

Three Postcards From Jerusalem

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[0:00] I have a question as we begin. Can I see you with a show of hands? How many of you have taken a vacation to a different country? Raise your hands.

Fair number. Good. I have a question. How many of you, before you went, you bought a guidebook to tell you what you might see there? Raise your hands.

A couple. Well, a lot of brave souls out there, I suppose. When Steph and I were going to Ethiopia, we definitely made a stop at the bookstore to buy a guide on Ethiopia.

And I don't know if you've seen these, or maybe you've seen the cover, but maybe you've never looked inside. But they're an extremely detailed look on a different country.

So, places to go. What hotels you might think about staying at. What the hotels are like. What the food is like at this restaurant or that restaurant. So, these guidebooks can be very helpful if you're going to be spending some time in a different country.

[1:06] Well, in the middle of Psalms, we have a guidebook to the Christian life. So, we're all traveling this Christian life from here to the celestial city.

And in the book of Psalms, we find a guidebook for that Christian life. It's the Songs of Ascent.

Psalms 120 through 134. And we've been going over these psalms in this afternoon hour.

And so, today we're coming to Psalm 122. If you would please turn there. A good title for this psalm would be, Three Postcards from Jerusalem.

Three Postcards from Jerusalem. And as we read, see if you can see why I think that's a good title.

We're going to read the entire psalm. Psalm 122 verse 1.

I rejoiced with those who said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

[2:14] That is where the tribes go up. The tribes of the Lord. To praise the name of the Lord. According to the statute given to Israel. There, the thrones for judgment stand.

The thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls.

And security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, Peace be within you. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.

Did you see how the psalm is broken into three very different sections? And they're all tied together with the word Jerusalem.

With this idea of Jerusalem. And so before we get to the three postcards from Jerusalem, we need to talk about what the biblical idea of Jerusalem. Basically in the Bible, Jerusalem is looked at under two different realities.

[3:18] In the Old Covenant, in the Old Testament, Jerusalem was the literal city in the Middle East. It was the capital of Israel. It's where the kings were. It was the center of political and religious life.

It was where the temple was. We saw that this morning. But in the New Testament, Jerusalem becomes a picture of the spiritual city of God.

So Hebrews 12, 22 says, We've come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. And Revelation 21 talks about Jerusalem coming down as a bride dressed for her bridegroom.

So Jerusalem is the bride of Christ coming down to marry her bridegroom. In other words, Jerusalem has been taken over.

It's given a new content. And the content of the idea of Jerusalem is the church. It's the bride of Christ. And so we're going to sing glorious things of thee are spoken.

[4:26] Zion, city of our God. We sang that this morning. Zion, that's talking about us. So we need to keep that in mind as we look at Psalm 122.

The Holy Spirit wants us to see ourselves in this psalm. He's not just talking about a literal city in the Middle East. He's talking about us.

So let's look at these three postcards from Jerusalem. Well, you go to your mailbox. And in your mailbox right now, there's probably some bills and some political ads.

And then mixed in there with all that is a postcard. And on the front of that postcard is a panoramic view of the city of Jerusalem.

And you flip it over and you look at the little section where the writing is. It says it's from David. And David has a little message. And it says something like, I'm finally here.

[5:26] I can't believe I made it. That's that. Those are the first two verses of Psalm 122. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. So can you hear the joy in this psalm? Not everything in the pilgrimage, not everything in this pilgrimage to the celestial city is hard, is difficult. We've seen a lot of those hard things in Psalm 120 and 121. But this psalm is marked with joy right from the very beginning.

Not everything is sorrow and hardship and persecution and trial in the Christian life. There's real joy. And this psalm hits on it. It's a guidebook for what kind of joy we find in the Christian life.

There's the joy of being with God's people. David said, I rejoiced with those who said, let us go up to the house of the Lord. He rejoiced that they wanted to.

[6:32] And so he rejoiced in the setting out. And then we see he rejoiced in the arriving to Jerusalem. I can't believe we're here. We're standing in your gates.

So we talked about the long walk this morning. Well, at some point, you made it to the city. And the long walk was over. When we went to Addis, the capital of Ethiopia, it was very surreal when we landed.

It was a long, long flight. That's part of it. But before that, it was months and months of waiting. And you always knew, we always knew we were eventually going to get there, Lord willing.

And then you're there. You're there. You can't believe it. You've made it. And you probably know what it's like.

You can't believe you've made it to this point. So Stephanie and Stefan, they waited not too long to be married. But they waited some amount of time. And then finally, you're there.

[7:32] You're at the altar. You're getting married. And now they're married. And so that's something of what David is saying. I can't believe we're here. This is amazing.

This is good. Now, every true Christian, that reality hits them at least some point. And a strong Christian lives in that reality more than most, than others.

They're surprised that they made it into God's city. They've made it. They've been qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

God did that for them. And now here they are. They're one of God's people. And there's this joy in receiving God's amazing grace. So think about it.

God chooses the ones he's going to save. And he chose me? Chose me? Who am I?

[8:32] Who am I that he should even notice me? Let alone choose me for everlasting life. A brother said to me not too long ago after a sermon. He said, and to think, that great God chose us.

He chose us. God's grace is surprising. He chooses and he draws us. He draws us to himself. Yes, we want to come at some point.

But he's the one who woos our hearts. We ignored him and he pursued us. We didn't care about him and he came after us.

Now, maybe some of you remember your baptism. Maybe some of you don't. But I remember after that happening, feeling I can't believe it.

I can't believe it. God saved me. And now I'm a member of God's family. I'm a member of this church. I can't believe it. It's amazing. I used to be on the outside and now I'm on the inside.

[9:36] I'm here. Something radical and amazing has happened. I made it. And it's all because of God's grace. And so in the Christian life, there's joy in being put in to God's family, into God's city.

There's joy in God's people. David rejoiced when the other said, let's go to the house of the Lord. And so there's not only the joy of being one of God's people and arriving in the city of God.

There's joy that we're not alone. You aren't alone, brothers and sisters. God saves us and then he gives us to each other. So Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, he had his faithful and he had his hopeful.

They were friends through thick and thin all the way to the end. But praise God, you don't have a hopeful and a faithful.

You have a Jim and a John and a Kevin and an Ed and a Jose. And you have all these people. We have something that this world knows nothing about.

[10:50] We have God's people. We have each other. We have a hundred brothers and sisters. We have a hundred houses and fields. We have encouragers and teachers. We have friends.

We have guides. We have helpers. We have servants. We have wise men and we have quiet maids. All the ones that we sang about in Psalm 148. So the road might be hard.

But God is good. You aren't alone. This is the city of God. And by God's grace, we're here. There's joy there. Now the second postcard comes.

And this time it's not a panoramic view of Jerusalem. Instead, maybe it's a picture of a tour bus. And this is the Jerusalem tour bus.

And on the back, it says, this city is amazing. It's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside.

[11:46] It's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. So Jerusalem in David's day was hardly a big city. Especially considered, I mean, compared to any big city today.

If you want to go back after the sermon and look at the maps in the back of your Bible, which you probably have, you'll probably find a map of Jerusalem. And then you can look down at the scale.

And on my map, it's just this.

It's a little city. And then you look at the scale and the line. The city is like this big, not very big.

Right. And the scale is this big. And this is 0.2 miles. OK, so the city is not even a half a mile long, not even a half a mile wide.

Very small, compacted together. It wasn't big from the outside. It was closely compacted together. But when you got down into the city.

And when you started to explore the city, when you got on the tour bus and you took it around the city and you went in and out of the streets, you started to see that this city was bigger on the inside than it ever appeared on the outside.

[12:53] So all the tribes of Israel were there. And they're worshiping God. And so people are coming from all over, all over Israel. And they're coming up to the temple to worship. And this city is full of life.

It's full of joy. It's full of all sorts of things going on. And during festival time, it would have been incredible. The city would have been brimming and overflowing with life.

People praising God. People celebrating. People feasting. Children playing. Remember Jesus got lost? I mean, that doesn't happen unless there's a lot going on and there's big groups and kids everywhere playing.

And there's old men and old women telling stories. And it's all revolving around God's temple.

People, every year, something like that happens in my town of Plymouth.

Over Labor Day, something like 250,000. I didn't make that number up. I heard that. So I think it's true. Something like 250,000 people come and attend the Blueberry Festival in Plymouth.

[14:03] And so Plymouth goes from this little, quiet, Midwestern town to absolute mayhem.

Everyone is mesmerized and caught up in what's going on. And so you can't drive down the streets anymore.

There's tons of people crossing all the time. You can't go to the store in peace. You go to Walmart and you have to go at like 2 in the morning or it's just packed. There's throngs of people everywhere.

And for a few days, that's all you can talk about. Did you go? No, I didn't go. I did. And this is what we did. And it's all there. The whole city is mesmerized with what's going on.

Well, it's that scene that we're taken to. So Jerusalem looks small on the outside. But when you got down into it, the city was so much bigger.

It was brimming and overflowing with life. And so as you went through on your tour, you could see the palace of the king.

[15:00] And those aren't just any kings. Those are God's kings. His ones. The ones he's anointed. The house of David. And so this is where, if any place where God's rule was made known

on the earth, it was here.

And this place was where all the worship was. The temple was. Now, so Jerusalem, it was bigger on the inside.

A lot going on. A lot better than it ever looked from the outside. And I have a question for you. Haven't you found the church?

This church in particular. To be that way. Grace Fellowship Church doesn't seem like much from the outside. A couple hundred people coming here. None of us really too important.

But once you get inside, this church is a lot bigger than you ever thought it was. Isn't it? Some of you have come in from the outside. And then once you're here, you see the greatest thing on earth is going on here.

[16:11] God is being worshipped. God's word is being proclaimed. We meet God here. Brothers and sisters, haven't you known that? Of meeting God with God's people.

And you could say, you know what? I can never do without church. I found life here. I found joy here. I found encouragement and teaching and rebuke and correction.

And I found myself growing here. And when I get cold, I find someone coming along and brushing me and giving me life again. There's so much going on here.

When you're on the inside, you find that this place is much bigger. There's a lot more life and activity than it would look like from the outside. It's a house of prayer.

It's a house of praise. It's a school. It's a hospital. It's a family. Here's your friends. Olivier said, sometimes we just want to stay here and never go out.

[17:08] Well, because we want to be with our family and our friends. And here we find fathers. And here you find spiritual mothers. So this place is amazing.

It's amazing. It's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. The third postcard comes in the mail. And maybe this picture is a picture of the Wailing Wall.

Do you know what the Wailing Wall is? It's that wall. I think it's left over from the temple where faithful Jews come up to pray. And so maybe it's a picture of that.

And then on the other side of the postcard, it says, pray. You have to pray for this city. Well, what does David pray for?

He prays for shalom, for peace, for prosperity. And he tells us why we should pray. For the sake of my brothers and friends. So here's where I find my brothers and my friends.

[18:10] So I will pray. For the sake of the house of the Lord, I will pray. The people I love here. The people that I love are here. So I'm going to pray.

And this is the place where God is worshipped. This is the place where the gospel goes out. And so I'm going to pray for this city. David's love for God's people prompted him to pray and then ask for prayer.

It made him say, you pray too. I'll pray and you pray too. This city is too important not to pray for. So this church.

We have to pray for it. It's important. There's lots of powerful. There's lots of significant and magnificent human institutions in this world.

And none of them are going to last. The church will last forever and ever. And so for her, I'll give my tears. For her, I'll pray. Pray. Now, that's the third postcard.

[19:15] Pray. So we've been thinking about the psalm as a series of postcards. They're just snapshots of Jerusalem, of the church.

Now I want to look at it differently under a different picture. You're driving down the road. And you come to a car accident. And two men have been thrown out of the car.

One is dead. And one is alive. Now, how can you tell which one is which? Supposing, well, it would be really helpful to have a stethoscope, wouldn't it?

You know what a stethoscope is, right, children? It's that thing that the doctor wears, puts in his ears, and he listens to your heart. So you take out your stethoscope.

You must be a doctor in this story, I guess. And you put it on one man's chest. And you listen for one second. And two seconds.

[20:18] And now three seconds. And there's nothing. And then you go to the other man. And you put the stethoscope on his chest. And you listen for one second.

And two seconds. And then, ba-boom. Ba-boom. His heart is beating. Maybe not very hard. But it's beating.

Now, this psalm is a stethoscope. You can put this psalm to your heart. And by listening carefully, you can know if you're alive or not, spiritually. There's a lot of people who think they are alive and they're not.

And there's some people who aren't sure whether they're alive or not. And this is one way you can tell. You put this psalm to your heart. And you listen. Does your heart beat when you read this psalm and when you think about it?

Do you get excited to worship God? Are you excited to worship God? Or is this a drudgery? Is this a thing that you just have to do? Well, are you amazed by grace?

[21 : 24] Are you amazed by grace? Grace, if you understand it, is always remarkable and amazing. So, are you amazed by grace? And when you're with God's people, are you at home?

Are you saying, this is life. This is what I want. I used to find church boring. But now I find this to be exciting. This is good. Now it's alive to me.

I used to think that this church was an itty-bitty thing. But now it's a big thing. It's brimming with life. Life is here. I love this place. This is what I need. This is what I want.

And do you pray? Do you pray for God's people? Do you pray for Christ's church? Do you pray for her peace or prosperity? Maybe your heart is faint.

Maybe the heartbeat is faint. Maybe you can barely hear it. But if you can hear it, there must be life there. But if there's nothing, if this psalm is going in one ear and as I preach, it's just disappearing.

[22 : 29] And if you read it and there's nothing, as you think about it, there's nothing going on in your heart. Then you can know you truly aren't alive, but dead.

This psalm is a stethoscope that you can put to your heart and listen to see if you're alive or dead. Now, suppose you say, I've used a stethoscope and I'm not at all happy.

My heart is beating, but it's not beating very hard. I can barely hear it. Or maybe you're saying, my heart isn't beating at all. The thing not to do is to say, all right, then I'm going to do it.

I'm going to start praying. I'm going to start getting excited about church and then I'll be alive. Do you see that's putting the cause and the effect backwards? You just can't work up being excited.

And a person, no matter a dead person, no matter how much they want to make their heart beat, can't make their heart beat. They need something from the outside to make them alive.

[23 : 35] And so saying, all right, I'm going to start to pray. I'm going to start getting excited about worship doesn't make you alive spiritually either. There's only life in one person and it's Jesus Christ.

He's the vine. We are the branches. And when we are connected to him, then life flows into us. So if this song doesn't resonate in your heart.

You need Jesus. You need life from Jesus. You need to come to him. You need to confess your deadness or your weakness, your callous heart.

And you need to say, Jesus, save me. Save me from my sins and give me new life. Help me. Forgive me. You need new life from the inside. So this song will test if you have that life on the inside.

But Jesus is the one that can give you that life. So take the stethoscope, listen well, and then come to Jesus. He loves to do sinners good.

[24 : 41] Let's pray. Father, your word is searching and it lays us open. And your word has been sifting us this afternoon.

And there are some people here who haven't been listening. They've been distracted. There are some people here who have heard the word and it's searched them and it's found them out.

And for those people, Lord, I pray for mercy. And we've all been found out because we know that we get far too distracted with smaller things, lesser things.

Than your people, your worship, your gospel. We get taken up with so many things that are not God centered.

So I pray that you would have mercy on us all. And as we put the psalm to our heart, I pray that you would give us ears to hear. And then give us the grace to find in Christ everything that we need for life and for godliness.

[25 : 52] We thank you that you have open arms to receive sinners like us. I pray that you would receive us and forgive us and help us as we go on our way.

As we come and seek your face. I pray this for Jesus' sake and in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.