

Psalm 122 | “The Joy of Arrival”
Preached on November 24, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please flip in your Bibles to Psalm 122 today. *[pause]*

We are in the midst of a sermon series on the songs of ascents, and here we land on Psalm 122. *[pauseeee]*

The songs of ascents are the psalms that the Israelites would sing as they traveled to and prepared for worship at the Temple during the annual feasts.

And let’s begin this morning by looking at what the psalm says—I’ll READ it for you. *[READ]*

There’s a certain joy that comes upon us when we finally make it to our destination. *[pauseeee]*

I think about when I was growing up, my family would take a yearly trip out to the Illinois-Wisconsin area to visit extended family. *[pause]*

It was a long trip, especially as a kid, and it felt like we would *never* get there. *[pause]*

Minutes felt like hours, hours like days.

But I remember the distinct feeling when we finally arrived. *[pauseeee]*

When you start pulling into the street or driveway of where you are getting to, there’s this certain joy that comes upon you...

It’s like you think, “The long journey is over! We made it!” *[pause]*

Your heart lifts, and gladness overtakes you. *[pauseeee]*

Now what is it that makes us so joyous over arriving somewhere? *[pause]*

The joy of your arrival isn’t simply because you got from point A to point B.

Rather, the joy comes from what the arrival *means*. *[pauseeee]*

As a child, I wasn’t so happy that we made it to the midwest simply because we got from point A to point B.

It was because of what it meant to arrive there...

It meant a week of vacation, it meant fun (like riding four wheelers, lots of soda-drinking, and staying up late).

It meant adventures and memory-making, and especially, it meant spending time with family. *[pauseeee]*

So on vacation, when I thought of arriving at our destination—that’s what I thought of, and so no wonder there was joy in making it there. *[pauseee]*

You see, the joy of arrival comes from the meaning of all of what that place signifies. *[pauseeeee]*

If you remember, Psalm 120 was like the psalmist in a hostile, far away land.

Psalm 121 was like the psalmist making his way to Jerusalem.

And now Psalm 122 is like the psalmist arriving in the gates of the city. *[pause]*

He’s made it, and there’s great joy over that fact because of what being in Jerusalem *means*. *[pauseee]*

Not only does it mean that the arduous journey is over, but it’s so much more...

It’s because of what Jerusalem meant to the Israelites. *[pauseee]*

You see, for us, we don’t have anything like what Jerusalem was for the Israelites. *[pause]*

Jerusalem (for them) was the center of all religious, cultural, and political life. *[pause]*

The king reigned there, and that meant that law and justice went forth out of Jerusalem. *[pause]*

The Temple was there, and that meant that God resided there, and worship was primarily done there. *[pauseee]*

The capital cities that we have in our country are no match for what Jerusalem was for them.

So just imagine the joy of an Israelite finally making it to Jerusalem, the central place of Israel’s life. *[pauseeeee]*

So here is this Israelite.

He was so glad when others said, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” and now their feet stood within the gates of Jerusalem. *[pause]*

What relief, what joy, what excitement they had!

And as he reflects upon the city, he can’t help but describe its magnificence and to ask for prayer for it.

And that’s what he does in this psalm. *[pauseee]*

He describes how Jerusalem is a city “bound firmly together”, and it’s the idea of the city being compact together. *[pause]*

It was a solid, firm, compact city, and that meant that it was an orderly, strong, and protected city. *[pauseee]*

It was also compact and joined together, and so the people were unified together.

In fact, he mentions that the tribes all go up to it, and this emphasizes that while, through most of the year, they were dispersed throughout different regions...

...It's here and now, during one of the feasts, that Israel comes together in unity to worship and give thanks to the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

He's so glad for the strength and unity that the city represented. *[pauseeee]*

There's a certain joy that comes upon us when we know that our family or even our country is strong and unified. *[pause]*

I think of the time right after the 9/11 attacks, and I felt like our country came together in unity and strength for a short time. *[pause]*

It really made an impact on me that I still remember it to this day.

Well the psalmist feels that way as he stands in Jerusalem. *[pause]*

He looks at the city and relishes in the fact that Jerusalem represents and signifies strength and unity.

But that's not all, for he sees Jerusalem as the place of justice. *[pause]*

He mentions that "thrones for judgment were set [there], the thrones of the house of David." *[pauseeee]*

Jerusalem was the place of the king, and so that's the place that people could come and find justice.

For the king was responsible for making judgments.¹ *[pauseeee]*

So when you look at this psalm, you are seeing David (the author here) rejoice in all that Jerusalem was and meant. *[pause]*

It was the place of security, unity, worship, and justice—no wonder he was so glad to be there! *[pauseeee]*

He doesn't want Jerusalem to ever *stop* being these things, so that's why he ends the psalm by asking for others to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem". *[pause]*

He wants peace, stability, and well-being to accompany the great city, so he seeks the city's good. *[pauseeee]*

¹ For an example of this look at 2 Samuel 15:1–6.

Now that's what the psalm meant in its original context, but there's some difficulty when we try to apply this psalm to ourselves, isn't there? *[pause]*

We are not Israelites living under the Old Covenant and with Jerusalem as our central place of religious, social, and political life.

So how can this psalm in any way, shape, or form apply to us? *[pauseeee]*

Well, we must cross the bridge of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant here. *[pause]*

Jesus' coming radically changed things in salvation history. *[pause]*

Where it used to be Israel under the Old Covenant—now through Christ, He has brought about the New Covenant, and people from every nation can trust in Him, and be a part of the people of God, the church. *[pauseeee]*

The church does not have a physical, earthly, central location of worship, and we hear Jesus make this point to the woman at the well, when he says...

“The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...

...But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”² *[pauseeee]*

It's no longer at Jerusalem that we have to go, and isn't that such good news! *[pause]*

We don't have to make the long, arduous trip to Jerusalem 3 times a year, but we can worship God right here and right now. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus is showing us that there's a radical change that has happened since His coming.

In fact, Scripture makes it clear that the old Temple in Jerusalem is no longer the place of God's dwelling, but it's somewhere else. *[pause]*

Guess where God's temple is now...

We (the church) are the temple of God! *[pauseee]*

1 Corinthians 3:16 says, “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” *[pause]*

Peter talks about how we are “like living stones...being built up as a spiritual house.”³

² John 4:21,23.

³ 1 Peter 2:5.

And Paul tells us in Ephesians that we are “members of the household of God,” and we “[grow] into a holy temple in the Lord”.⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that amazing?!

We as the people of God are the temple of God—we are the house of the Lord! *[pauseeee]*

As we gather together, He dwells in and among us.

So we don't have to travel thousands of miles to experience the presence of God, but we can experience it right here, right now among us.

*And as we gather together as the temple of God, in so doing, Hebrews says that we “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”⁵ *[pauseeee]**

So we see that the church gathered and worshiping its Lord is like an Israelite coming to Jerusalem and worshiping in the Temple.

And now we no longer have to look to the earthly Jerusalem, but we look to the Jerusalem that is above.⁶

And someday that new Jerusalem will come down from Heaven in the new heaven and new earth.⁷ *[pauseeeee]*

*What is all of this to say? *[pause]**

It's to say that this psalm can still apply to us, but somewhat differently than for the original Israelites reading and singing it.

*And what's key here for interpretation is to ask: what did Jerusalem signify to the psalmist? *[pause]**

It signified being in the presence of God among God's people, and that's what we experience in the church...

*We experience the presence of God among us as God's people. *[pause]**

And so as we look at this psalm, we see that in the Lord's presence among God's people there is to be...

I. Joy

David had joy about being in the Lord's presence among God's people.

⁴ Ephesians 2:19–22.

⁵ Hebrews 12:22.

⁶ A reference to Galatians 4:26.

⁷ A reference to Revelation 21:1–2.

And that's why he says, "I was glad when they said to me 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"
[pause]

I mean, he got excited by even just having his feet standing within the gates of Jerusalem!
[pauseeee]

Are we like that when it comes to gathering together? [pauseeee]

"In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown was having trouble getting into the Christmas spirit so Linus said...

'Charlie Brown, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem.'"⁸ [pauseee]

Way too often we act like Charlie Brown when we come together, when we should be acting like David, who was glad! [pause]

There shouldn't be permanent scowls or frowns on our faces when we come together, but there should be a certain gladness! [pauseeee]

Now certainly, there are times in our lives of sadness, where it's appropriate to be sad as we come, but I'm talking about the general, ordinary Sunday...

Our gatherings should exude joy! [pauseeeee]

Now why was David so joyous when it came to going to the house of the Lord? [pause]

David was glad because it meant that *God was present*. [pauseeee]

There's nothing greater than being in the presence of God...

There's nothing more joyous, for the presence of God means: favor, blessing, mercy, love, security, power, glory, and grace. [pause]

What's more joyous than hearing God say, "I'm here!"? [pauseeeee]

Do you have joy when you think that God is with us? [pause]

When we gather together, we should look around and think, "God is here. He is present with us."

What an amazing thought! [pause]

We have the presence of the Lord Almighty with us, so let's rejoice! Let's be glad! [pauseeeee]

We also know that someday we will get to experience His presence in its fullest manifestation in the new heaven and the new earth.

⁸ Found at: <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations/joy>.

For the new Jerusalem will come down and it says in Revelation...

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God...

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”⁹ *[pause]*

Now that’s going to cause *gladness*. *[pauseeeee]*

So David was glad to go to the house of the Lord because God was there, but that’s not all, for he was glad because he could worship *with others*. *[pause]*

He says that he was glad when they said, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” *[pauseeee]*

We must understand that worship is not only an individual reality, but it’s also a corporate reality...

We are to worship God *together*. *[pauseeeee]*

There’s something about being shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and worshipping our Lord together. *[pauseeeee]*

We come together, not for fun and games.

Not for entertainment or to have some social club.

No, we come together as the people of God to worship our Lord, our God, and our King! *[pauseeee]*

This is not some empty, religious ritual.

This is not some task that needs to be checked off every Sunday.

This is the gathering of the children of God to worship and look to our Heavenly Father. *[pauseeeee]*

The church in America needs a good, big healthy dose of what the church actually is and what it does.

Because you can’t get this awesome experience by sitting at home by yourself.

Nor can you get it by watching a service online, for there’s something special about the church *gathered*. *[pauseeee]*

⁹ Revelation 21:3–4.

Here there is unity, here there is love, here there is forgiveness, here there is help, here there is worship of the triune God as His people together. *[pauseeee]*

God didn't save us to be mere individual Christians, but He saved us to be a part of something bigger and more amazing—the church. *[pause]*

Peter says, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him* who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”¹⁰ *[pauseeeee]*

Do we rejoice that we get to be among God's people? *[pause]*

Do you wake up on Sunday's and think, “I'm glad because I get to go worship the Lord with my brothers and sisters in Christ today!” *[pauseeee]*

Let's get back to the importance of the church, for it is the temple of the living God.¹¹ *[pauseeeee]*

Another thing that David was glad about was the security, unity, and justice that was represented in Jerusalem.

And likewise, the church ought to be a place of security, unity, and justice. *[pauseeee]*

You should not think of this church as chaotic or unruly, but as a safe haven, away from the tumbling waves of the world. *[pause]*

This should be a place where you know that forgiveness will be extended, and so you can open up your heart here. *[pause]*

This should be a place of security, for we are simply looking to the security we have in our God. *[pauseeeee]*

We should also be unified together, as we serve our Lord, and there should be good judgments made, as we live in accordance with God's righteous Word. *[pause]*

We do this, always knowing that God brings us together in unity, and He is ultimate, just One. *[pauseeeee]*

So as God's people, who God dwells in, we should be a glad group. *[pause]*

Joy should characterize our church. *[pause]*

How could we not when we know that God is with us, we get to worship Him together, and He provides us with security, unity, and justice? *[pauseeee]*

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:9 (italics is mine).

¹¹ A reference to 2 Cor. 6:16.

A second characteristic we see here in this psalm about being in the Lord's presence among God's people is that there is to be...

II. Gratitude

There was a study done to determine how often people say 'thank you'.

And in it, they looked at over 1,000 real-world cases of someone asking for something and someone else responding to their request. *[pause]*

In their results, the research showed that across various languages and cultures, only 5.5% of the time did someone express thankfulness.¹² *[pause]*

Now that's low! [pauseeee]

It doesn't always come naturally for people to be thankful.

Just think of how you have to teach your kids to say "thank you" all the time.

But as Christians we can and should be thankful, even amidst hard circumstances. *[pauseeee]*

There's that story of Corrie ten Boom and her sister, Betsie, in a German concentration camp during World World 2. *[pause]*

"[The girls] were disgusted to discover that their barracks were infested with fleas. *[pause]*

When Corrie began to complain, Betsie insisted that they instead give thanks, quoting 1 Thessalonians 5:18, 'In every thing give thanks.' *[pause]*

With some persuasion, Corrie finally joined her sister in thanking God for the fleas."¹³
[pauseeeee]

We are called as the people of God to gratitude, and we see that in this psalm. *[pause]*

In verse 4, David says that it was decreed for Israel to go to Jerusalem "to give thanks to the name of the Lord".

So God required Israel to not only come to the 3 annual feasts, but it was for the purpose of giving thanks to Him. *[pauseeee]*

God desires and commands gratitude.

No wonder 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us that giving thanks in all circumstances "is the will of God" for us! *[pauseeee]*

Christians are to be the most grateful people in the world. *[pause]*

¹² <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.180391#RSOS180391TB1>.

¹³ Found at: <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations/gratefulness>.

A mark of our lives should be a constant flow of thanks from our hearts to God. *[pauseeee]*

You see, our church should not only be a place of joy, but a place of gratitude.

And it's our joy that should overflow into that gratefulness. *[pauseeee]*

So often, we are more ready to grumble and complain than to give thanks. *[pause]*

We can readily express all of our gripes, complaints, and grievances, but how ready are we to express the things that we are grateful for? *[pauseeee]*

When things are going well, gratefulness should flow. *[pause]*

When things are not looking too bright, gratitude should still be present. *[pause]*

As the church of God, we should bleed gratitude. *[pauseeeee]*

When you consider it: how could we NOT be grateful people? *[pause]*

Remember that we don't deserve anything, yet look at all that God has done for us, especially in Jesus Christ! *[pauseeee]*

As a church, it's so easy to think about what we *don't* have, but how much effort do we put into expressing our thanks for what we *do* have? *[pause]*

I'm not going to groan over who is not here, but I'm going to choose to be thankful for the people who ARE in this room. *[pause]*

I'm thankful for you...

The spiritual gifts that He has given you, and the work of service that He has motivated you to do. *[pause]*

I'm grateful for the building that God has given us here, and that God has supplied our needs year-in and year-out. *[pause]*

I'm grateful that He has helped us to always be grounded on His Word, and not to swerve from it. *[pause]*

What are you thankful for? Do you think that way? *[pauseeee]*

This psalm reminds us that we are not only to be thankful individual Christians, but we are to be thankful corporately.

That's what God called the Israelites to do in Jerusalem: to give thanks together.

So let's be thankful together. *[pauseeee]*

May everything we do here be covered with the dew of gratitude. *[pauseeee]*

Thirdly, in this psalm we see that in the Lord's presence among God's people there is to be...

III. Prayer

In the closing verses of this psalm, David calls for the people of God to pray. *[pauseeee]*

Now I think we all know that prayer should characterize a church, but when it comes down to it, is our church *bathed* in prayer? *[pause]*

Too often it's easy to pray in a routine way, or to use prayer simply as a means of transitioning to something else.

But that's not how prayer should be used in a church.

Rather, we should pray in sincerity, lifting up our voices out of the depths of our hearts. *[pause]*

We should pray persistently, knowing that our God wants to hear us. *[pause]*

We should pray in faith, confident that God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."¹⁴

And we should pray because we know that we cannot make it on our own. *[pauseeeee]*

For David, he knew that Jerusalem was the place of God's presence among God's people, but that didn't cause him to just assume that it didn't need prayer...

No, he knew that God often works in and through the prayers of His people. *[pause]*

He knew that God needed to work. *[pauseeee]*

You see, this is no mere human endeavor here.

We can't think that joy, gratitude, and peace will just magically appear in our church, but we must ask God for it! *[pauseeeee]*

I'll put it this way: our church needs prayer. *[pause]*

I'm not saying that because we are in some horrific situation as a church, but I'm saying that because a church is always in need of God's powerful working! *[pauseeee]*

We need prayer, so that we feel the security that only God can give us.

And we need prayer, so that we can have continual peace among each other, and experience His peace in our hearts. *[pauseeee]*

If you think about it, how could we not pray for this church?...

¹⁴ Ephesians 3:20.

It's the place of God's presence among God's people!

So let's seek its peace and its good! *[pauseee]*

Our church should be characterized by prayer. *[pause]*

I may have given this illustration once in the past, but it's too good not to share again...

"In one region of Africa, the first converts to Christianity were very diligent about praying.

In fact, the believers each had their own special place outside the village where they went to pray in solitude. *[pause]*

The villagers reached these "prayer rooms" by using their own private footpaths through the brush.

[And] when grass began to grow over one of these trails, it was evident that the person to whom it belonged was not praying very much. *[pause]*

Because these new Christians were concerned for each other's spiritual welfare, a unique custom sprang up.

[So that] whenever anyone noticed an overgrown 'Prayer path,' he or she would go to the person and lovingly warn, 'Friend, there's grass on your path!'"¹⁵ *[pauseee]*

Is there grass on our church's prayer path? *[pause]*

Let's make sure our prayer path is well-worn and trodden by going to the Lord often. *[pauseee]*

As we have considered Psalm 122, we have seen that...

Joy, gratitude, and prayer should characterize our gatherings!

David couldn't help but rejoice and be glad at arriving in Jerusalem for worship. *[pause]*

It meant being in God's presence among God's people, and he shows us that joy, gratitude, and prayer should all accompany His people. *[pauseee]*

Do you have joy when you come here? *[pause]*

Just consider all that God has done for you in Christ!...

Even though you were a sinner, He sent Jesus to come to this earth, die for you, and then rise again.

¹⁵ Found at:

<https://www.logos.com/grow/sermon-illustrations-on-prayer/#:~:text=9%20Down-to-Earth%20Sermon%20Illustrations%20on%20Prayer%201%201.,8%208.%20Consistency%20in%20prayer%20...%20More%20items>.

Original source from: *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*.

And that means forgiveness, new life, and so much more! *[pause]*

He has brought you into a family, the family of God, and what joy we can have together!
[pauseeee]

Does all of this lead also to gratitude? *[pause]*

Everything we have is a gift from God—we are recipients of great grace.

So how could we NOT be thankful people? *[pause]*

And do you go to the Lord in constant prayer for this church and for God's kingdom? *[pauseeee]*

As we conclude our gathering this morning, we get to put into practice all three of these things:
joy, gratitude, and prayer. *[pauseee]*

There will be prayer, as I will conclude this sermon in prayer, but there can also be joy and
gratitude, as we sing our final song this morning. *[pause]*

Let's live out what we are called to do as the redeemed, joyous, grateful, prayerful people of
God.