**PRAY**

At some time or other we have all received an invitation to go somewhere that we have always wanted to go to, or just like going back to again and again.

It is an invitation that gives us both pleasure immediately, as well as pleasure in planning and anticipating. In short, we are happy.

Psalm 122 is titled as being written by King David – one of four Psalms of Ascent that he wrote – no doubt indicating his view of the importance of worship, with God at the centre.

There is no indication that David ever made pilgrimage from a great distance to one of the major feasts – he was born in Bethlehem, not far from Jerusalem, so maybe in his early years watched the pilgrims as they approached the last few miles of travel.

Having said that, the Psalm is written in the voice of one who had travelled a great distance and had finally arrived at the Holy City.

It is also written with what Jerusalem was in his day and a glimpse of what it would become under his son, their successors and ultimately the awaited Messiah – a son of David in respect of Jesus’ human lineage.

Spurgeon summed up the psalm by saying, ‘David wrote it for the people to sing at the time of their goings up to the holy feasts at Jerusalem. It comes third in the series and appears to be suitable to be sung when the people had entered the gates and their feet stood within the city.’

**v1 - I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD.’**

David’s words voice that of a group inviting an individual to accompany them on their pilgrimage – it was an invitation and acceptance that made the person glad.

There would have been an element of safety being offered by travelling in a group, but here the pilgrim is delighted that he is able to go and that his fellow community have a like-minded view to worship God.

**Deuteronomy 12:5-6**, written by Moses, says, **…you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; 6there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings…**

This requirement to take the sacrifices and offerings to one central place was to prevent the young Israelite nation from copying the surrounding nations in the pagan practices that accompanied their worship.

Things that both removed God from the centre of worship and allowed those who had no priestly background to make sacrificial offerings. To God, these were unacceptable

In the time of the Exodus, the Tabernacle where God resided, was in very close proximity to everyone in the camp.

By David’s time, the same Tabernacle existed (the Temple had yet to be built), but the people were spread out across the nation and possibly David wrote here in prophetic anticipation of the pilgrims who would come to the **house of the LORD** which would be built by Solomon.

Today we are blessed in that we do not have to go to a specific place to worship God.

We worship a God who is not contained by a building, nor is He contained or restrained by anything, including the universe that He created. Yet, God is as approachable as a closest friend – He wants His people to worship because they see His glory, rather than from being forced to do so.

Despite not being required to gather at one place and at a set time, we need to be careful the freedom that we have is not abused.

We often see in David’s actions that he knew at what he calls, going to the house of the Lord made David happy – it was clearly somewhere that he found he could focus his thoughts, prayers and worship to God Almighty.

It was also somewhere that he knew he could receive God’s instructions for both himself and the nation that he ruled over.

Albeit David is speaking through the voice of someone on pilgrimage, but he says that he is glad.

The same feeling of gladness should be how we feel whenever we enter God’s presence – it doesn’t have to be by coming to this place, it should be in every moment of every day – knowing we are surrounded and protected by God’s love.

We should make sure that we do enter the Lord’s presence each day – entering involves action.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** encourages us to do that entering on a corporate basis, to continue meeting together as the fellowship of the church, to encourage one another.

That will enable us to share in the gladness that David spoke about.

That passage from Hebrews is talking about Jesus and Him being our High Priest – for us no longer having restricted access to God, but as the writer says, it is for us to (v22) **draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.**

If you feel discouraged, or concerned, or just not feeling glad for no particular reason, the company of God and His people is your answer.

Granted as you look around we may not be the ones you would naturally choose, but it is both good and important for us to gather with fellow believers in Jesus, for prayers, worship and to receiving God’s word.

Come seeking the Lord and calling on His Name and you will go away glad.

That shouldn’t be from any human action, it will be because the Lord has heard you and spoken to you through His Holy Spirit.

Being glad is not the same as being entertained. It is a dangerous area to enter if you are truly seeking God – partly because often the focus of the entertainment is on the entertainer, rather than the Lord.

Remember what I said last week about God being jealous about you – He will not share you with anything or anyone else.

Gladness comes from God’s people coming together for His glory in His house.

Our gladness come from what David describes in **v2** - **Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!**

This is the pilgrim’s (and our) arrival at the destination. We no longer look from a distance at where we want to be, we are there – in God’s presence and the response is full of joy and gladness.

We grow together in a way that David described **Jerusalem** as being **built, as a city that is compact together…**

The building and architecture of Jerusalem is not the point here, it is the way that it is compacted together – a place that is devoted to God’s service, for His glory, where all are welcome and where, as Spurgeon described it, it is a ‘joy of the whole earth.’

He also said, ‘…a church should be one in creed and one in heart, one in testimony and one in service, one in aspiration and one in sympathy. They greatly injure our Jerusalem who would build dividing walls within her; she needs compacting, not dividing.’

We may be many individuals. but as believers, we are one in Jesus our Messiah – we are one family.

Despite the Israelite nation having the appearance of one people, for many purposes it was divided by the tribes through which it was made up – a fact that eventually caused rifts and the falling apart of the kingdom.

Though that is a very simplistic statement, there is a warning for Christian believers – although all of those believers in the world may have differing cultures and languages, we need to ignore whatever differences we have, to see that we are all first and foremost of Jesus.

Whether we are local church or global church, we are all believers in Jesus, who need to support each other – especially in prayer and in doing so, we will glorify God’s Name.

One of the reasons David gave for the people to go to Jerusalem was to **give thanks to the name of the LORD**.

The primary purpose of the feasts of Israel was for the people of God to come together and give Him thanks – to show their appreciation for what He had done gave them faith for what He would do in the future.

That should be the primary focus as we gather each week – any blessings that God gives us following our praise and thanks are from His bountiful store of grace.

### David exhorts (urge / strongly encourage) pilgrims to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

### **Hebrews 7:2** tells us that Jerusalem’s name itself means the city of peace – but in reality it has known little physical peace over the years. This word for peace, *shalom*, is also referring to a secureness and welfare that only a knowledge and faith in God can provide.

### Those prayers for peace are important for Jerusalem, but they are important for the church too – Spurgeon’s opinion on church unity was: ‘In a church one of the main ingredients of success is internal peace: strife, suspicion, party-spirit, division, – these are deadly things. Those who break the peace of the church deserve to suffer and those who sustain it win a great blessing.’

Following Spurgeon’s example, we will all be blessed by a church that has unity – and in that blessing is a desire to get close to God’s will.

So maybe you would add to your prayer list a request that the Holy Spirit works through us all to maintain and deepen our faith and unity?

David concludes this Psalm by saying, **Because of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.**

David understood that the gladness and goodness of the pilgrim toward God’s city was not was because the house of the LORD was there.

Yet, though the Tabernacle would soon be replaced with the first Temple – one that was magnificent beyond even our imaginations, in terms of the precious stones and gold that was used – this psalm is saying the building was not the important thing.

It is more about the people – God’s people of all times – those who choose to assemble, to testify and to seek out the peace of God.

When we truly acknowledge there is one God, who is our Creator and Sovereign King and also put Him in His rightful place, first, we will truly know Him and grow in Him.

We will gain faith in our eternal Heavenly Father, to deal with whatever this world presents us with.

Just before I conclude, I want to include a comment about the presence of the promised Messiah in this psalm.

As with the previous psalm, the Messiah is not overtly mentioned, but if you care to look He is there.

**v5 - For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.**

Through David, God established Jerusalem as the seat of government for Israel and the city contained the main courts. Judges sat on thrones, possibly near or at the city gates **Ruth 4:1-12, 2 Samuel 15:12, Matthew 19:28** and these were literally the thrones of the house of David, with the responsibility for judging handed down through the generations.

The city was meant to be a city of justice, where good was honoured and where evil was corrected.

In the Book of Revelation, we are told that one day Jesus will judge everyone whilst seated at the judgement seat – a Heavenly copy of the throne of the house of David, of which Jesus is a son.

God has ensured that all sin will be dealt with – to be judged impartially by one who is sinless.

But God has also ensured that there is a way to avoid this judgement seat – by repenting of sin and accepting the salvation that God offers through His Son, the one who is the judge.

It is up to you to make the choice whether you are to be judged or not. But remember, this judge will know if you are claiming salvation because you have repented, or if you have not really done so with all of your heart.

It is not a choice to leave too late, nor to chance.

**CONCLUSION**

The last thing David says is **I will seek your good**.

Just as it was good for pilgrims of David’s time to seek the good of Jerusalem for the sake of God’s house, so Christians today can and should seek the good of society for the sake of God’s house

The Hebrew word translated as house in **verse 9**, can be translated as bodies (meaning the people).

So, we may interpret that verse to say we should be looking after our own people – our fellow believers – locally and globally, to seek God’s blessing.

This takes time, it takes effort. The phrase **I will seek**, is not a quick glance around – there is actually great effort implied and demanded.

So whilst the pilgrim may have had great excitement at the thought of travelling in pilgrimage, he had work to do – in preparing for the journey and the destination.

We have a similar call from God to make our lives a pilgrimage – which will take effort, commitment and possibly sacrifice, but the thought of standing with God’s Heavenly Kingdom should drive us on constantly.

**PRAYER / OFFER**

**READING**

**Psalm 122**

**1 I was glad when they said to me,**

**‘Let us go into the house of the LORD.’**

**2 Our feet have been standing**

**Within your gates, O Jerusalem!**

**3 Jerusalem is built**

**As a city that is compact together,**

 **4 Where the tribes go up,**

**The tribes of the LORD,
To the Testimony of Israel,
To give thanks to the name of the LORD.**

**5 For thrones are set there for judgment,
 The thrones of the house of David.**

**6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:**

**‘May they prosper who love you.**

 **7 Peace be within your walls,**

**Prosperity within your palaces.’**

 **8 For the sake of my brethren and companions,**

**I will now say, ‘Peace be within you.’**

**9 Because of the house of the LORD our God**

**I will seek your good.**