

“Mountains, Valleys, & Caves: David on Mount Zion”

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Psalm 122:1-9

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Mount Zion has always occupied a special place in Judaism. The term can refer to part of the City of Jerusalem or its whole, or to the entirety of the nation of Israel (Zionists). David founded Mount Zion when he defeated the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-7). The “Songs of Ascent” (Psalms 120-134) are sung by Jewish pilgrims as they ascend to Jerusalem for worship. King Solomon pursued wisdom but his father, David, pursued worship. David REALLY loved God. He seemed unique among the kings of Israel in this regard. Wisdom is important for this life, but worship lasts forever. Like all of us, David made mistakes, but make no mistake about it—despite his imperfections, this was a man who loved God. The Psalms give us a look at David’s heart and character. David is credited with writing about half the 150 Psalms. David constantly affirmed the beauty, goodness, and truth of God’s law. The Lord is magnificent and worthy of glory, honor, and praise. David praised God, not because of his circumstances, but because of the nature, goodness, and character of God. Even after the death of his son, whom he had fasted and prayed for, we see David’s abiding trust in God. This is the next line after he hears the news: *“And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped”* (2 Samuel 12:20). Through all the tumult of his life, David always worshiped. He praised God in his mountaintop experiences, while in the valley, and even in the cave.

APPLICATION: Our theme this week is about **praise**. In the Old Testament, David was THE model of praising and thanking God in all circumstances. There are so many benefits of giving God glory. What comes to your mind when you think of praising God? Why is praising God so important? How big a part of your spiritual life is praising the Lord? What other scriptures come to mind about it? How can you incorporate the praise of God into your life in a more regular and consistent way? Memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* Try writing your own psalm of praise to God.

Psalm 119 goes through the Hebrew language to teach the alphabet by focusing upon “God’s Word.” 15 “Psalms of Ascent” follow. David wrote 4: (122, 124, 131, 133). Solomon wrote Ps. 127. We do not know who wrote the other ten. The “Psalms of Ascent” have motion – they are going “up” to Jerusalem. Worshipers memorized and sung these Psalms as they made pilgrimages to Jerusalem. All men were required to come to Jerusalem at the 3 major festivals each year (Passover, Festivals of Weeks/Tabernacles). These Psalms are passionate and express the full gamut of emotions of lament, defeat, trust, hope, worship and praise. While we may not be literally walking to Jerusalem, we can relate to moving towards a deeper relationship with God. There are 15 Psalms of Ascent. We notice a distinct pattern when we divide them into threes. 120 begins in **TROUBLE**: *“In my distress, I called to the Lord. Deliver me from lying lips.”* It ends with *“I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.”* He is far away from Jerusalem.

121 is about how he is putting his **TRUST** in the Lord. He will lift his eyes to the hills – that would be Jerusalem. **Psalm 122** is **TRIUMPH**. It has themes of joy in worship and giving thanks to God. *I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”*² *Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!*

³*Jerusalem— built as a city that is bound firmly together,* ⁴ *to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.* ⁵ *There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.* ⁶ *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you!”* ⁷ *Peace be*

within your walls and security within your towers!"⁸ For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, "Peace be within you!"⁹ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

Our theme is "**Praise.**" This is a crucial component of our faith. In spite of all David's "Mountains, Valleys (and wilderness), and Caves," the Lord was his central focus. David constantly praised God even in times of trouble.

*I was **glad** when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"* The word "**glad**" = cheerful, happy, joyful, pleased (opposite of sad) is found 35x in the Psalms. There is a deep connection between being "glad" and praising/thanking God.

*67:4-5 Let the nations be **glad** and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples **praise** you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!*

*68:3 But the righteous shall be **glad**; they shall **exult** before God; they shall be jubilant with joy! Sing to God, sing **praises** to his name*

*118:24 This is the day that the Lord has made; let us **rejoice** and be **glad** in it.*

*149:2-3 Let Israel be **glad** in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! Let them **praise** his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!*

A question: **What makes you glad?** This week, the snow cancelling school/work made a lot of people glad. Some are glad when they think about sports, shopping, food, Fido, family, friends, hobbies, etc.

A 2nd question: **Does your faith make you glad?** If we're not "glad" about our faith it will never mean much to us because it doesn't occupy the seat of our affection. If we don't love something (like our work), most likely we'll never be successful.

In full disclosure, I've not ALWAYS shown up at church with gladness (and I'm the preacher). Over 25 years ago, I met a Tulsa cardiologist and asked him, "How many open-heart surgeries have you performed?" His answer stunned me: "Between 9,500 and 10,000." I was shocked. My immediate thought was: This guy is rich! Then I thought, I can't imagine what it would be like to open up the chest cavity of an individual and hold their beating heart in my hands." He brought me back to reality with another startling comment: "And I can hardly wait to do another." And his closer was, knowing I was a preacher, "And I'll bet you feel the same and can hardly wait to preach another sermon." I nodded "Yes" with my head but "No" with my heart." That was over 25 years ago. Our kids were teenager and pre-teen. If he were to ask me the same question today, I would eagerly affirm with both my head and my heart. They would both be nodding yes. Of course, Dana bore the brunt of getting the kids assembled and getting them here. It reminds me of the story where a family was on a long trip and the two boys were fussing and fighting in the back seat. The dad warned them and told them to knock it off. But they persisted. He finally pulled over on the side of the road and gave them each two swats, told them to get back in the car and not say a single word. About an hour later, one of the boys said, "Dad, can I say something?" Dad was still smoldering and he grunted, "Yeah, what is it?" "Well, you know when you gave me that swat back there?" "What about it?" "Well, my shoe fell off."

He begins with the word, "I" and ends in verse 9 with "*I will seek your good*" but this is a Psalm of community, not individuality. *when **they** said to me, "Let **us** go to the house of the Lord!"* The highlight of OT worship was going to the Temple. The idea of a solitary faith has never existed within Judaism/Christianity. We are meant to worship with others.

We may not like the idea of church, but the "church" was Jesus' idea and began on the day of Pentecost. The Book of Revelation refers to the church as "The Bride of Christ." Also, the church lets self-absorbed people like you and me in it. It's easy to complain about the church's failures, and those would be true – but there are so

many things the church does well. In this snowstorm, the places of shelter were often faith-based. I'm excited about our Development Center and ways we can help children, students, and adults who are underserved. We will help with adoption and foster care, a counseling service for parents, food and rent assistance, health care assistance for the underserved, and a place for uniquely abled (special needs) adults. All these agencies are all part of the church – not just Asbury – but the “catholic” or “universal” church. To be in the Development Center our partners must be: Christian, development centered, and allow Asbury members to volunteer. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The church will prevail.

A worshipping community helps us make friends and encourage one another; teaches us about our faith; and provides opportunities for service and witness. Some prefer flying solo in a one-engine airplane. It's easy, accessible and you can fly all by yourself. I'm flying to Israel on Friday. I'm NOT flying solo or on a one-engine. As the African proverb goes, “If you want to travel fast, go alone. If you want to travel far, go together.” I regularly talk to people with physical constraints that make it impossible for them to attend. They tell me how much they miss coming. It is like their joy has been lost. So many have simply opted out. I ask, “Where is our sense of Gladness?” in life. For David, it was being with others in worship. He loved to praise God. Praising God renews us. It refocuses our attention from ourselves and our problems and how difficult life is to how awesome and great is our God. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint.” Maybe the reason we're so tired is because our focus has been distracted from our one priority of giving God the praise, honor, and glory that is due him. If full of anger, anxiety, bitterness, complaint, fear, and lament then we will be sad, lonely, and depressed. Praising God redirects us. We neglect the worship of God corporately at our own spiritual peril.

The Song of Ascents includes troubles. We have valleys, wilderness wanderings, and caves. But we must always give God praise. We can trust God. We will Triumph in the end. Jesus told us (John 16:33) *“In this life you will have trouble. But take heart, for I have overcome the world.”*

Though sometimes coming to worship can be difficult, so is anything worthwhile. School and work may not always be easy. Relationships can be challenging. I can also say that I don't know if I've ever left on a Sunday regretting what my time invested. When we enter into His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, we receive far more in return than we give. A key to living in triumph is giving God praise. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

The Psalms of Ascent were for people going up to worship God. They were literally taking steps together. There is joy in being with others as we worship and serve. 2nd Saturday is this coming Saturday. I spoke with a young man who will be baptized today (Ethan) who went to 2nd Saturday with his dad in Jan. Loved it. Community + service. And we add in Worship/Praise. This is how we build our affection. Not in isolation – but in community, service, and worship.

I invite you to give your life to Jesus Christ this day – and to participate with His church as we worship together every Sunday. Because you take the time to make the worship of God a priority in your life, you will be better. This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.