

The Blessed Zion

Psalm 48:1-14

By [Sean Lucas](#)

Please take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Psalm 48. Psalm 48. As you are turning, I just want to say it's a great privilege to be with you, a great privilege to come and talk a little bit about Blessed Zion and explain why I titled the history of First Pres. Blessed Zion. I hope what we'll find as we come to God's Word tonight is that First Pres., and all of our outposts of Zion, are blessed not because they are strong and beautiful and powerful, but they are blessed because we have a great King who delights in us and sings over us and rejoices over us and is in fact in the midst of us tonight. But before we read this portion of God's Word we need His help so please pray with me.

Almighty God, we come now, as we have many, many times before, and we ask once again that You would grant us Your Holy Spirit that our eyes of faith might be opened and that we would see glorious riches in this portion of Your Gospel. Lord, may we not be like Samson who roused himself thinking that he could rise in the face of the Philistines once again not knowing that the Spirit had led him. Lord, grant us Your Spirit this night so that we might read and hear and apply and believe and see the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm 48:

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress.

For behold, the kings assembled; they came on together. As soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they were in panic; they took to flight. Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor. By the east wind you shattered the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever.

We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Let Mount Zion be glad!

Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments!

Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Camelot: A Picture of Kingly Power

This past November, as you know, our country remembered the 50th anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and as you paid attention to the news report undoubtedly you heard reference once again to the Kennedy years and the Kennedy White House being compared to Camelot. Of course it was perhaps inevitable that the Kennedy years would be called "The Camelot Years." Most people don't realize that JFK and Jay Lerner, who was one of the two authors of that musical, were actually roommates at Harvard. And of course the Broadway show, Camelot, came out in fall 1960 as Kennedy was winning the election and beating Richard Nixon. And of course the Broadway cast album was actually the billboard number one album for nine straight weeks. And when Kennedy was killed it was revealed that the Camelot cast album was one of the family's favorite and the last lines of the show were especially prized which went, "Don't let it be forgot that once there was a spot for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot."

But the Camelot mythology goes far beyond the 20th century and the president. It goes all the way back to the 12th century, we think. The mythology connected to Camelot, Camelot being a symbol of King Arthur and Arthur's world, of a world of feudalism and honor, a world in which stability came from this central location, this place where there was security and safety. And by the time one reads Thomas Malory's, *The Death of Arthur*, in the 15th century, Camelot becomes central, central to the story. It's not only a castle and not only a fortress but it's a symbol. It's a symbol of a place where all that is right and good dwells. It's a place where the knights are around the round table and where Arthur reigns with justice and goodness. But it was more than just a place and more than a symbol; it was people as well. Those knights at the table, Lancelot as the great hero, Guinevere as the beautiful queen, and, of course, Arthur above all ruling over his kingdom. And so from the 12th century to the 20th century this image of Camelot has proved potent.

Longing for a Better Kingdom

And I think part of the reason why that's the case is that there is something our hearts, something in our souls, something deep down in our bones that longs for a place and for a people that are safe and secure, a place where there's peace

and justice, a place where there's glory, a place where the king rules with justice. In other words, our hearts actually long for Zion, for blessed Zion as described here in Psalm 48. We don't long for mythology, we don't long for Camelot, we don't long for a place where Arthur rules, we long for what's described here in Psalm 48 because what's described here is far more real than any mythology and it's far better, far greater and far more powerfully pictures the justice and goodness and peace for which we long. We long for this place and these people and this safety and this security.

And Zion first shows up in the Bible in 2 Samuel chapter 5 when David goes to conquer Jerusalem. When he finally just establishes his claim upon the city it's called the stronghold of Zion, the city of David. And when Solomon builds the temple and the procession comes and they enter into this holy place that Solomon has constructed in 1 Kings chapter 8 the Bible speaks of the city of David, which is Zion. And when God's people would go to worship there in Jerusalem as they sang the Psalms of Ascent from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134 they sang often of going to Zion, of the place where God dwells and the people with whom God dwells so that the place there in Jerusalem came to be identified as the place where God's people would gather but it wouldn't simply be localized to Jerusalem. By the time the Zion imagery makes it to Isaiah it's no longer a city but an entire mountain. Isaiah describes it this way. "Zion is the mountain of the house of the Lord which shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow into it and many people shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.'" It's not simply the place for the Old Testament saints; the New Testament saint goes to Zion as well. In Hebrews chapter 12 we're told that "you have come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God and to the heavenly Jerusalem." And so Zion, over and over again, is described throughout the Bible as a place where God's people come together and worship and to find security and to find safety. It is described over and over as a blessed place.

I. Zion: Blessed because the King is Present

But why? Why is Zion a blessed place? Well what I hope you'll see tonight is that Zion is not a blessed place because it is a strong and powerful and beautiful place, though it is, and Zion is not blessed because it is filled with strong and beautiful and powerful people. Zion is blessed because the King dwells there, and not David the king, God the King. Our God dwells in the midst of Zion. And that's why, friends, this imagery of Zion is so appropriate for you and for all the outposts of the city of God because when you gather in this place as God's people you come to meet with the King. You don't come with an appointment for a pastor and you don't come for an appointment with elders and Sunday school teachers; you come to this place, blessed Zion, gathering with God's people, to meet with the King and that's why you are blessed. You're blessed because here in Zion you know the King's presence.

That's ultimately what the first three verses describe for us when the sons of Korah sing, "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress." Now to be sure, as Zion is described here it has many natural advantages. It's set on a mountain. It is beautiful and high in elevation. It is the far north. Whether that's describing heaven or whether that's describing an elevated place, it's hard to get at. It has natural citadels that make it a defensible fortress. All these things are true but the real reason why Zion's blessed is because the King is there. The psalmist speaks of his holy mountain. This is God's mountain, His place where He dwells to make His people secure.

Indeed throughout the Bible the great blessing that's held out to God's people is that God would dwell in their midst. All the way back in the Garden of Eden, what was it that was particularly special about that garden? It was the fact that God walked in the midst of that garden in the cool of the day and Adam and Eve saw God face to face and enjoyed fellowship with Him. And even after the Fall the promise was continued to be held out that God would meet with His people. And so in the Old Testament the people of God had the tabernacle where the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night would rest over the tabernacle and God's presence was there and Moses would go in and out and would meet with God face to face and God would speak to Moses as a friend. And then when God's people get to Jerusalem, there in the center of the city, the temple is built and the shekinah glory of God filled the temple and dwelt in the midst of His people. And of course Jesus came among His people and tabernacled among us and His people beheld His glory; they met with God face to face. And then finally in the garden of God, at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 21 and 22, what's particularly blessed about that place is that God would come and dwell in the midst of His people and the throne of God and the Lamb will be there and we will see Him face to face. All throughout the Bible, the promise is that God will dwell in the midst of His people and we will behold Him.

But that's not just true in the past and that's not just true in the future; that's true now. It's true tonight. God dwells in your midst. This is the place and you are the people with whom God meets. God comes to dwell powerfully in your midst as the mighty one who will save and particularly by His Spirit and through His Word He comes to meet with His people because Jesus has made sure that God will come among us not as a judge but as one who sings over us with great joy. In Jesus Christ, Zephaniah 3 has come true - "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing." That's why you're blessed tonight. You may not have heard Him while you were singing, but God by the Spirit of Jesus is in your midst and He was singing. He was singing great songs of joy. Our singing Savior, delighting in His people, as Zion is gathered together on this night. The King is

present and that's why you're blessed.

II. Zion: Blessed because the King is Powerful

But you're blessed not only because the King's presence is with you but also because our King is powerful. Ultimately that's what verses 4 to 8 describe for us. While this city stands as a fortress, our security in the face of adversity and attack, rests in the fact that our God is present, yes, but not only that He's present, also that He's powerful. In fact, verses 4 and 5 describe the kings coming together. "Behold the kings assembled; they come on together." It pictures Zion being surrounded, even the ships of Tarshish are brought in to lay siege to the city of God. but even when the enemies of God's people gather around Zion, the city of God, the fortress of God, are they able to attack it? Are they able to withstand it? No. What does the psalmist say? Verse 6 - "Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor." Verse 5 - "As soon as they saw it they were astounded; they were in panic; they took to flight." As soon as they saw Zion in all her glory with the King in the midst of His people the enemies of God took flight because God is powerful. Our King is great and strong and mighty. "There is nothing our God cannot do," as our children say.

That's true for you tonight. I don't know what situations you face or what you bring into the sanctuary tonight, but if you're like my people back in Hattiesburg I can probably hit some of them. There are some of you who are struggling profoundly with depression and despair. Even this past week you have thought to yourself, "I don't know if I can go on any further. I have never felt like this before." There's others of you who have been struggling with a besetting sin - perhaps it's lust - and you cannot stop clicking on the computer screen. Or maybe it's rage where you can't seem to get a hold of the anger as it bubbles up inside of you. Or perhaps it's deception and lying because you have so lived a double life that you are now two people and you're scared to death what will happen when one comes back together. I don't know if it's a situation in your workplace where you're not able to get along with your coworkers or your boss and you wonder how in the world this is all going to straighten out. I don't know what you're facing tonight but what I do know is this. When you come to meet in Zion, in this place with this people, the blessing that is held out for you, whether demons and devils are shouting in your ear or whether it's your own heart screaming at you, the blessing that's held out to you is that the King is here and He is powerful and He is able to deal with whatever you are facing. In fact, Luther teaches us to sing as much. "And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear" - why? "For God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure for lo, his doom is sure. One little Word shall fell him." What's that little Word? Jesus. Jesus is the mighty King who gained His great victory at the cross, who crushed the serpent's head right there, who's already won the victory and made it sure. He is the powerful King in our midst. He dwells in the midst of Zion so that whatever

you're facing tonight you can take to Jesus, tonight, right now, in your pew. You don't need an altar call. You can ask Him right now to deal with whatever it is that you find yourself wrestling with. That's a blessing. This is a blessed place - when you can come and meet with the King knowing what He is here in your midst and He is powerful, that should draw forth from you the King's praise.

III. Zion: Blessed because the King draws forth Praise

That's certainly what happens in the psalm, isn't it? The King's praises are drawn forth because Zion has such a great King in their midst. Verse 9 - "We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments!" As we gather week by week in our outposts of Zion, singing the songs of Zion, hearing the Word that comes from Zion and to Zion, we sometimes wonder, "Does it make any difference? Does anyone here - why should we be glad?" Well according to what the psalmist teaches us here there's plenty of reason for us to be glad. And yes, someone hears. Why should we be glad? Because of the steadfast love of God. "We have thought on your steadfast love, O God." Well where was that displayed? Anytime you wonder why you should praise, anytime you wonder why you should lift your voice in song, it's because the King is not simply the King, the King is the King who suffered for you. Where was the steadfast love, the hesed love of God most clearly displayed? It was displayed in the cross, so that anytime you doubt whether God loves you with a steadfast and abiding love all you have to do is look to the cross and there see a Savior who died for you, who bled for you, who suffered for you, who bore the wrath and curse of God for you. And there you see the steadfast love of God.

But more, this Savior and King who was crucified is the Savior and King who was raised from the dead and rules powerfully at the right hand of the Father and dwells in the midst of His peoples week by week, receiving the praises of His people and mediating His Word to us. Surely this should cause Zion to be glad and the daughters and sons of Judah to rejoice. Yet how often we have looked at the weakness of our efforts and the struggle of our own hearts instead of the glory of our King. There is nothing more mystifying to me than worshiping with friends, not saying this group of friends but the other group of friends that I worship with, and to see men and women standing in the midst of the congregation not singing. Friends, if you could have your ears opened tonight and to hear God in Jesus Christ singing over you, and if you could have your ears open tonight so that you could hear the angels singing tonight, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is filled with the glory of God!" you would want to join your voice with them. If you had a sight of the steadfast love of God tonight, this love that was displayed in the cross and the empty tomb you could not stop from singing. You would say to one another, to the brother or the

sister who's not singing tonight, who's not bringing the King's praise, you would want to say to Him, "Come, we that love the Lord, and let our joys be known. Join in a song of sweet accord and thus surround the throne. Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God, but children of the heavenly King may speak their joys abroad." Why? "Because we're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion! We're marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God!" If that's your heart tonight then you must sing with great praise the praises of the King who suffered and bled and died and rose again for you and you would join your voice with His voice and the angels voice to sing your praise.

III. Zion: Blessed because the King has a Posterity

And yet that's not all the reasons here. Those are not all the reasons here why Zion is blessed. Not only because of the King's presence, not only because the King is powerful, not only because the King receives praise, but also because the King has a posterity. That's what the final verses speak of. The psalmist urges us to walk around Zion. Do you see it? Verse 12 - Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels" - why? "That you may tell the next generation." And so it always is. God's grand design is for the next generation to hear. It's wonderful to be a people like we are at First Presbyterian Church Hattiesburg and like you are here at First Presbyterian Church Jackson - it's wonderful to be a mission-minded people and to go to the uttermost parts of the earth preaching the Gospel of our King to see generations yet unknown to us coming to faith in Jesus Christ. But God's great discipleship mission is for you to tell your next generation, to tell your next generation about the King, to usher them as best you can, God helping you, into the kingdom of God. That's the great discipleship mission that God has for you.

So what do we tell them? Do we tell them how wonderful the ramparts are and how beautiful the buildings are and how great our programs are and how exciting our ministries are? No. What do we tell the King's posterity? Look at it. Verse 13 - "That you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God, forever and ever. He will guide us forever." An alternative reading there - "He will guide us through death itself and through the other side." That's what you need to tell your children. That's what the King desires in order to have a posterity for Himself. Remember what He told Abraham thousands of years ago? He told Abraham that Abraham would have a posterity of faith that would be numberless. You couldn't count all the stars and you couldn't count all the sand on the seashore. That's how great Abraham's posterity would be. And how does the King accomplish this? Through His Son, Jesus, through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus died for His church, for the church yet unborn as well as the church that's already been.

And Hebrews 2 tells us that there's coming a day when Jesus shall gather all His children and will stand before the Father and will say, "Here I am, I and the

children God has given Me.” He’ll gather all His posterity and bring us to the Father so that there will come a day when we will gather around the throne of God there in the garden of God and as we do we’ll look to the right of us and we’ll see generations upon generations who have come before us in this place and in other places who have loved Jesus with all of their hearts and all their strength and all their mind and all their soul. And if Jesus carries we’ll look to this way and we’ll see generations of generations yet unborn who will be gathered around the throne because they love God with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength and all their mind. And we will gather around the throne with all of these generations, the King’s posterity, and we will say, “This is God, our God, forever and ever.” And this is why Zion is blessed. There are thousands gathered in stadiums today that will know nothing of this joy, nothing of this joy. To be gathered with thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands from every tribe and language and people group and generation and generation, gathered around the throne singing, “This is our God, our God, forever and ever. He will guide us forever.” That’s why you’re blessed. That’s why you’re blessed. You’re blessed, First Presbyterian Church, not because you’re beautiful, not because you’re strong, and not because you’re great; you’re blessed because you have a great King and that’s why this is a beautiful, wonderful spot to be in, a spot that’s far greater than any Camelot. This is a place that’s a blessed Zion. Amen.

Please pray with me.

Father we do ask that You would drive all of this deep into our hearts. Lord, we know this intellectually. Lord, grant that we can feel it in our affections so that if we would be drawn out this new sense of the heart might respond to the reality that You are pure and that You are powerful and that You delight in our praises and Your steadfast love is real and true and abiding and that You have a posterity even in this place and in generations yet unborn who will name the name of our King. Lord, please, please, please, please, help us see just a glimpse of how blessed we are to be part of this people and to be here in this place to be part of Zion. We pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.

Would you please stand with me to receive the Lord’s blessing?

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, the peace that comes through Jesus Christ our Lord, may that peace guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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