This is not simply speaking of a theological reality, but of a desire to pursue the means that God has ordained to live in his glorious presence.
- C. For a season in the life of our church, I believe that pursuing this first value (***presence***), as well as the strategic elements necessary to building it, must take ***primary place*** of importance in what we talk about, how we train, what we "program" toward.
- D. Closely tied to this value is the image related to it of an *altar*. Throughout the Scripture an altar is the place where worship is offered to the Lord.
- E. I long for our church to be a place where "incense" arises to the throne of God in the midst of the darkness and brokenness of Kansas City. At the heart of this city block (an "embassy for the kingdom") I long to see a burning fire of worship and prayer arise to the God of heaven — both as a testament to his infinite worth and as a petition to him to accomplish his purposes in our church and in our city.

- F. To set out toward building this will require a clear framework (why are we doing this), a plan (what is expected), as well as a commitment to continue in the face of difficulty.
- G. I am praying that God would *stir up our spirits* to set about building his house in this way over the next six months.

¹⁴And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God (Hag 1.14)

- H. This fall we are entering into a specific and focused season of putting our hands to the work that God has been inviting us toward. In this season, we will primarily be focusing our labors on “building” the culture of our church toward the values and vision that God is calling us toward.

I. What:

1. **1 & 2 Chronicles:** This fall we will be preaching from portions of 1 & 2 Chronicles in the pulpit. We will be looking specifically at two primary themes. First, we will see that God’s people are designed to live under the rule of the rightful king and with rightly ordered worship of God — when they are, God’s blessing is upon them, and when they are not, they are left in disorder. Second, we will look specifically at the nature of building God’s house as a place for worship and prayer to be offered to him as a central and essential aspect of God’s people.
2. **Wednesday night prayer:** We will continue and strengthen our Wednesday night prayer meetings as a first expression of a broader prayer ministry at Redeemer Kansas City. This includes casting vision, training/developing (worship leaders, people who grow in leading prayer, etc.), consistency, and developing a long-term “model” for prayer meetings at Redeemer.
3. **Sunday Schools:** On August 6 we will launch Redeemer Kids in our Sunday School hour at Redeemer (8:30 AM); and the following week (August 13) we will begin our adult Sunday School class. This Fall we will be hosting *one* class (i.e., everyone together) that is designed to sow into our spiritual family essential culture-building realities necessary for the coming days as a church. This will also include a move toward brining children into the worship service.
4. **Outreach:** As an essential element of our future ministry together, we are building several “small beginnings” contexts for larger efforts oriented toward evangelism and disciple-making. This will include: (1) all church events; (2) consistent evangelism groups; (3) training and development; and (4) city partnerships.
5. **Builders:** We have established particular avenues for the men of our church to answer the call toward building the house in this season. This includes a monthly prayer gathering and quarterly men’s breakfast. Our desire is to build men who will build God’s house, godly families, and a godly legacy.

VI. APPENDIX I: AN OVERVEIW & OUTLINE OF THE SONGS OF ASCENTS

- A. The *Songs of Ascents* are a compilation of 15 Psalms (120-134) that all include the title “A Song of Ascents”. This section of the book of Psalms was likely compiled together as a unit before it was included in the final compilation of the book of Psalms.
- B. *Ascents:* In Hebrew, the word translated ascents can mean literally “steps”, or it can have a more figurative idea of ascending toward something. Because of this dual meaning, many commentators have sought to understand the place of these songs in the religious life of Israel. This has led to two predominant interpretations of these songs.

1. Jewish commentators have seen a correlation between the 15-Psalms with this title and the 15-steps that ascended in the temple from the Court of Women to the Temple complex. There is some belief that from the time of Nehemiah through the remainder of the Second Temple period (approximately 500 BC — 70 AD) that the Levites would sing each of these psalms on one of the steps as they ascended toward the Temple at the time of the feasts.
 2. It is also common to interpret these psalms as a type of “hymnbook” that Jewish pilgrims would sing as they made their way up (literally ascending) to Jerusalem year to year at the time of the Feasts. Because of much of the harvest imagery (as well as themes of ultimate restoration and redemption) throughout these songs, it seems that this would have particular application to the Feast of Tabernacles.
 3. It is unnecessary to draw a sharp distinction between these two understandings of the use of these psalms. If they were used by the priests on the steps, then it also could be said that they did so as representatives of the “pilgrims” who were making their way up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.
- C. The Songs of Ascents have a definitive shape and structure, giving reason to believe that there was an intentional form to their compilation.
- D. **Psalm 120:** Begins with a pilgrim in exile, far off from the presence of the Lord, and experiencing the distress and oppression of their enemies. The call of the psalmist is for the Lord to “deliver” them from the wicked who surround them. Here we have the introduction of many themes that will be revisited throughout these psalms: the dwelling, peace, and the intervening power of the Lord.
- E. **Psalm 121:** The psalmist turns his eyes upward to look to the place where his help comes from. This could be an allusion to the height of Jerusalem, or the ancient belief of the dwelling place of the gods was situated in the mountains (heights). Regardless, the psalmist is sure that the Lord will keep his people, and that those who lift their eyes to him will not be put to shame.
- F. **Psalm 122:** A song of delight in arriving in Jerusalem — the place of God’s house (i.e., the place of his presence). This psalm is ascribed to David, and he declares that it is his delight to go up to the place where God’s glory dwells. This is a glad meditation on the glories of God’s presence, his city, and his people.
- G. **Psalm 123:** Here again the psalmist turns his eyes to the Lord. This time the song is not about the help that comes from the Lord, but about the posture of humility in the suppliant. The psalmist turns to the Lord like a servant looks to the master — knowing that it is through him alone comes mercy.
- H. **Psalm 124:** This psalm is the “darkest” of the songs of Ascents. The pilgrim understands that if God had not been on their side they would have been overtaken by the raging waters, the floods, and the torrents. Yet, the Lord had provided deliverance and has been a help to his people!
- I. **Psalm 125:** Those who trust in the Lord are likened to the firm and stable Mount Zion — which cannot be moved but will abide for all eternity. This psalm tells of the Lord surrounding his people and doing good toward those who are his.
- J. **Psalm 126:** In one of the most memorable and metaphorical psalms in the collection, this psalm speaks of the glorious reality of living in the time of God’s redemption and restoration. The picture is of the pilgrims who have experienced the favor of God after a season of exile, oppression, and trial. This looks into the future of a day of perfect and whole redemption and fills the heart of the singer with faith — that although there is still time of tarrying and waiting (sowing, hard work of harvesting), the one who weeps in the labor will come home with shouts of joy and praise.
- K. **Psalm 127:** This Psalm stands at the “center” of the songs of Ascents (7 psalms before and 7 psalms after). At the center, it holds a specific and important place in understanding the general movement through this hymnbook. This psalm is a meditation on the necessity of the Lord’s intervention in the building of his

house. There is here an important relationship between the building of God's house (the temple, the place for his presence, etc.) and God building godly houses. It is as though the people of God are built in two ways. First, they are built through the establishing of God's presence at the center of their national identity. Second, they are built as God gives grace to individual families in experiencing personal godliness and fruitfulness.

- L. **Psalm 128:** As the Lord builds his people through their households, this psalm serves a specific purpose of highlighting the strong family bonds of a godly household. The pronouncement of *blessing* upon the man who fears the Lord and walks in his way leads to the declaration of a fruitful household (with wife and children being described in harvest language).
- M. **Psalm 129:** This psalm recounts the afflictions and hardships of God's people, with a specific reminder that God will visit the wicked with judgment. Those who set themselves against God's people, God's city, and God's purposes will be put to shame. This psalm uses the agricultural language to describe withering and lack (in contrast to much of the collection's harvest and abundance).
- N. **Psalm 130:** In this song the psalmist cries out for deliverance from the depths of despair (the deep waters? Compare with Ps 124). However, the cry for deliverance is not from the adversaries, but from the sins of the pilgrim himself. God's vary nature is lauded as the one who does not mark iniquities, and therefore brings reverent and humble fear in response to his forgiveness. God will bring restoration and redemption to his people, and save them from all of their sins and all of their sorrows. Because of this, the people of God are to wait for his redemption more than watchmen wait for the morning.
- O. **Psalm 131:** In a similar tone to Psalm 123, this song of David is a meditation on turning away from pride and embracing humility. Rather than a servant looking to his master, this song emphasizes a child looking to his mother. No longer will the pilgrim seek to trouble himself with anxious thoughts (cf. Ps 127.2) about things that are too lofty for him, but will rather rest and take succor in the comfort of the Lord like a weaned child rests upon his mother.
- P. **Psalm 132:** This psalm is longest of the Songs of Ascents (likely important with its relation to the covenant made with David about the Messiah!). It begins with remembering the vow that David made to build the house of God (a centerpiece of the songbook). David determined with focused zeal to not take comfort for himself until the Lord had a place to rest and dwell! Yet, the Lord had a promise to David that he would build an eternal house on the throne of David. The center of this psalm is the call for the Lord to "Arise" and "go to your resting place".
- Q. **Psalm 133:** A meditation on the glorious blessing that will come from the hand of the Lord upon the unified people of God. The pilgrim is reminded of God's heart for the unity of his people and for the glorious experience of eternal life that is promised from his hand.
- R. **Psalm 134:** A call to the Levites who were to stand before the Lord in the night service. This is a call to them to fulfill their duty — which is blessing the Lord and lifting high his name.

VII. APPENDIX II: PREACHING THE PSALMS

- A. July 9 — Psalm 122
- B. July 16 — Psalm 133
- C. July 23 — Psalm 126
- D. July 30 — Psalm 128
- E. August 6 — Psalm 127
- F. August 13 — Psalm 132