

"Let Us Go to the House of the LORD"

SCRIPTURE TEXTS: Psalm 122:1-9 and Hebrews 12:22-24

Introduction

So we're now on the 3rd Psalm is the series of the Songs of Ascents. Unlike the previous two Psalms (120 & 121), the author of Psalm 122 is identified. It is written by king David. Nevertheless, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the editor of the book of Psalms placed it as a Song of Ascent. So it follows the overarching storyline in the series. David wrote the Psalm, but it is used by believing Jews (and even Gentiles) on their journey to Jerusalem to worship God there. It is a song of pilgrims.

In Psalms 120, the pilgrim realizes the distress and corruption of life due to sin, and he sets out to go to Jerusalem, to be in the presence of God. Then, in Psalm 121, he confesses his trust in God who made heaven and earth to preserve him and protect him from all the dangers on the road to Jerusalem.

Now, here in Psalm 122, the pilgrim finally arrives and enters Jerusalem. Look at verse 2, the Psalmist says, "*Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!*" He's already there, and for the rest of the Psalm, he beholds the greatness of Jerusalem and prays for Jerusalem.

Now, we need to understand right away how this Psalm will apply to us today, so we will not have trouble interpreting the Psalm throughout our sermon. Since the past 2 sermons, we recognize that the Songs of Ascents indicate what the pilgrims are thinking and experiencing on their way to Jerusalem and until they reach Jerusalem. And that applies to us as the New Testament pilgrims on the way to the New and Heavenly Jerusalem.

Jerusalem and the temple back then are just types and shadows pointing ultimately to heaven where God's glorious presence perfectly dwells.

But at the same time, these Psalms—particularly Psalm 122—apply to the church here on earth. Bakit gano'n? Paano natin masasabi? Well, if we look at the redemptive plan of God as revealed in Scriptures, the heavenly Jerusalem has already begun and is realized in the church.

Look at **Ephesians 2:6**. After telling the Ephesians believers of God's mercy, that while they were dead in trespasses and sins God made them alive together with Christ, Paul adds—"*and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*" Paul is saying, "You believers, although you are still here on earth, because you are now united in Christ and Christ is already in

heaven, then all the heavenly riches and blessings are already secured, they are now yours. It is as if you are already there.”

Consider another text at **Hebrews 12:22-23**. Sino kausap ng writer to the Hebrews dito? Mga Christians na buhay pa at nasa mundo pa. And what does he say? *“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all...”*

As believers united to Christ by faith, you have already arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem. You now have access to the holy of holies. You can now worship God in the Spirit and truth. [APPLY] That is why friends, whenever the church worships according to the Word of God, it's not an earthly worship. Yes, we're still on earth. But the worship we do here is spiritual, and every time we gather—and pray, hear his Word, and sin praises to him—we join the heavenly worship together with the angels and those who have gone before us. It is a heavenly worship.

Ito 'yong reality ng kaligtasan na tinupad at patuloy na tinutupad ng Diyos, which we Reformed Christians identify as the **“already but not yet.”** As Christians, we are already perfect and complete in Christ. As Matthew 28:18 shows, Christ kingdom is already here, he's already reigning through his Spirit in the church... But we still await a consummated state. May inaabangan pa tayo na pagbabalik ni Cristo, kung saan magiging ganap ang katuparan ng lahat ng pangako at kaligtasan ng Diyos.

Even so, the realities of that heavenly state have already begun among believers. We experience it now in the church. And that is how we will interpret and apply Psalm 122 to ourselves this morning.

So the point that I want to call your attention here is this: ***While we are still in the journey towards the New and Heavenly Jerusalem, God has already brought us into his church—the foretaste of heaven. And we are to greatly rejoice in it, to greatly esteem it, and to render great concern and prayer for it.***

Now, the first thing that we see here in Psalm 122 is that there's great joy for the house of God. (By the way, expect na mas mahaba po 'yong 1st sermon point)

SERMON POINT 1: Great Joy for the House of God

Verse 1: *“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”*

Again, David wrote this Psalm. Although we cannot determine the exact situation when David wrote this, Scriptures tell us that the temple was not yet built during David's time. It was king Solomon who built it. Pero ano 'yong tinutukoy ni David dito na sinasabi ng iba sa kanya, *“Let us go to the house of the LORD”?*

In the history of Israel, prior to the building of the temple, the people worshiped before the Tabernacle. Compared with the temple which has a fixed structure, the Tabernacle was a tent. And inside the tent is the Ark of the Covenant which symbolizes the abiding presence of God.

Since Israel was traveling from Sinai to the Promised Land, palipat-lipat 'yong Tabernacle. Kahit 'nong nakapasok na sila sa Promised Land, the ark of the covenant has always been moving from one place to another. Wala pa ring permanent place of worship for the people of Israel.

But if you will look at Deuteronomy 12:5-6, God instructed through Moses, *“But you shall seek **the place that the LORD your God will choose** out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices... and so on.”* In short, God will choose a place where the believers will go and worship him.

Now, when David was appointed king and he conquered and settled in Jerusalem, he brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city. And because David is God's chosen king, the people perceived that that is the place God has chosen and it was further affirmed when Solomon finished the temple. Kaya no'ng dinadala na 'yong Ark of the Covenant sa Jerusalem, it says in 2 Samuel 6:5, *“And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and [other instruments].”* And in verse 15, it reads *“So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn.”*

So this must be the great joy and gladness that David was talking about in Psalm 122:1. Although hindi pa nagagawa 'yong mismong temple, they are glad because finally God has chosen Jerusalem to be the permanent place of worship for his people. It is where the house of God will be built. It is where God's presence will dwell. It is God's chosen place.

Similarly, for the pilgrim reading this Song of Ascent, he rejoices when fellow believers said to him, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.” For that is God's chosen place of worship for his chosen ones.

Now, fast forward during the time of Christ, mukhang may malaking difference. If you read Luke 19:41-44, it says, *“And when he drew near and saw the city [Jerusalem], he wept over it.”* He's going to Jerusalem not rejoicing but weeping. Why?

Because Jerusalem has failed (just like the rest of Israel). The city and the people in it disobeyed God and failed to be the right place of worship. They failed to be the testimony of God's abiding presence. And Christ already foresaw that Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed as God's judgment to them in the year A.D. 70.

But despite this failure and destruction, it is just part of God's perfect plan of salvation. The old Jerusalem and the temple were to be destroyed because Christ had already come. He is the true Jerusalem, he is the new and ultimate temple. By his perfect sacrifice, all the sacrifices in the temple have been fulfilled, at hindi na kailangan pang gawin 'yong mga 'yon. Kaya sabi Niya sa samaritan woman sa **John 4**, hindi niyo kailangan pang pumunta sa Jerusalem para sumamba sa Diyos. **Sa pamamagitan ni Cristo, kayo ay makakalapit at makakasamba na sa Diyos sa Espiritu at katotohanan.**

Christ is the ultimate "tabernacle," our Emmanuel, "God with us." The chosen One. And as he said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Moreover, although Christ already ascended in heaven, the house of God still remains. How? Where? Among the believers, those who have the Spirit of Christ.

- Ephesians 2:19-22 — *"You are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God... In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."*
- 1 Peter 2:4-5 — *"... you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house."*
- 1 Corinthians 6:19 — You are *"the temple of the Holy Spirit."*

So brothers and sisters, although wala na 'yong physical Jerusalem and temple na tinutukoy sa Psalm 122, **you believers are the temple of God.** You are his chosen people, and although the church is everywhere—Christ gathers the church as local communion of saints. Hebrews 10:24-25 to the believers, *"... do not neglect meeting together... but encouraging one another."* **So wherever he gathers believers as a congregation to worship him, that is where God has also chosen to dwell.**

How is this relevant to us? Well, let me ask this question: "Why would someone have no joy and gladness going to church? Paanong nagiging 'dragging' sa isang tao na gigising ka on Sunday, maghahanda ka, ba-byahe ka papunta sa church? Why would people put no or less value for the church?"

Friends, that happens when you don't understand or forget the reality of the church. And what is it?

The church is not the building or just the venue that you go to. It is the gathering of God's people. It is the congregation of God's redeemed (cf. Belgic Confession Article 28). And it is God's chosen place and people where his abiding presence dwells. Yes, God is everywhere, kahit sa lugar ng mga unbelievers. But he abides

specifically among his chosen people—to fellowship with them, to nourish them, to bless them.

Maraming mga tao they profess to be Christians, yet not members of the church. Maraming alam sa Bible, pero ayaw nilang pumunta sa church, ayaw nilang makipag-fellowship and worship together with God's people. Well, how could you say you are part of God's people when you're not even *with* the people of God? **(Union with Christ through faith leads to union and communion with his people).**

Then, in 1 Peter 2:9-10, sabi ni Peter sa Christians, *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession... Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

This implies that if you are not part of the church, then you are not part of God's people. You're outside God's mercy and blessing. You're outside his kingdom.

That is the natural state of men. We are all by nature strangers and aliens, outside the community of God. We don't care about God, the things of God, and the people of God. By nature, all we care about is ourselves and the things of this world. Look around! Anong pinagkaka-abalahan ng mga tao, especially on Sunday? **They busy themselves with many things other than going to church to worship God with his people.** Gagala dito, gagala doon. Or mag-i-i-stay sa bahay, manonood na lang ng TV. Without God life is meaningless and restless. And people, blinded by their own fallen mind, will keep running for so many things that NEVER SATISFIES!

That is man's natural state. We all live outside the community of God until he brings us to himself and in communion with his people.

What is the point here, mga magulang ko't kapatid? **It is a privilege to belong to the church.** To be in the church, to be part of God's people and be with God's people, should cause you great joy. For the church is where God's presence and blessing abide.

Do not think that going to church is just a matter of duty. (Yes, it is a command for God's people). But it is ultimately grace. It is a privilege. Although pwede ka naman pabayaang ng Diyos, he grants you mercy. **Though you are a sinner, God calls you and brings you into his presence.** Every Lord's Day, we start by reading from God's Word. Why? Because it is not your pastor or a worship leader who calls you to his presence—but God himself.

Are you glad that you are here in the church together with other believers? Are you glad that you are here with fellow sinners receiving God's mercy? Like the Psalmist, may we have great joy when we say to one another, "Let's go to church or Happy Lord's Day!"

[TRANSITION]: Now aside from great joy for the house of God, David and the pilgrim show great esteem for it... Ano bang meron sa Jerusalem?

SERMON POINT 2: Great Esteem for the House of God

In verses 3-5, David commends Jerusalem. He affirms its beauty and splendor as God's chosen place for worship. A place where his presence dwells. And in praising Jerusalem for its beauty, the Psalmist implies that Jerusalem has no equal. There is no other city like it.

What does David commend about Jerusalem?

- **He commends Jerusalem's unity**

Verse 3 — *"Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together [or compact together]"*

The city, its walls, its structures, its houses are all strategically located to strengthen and support the whole city. (We don't have time to describe how it looked like before)

But more than the physical aspects of the city, what makes the city compact and distinguished is the unity and good order among its people. The faithful, the believers are drawn to it with a united purpose of worshiping God. As verse 4 said, *"[Jerusalem]... to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD."*

It is like no other because of its unity.

- **Next, David commends Jerusalem's holiness**

Verse 4 — *"... to which the tribes go up... as was decreed for Israel (or as a testimony for Israel), to give thanks to the name of the LORD"*

The people gather there in obedience to God's decree and for the remembrance of God's saving works. There in Jerusalem, especially in the temple [with its sacrifices], they are reminded of God's instructions and in response give thanks and praise to God for his saving work.

It is like no other because of its holiness.

- **And lastly, David commends Jerusalem for its royalty (or righteousness)**

Verse 5 — *"There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David."*

As the capital of Israel, justice is administered there by king David, a man after God's own heart. Hence, the people and the pilgrims going are secured.

It is like no other because of its royalty.

Now, considering the context of the Songs of Ascents, these are the things that the Pilgrim gets to enjoy once he arrives in Jerusalem. Away from the corruption and lies of his hometown and other threats of the journey, he now experiences the unity, holiness, and righteousness in Jerusalem. He finds the answers to his life's distress.

So he's not just joyful to be in God's chosen place of worship. He also esteems it highly, because of the privileges he gets to witness and enjoy in it.

And friends, it is the same with the church. The gathering of God's people is like no other.

- **Here we see the unity of the believers** — We're united by the Spirit in Christ through faith. Despite our differences in family, age, status, preference, and even maturity... we're united as one body, with one faith, one Lord.
- **Here we also get holy privileges** — Especially during the Lord's Day, we receive God's Word. We learn his ways. Naririnig natin 'yong mga patotoo ng Kanyang katapatan; napapaalalahanan tayo ng mga pangako ng Diyos. Hindi mga "trivial things" lang pinaguusapan po natin dito. We're talking about salvation in Christ, salvation from the wrath of God in hell, and eternal life.

And aside from the Word, we witness and partake of the Sacraments—the signs and seals of God's promise of salvation in Christ. These are things that nourish us and strengthen spiritually.

- **And lastly, here in the church, we experience the justice and righteousness of God** — Christ is our King who rules over us by his Word and Spirit. As we follow the Word of God, sin and error are corrected in the church. And here we are encouraged and enabled by the Spirit to show gratitude to God, to live in righteousness, and love one another.

The church is like no other. Hindi mo makikita at mae-experience ang mga bagay na 'to sa ibang mga organizations sa mundo... The church is God's redeemed people united as one body. The church is where we get nourished and guided by Christ through his Word and Spirit.

Do you see it that way? Do you regard the church that way?

[TRANSITION]: Now finally, aside from great joy and great esteem for the house of God, David and the pilgrim renders great concern and prayer for it.

SERMON POINT 3: Great Concern and Prayer for the House of God

Verse 6-7 — *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! ‘May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!’”*

Although the city is already chosen and established by God as the place of worship, David recognizes the dangers that can threaten the order, peace, and security of Jerusalem and its people.

So he prays for its security and prosperity. ‘Yong *“peace”* na tinutukoy sa verses na ‘to ay hindi “reconciliation with God.” It’s the welfare and prosperity of Jerusalem. The Psalmist prays that the city will flourish as God’s chosen city and place of worship. For the sake of my *“brothers and companions,”* **for the sake of other people**, may God’s place of worship be secured and flourish.

And then David vowed to do everything for Jerusalem. Verse 9 — *“For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.”*

This is the attitude of the pilgrim. After realizing the blessing of being there in Jerusalem, and experiencing the benefits in it, he renders great concern and prayer for it.

Friends, you have the same calling for the church today. The reality is, the church in this side of eternity is not yet perfect. The church is still filled with true believers and false professors of faith (Just no time to discuss). There are things—sin, problems—that threaten its peace, its order, its progress. As members of the church, you yourselves know that. Do you pray for the church? Do you seek its welfare?

To be honest, we don’t value and get concerned about the church as much as we should. As sinners by nature, ang default natin is just to get something from the church but not give ourselves for the good of the church.

But thankfully, Christ is the one who renders the greatest concern for the church. Even when you didn’t care about God and the people of God, he sought your greatest good. Ephesians 5:25-27 — *“... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that he might present the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing... holy and without blemish.”*

By his precious blood poured out on the cross all your sins are cleansed and you were made righteous, beautiful, and glorious in the sight of God. And he continues to do so until the end. By his Word and Spirit, he continues to reveal the spots and wrinkles and imperfections of the church to sanctify his people.

Kaya nga po kapag may problema sa church or may nagiging under discipline, nakakalungkot 'yon, nakakapanghina. And we must address it accordingly. But it is nonetheless a testimony of God's mercy to us. He's cleansing us, purifying us, because he wants us to be the church we ought to be. A beautiful bride. A holy house of God.

And Christ himself prayed for all his people in the whole chapter of John 17. In fact, si Cristo'y patuloy na nananalangin at namamagitan para sa Kanyang iglesia. *"He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25).

Christ loves the church so much. That's how precious the church is in the sight of God. And brothers and sisters, because God loves you and values you that much, you're called to show the same love for the church.

The church is no ordinary group of people. Yes, you are sinners, but you are redeemed sinners. You were bought with a price. You are the children of God. And God has chosen to dwell among you, to speak to you, to nourish you, to bless you. **Those who become part of the church, and who realize the blessings that God provides for and through the church, will inevitably be concerned for the church.**

The church is not just a weekly errand that you do every Sunday. It is God's people. So do you pray for it? Are you concerned with your pastor, your elders, your deacons, your fellow members? Do you support it? Do you seek the unity and expansion of the church? I trust that you can reflect on those things.

CONCLUSION

- As I end, let me speak to you unbelievers. What a privilege and blessing that of all the places you can go to on Sunday, God brought you here. Around you are also sinners, who all look to God for mercy and strength. Listen to the life-giving Word of God. Ask God for faith.
- To all believers, our lives as pilgrims heading to the new and heavenly Jerusalem is indeed a long and hard journey. But Christ has appointed his church, through which he gives us the means of grace to sustain us in the journey.
 - Be part of the church (Invitation for non-members to Inquirers' Class)
 - Do not miss the church (As much as possible, don't miss the Lord's Day)

The church here on earth is the foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem. And it is your greatest privilege to be part of God's people. So beloved, rejoice in it, cherish it, invest your lives for it as thanksgiving to God in Jesus Christ. Amen.