

Singing the Glories of Zion
Psalm 87
Sermon by Rev. Keith Davis (6-3-07)

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when babies are born to the royal family in Great Britain, the Brits treat it as a big event. Reporters from every major newspaper and tabloid magazine are Johnny on the spot. They want to be the first to snap a picture of the little one.

Such births have also prompted national celebrations. In fact, back in 1982, when Prince William was born to Sir Charles and Lady Di the thunder of canon and the popping of champagne bottles could be heard all over Britain; flags were billowing in the wind, the peal of church bells filled the air; prayers were raised and songs were sung in celebration.

This is the way the Brits and others in the world welcome those who are born into royalty, who are born into a famous family, to a person of status or standing. Now, I wasn't there the day that Lydia was born, and I wasn't there the day that Faith was born.

But I think it's safe to assume that there were no newspaper reporters or photographers or *paparazzi* clamoring around the maternity ward; there were no mobs of people standing in the hospital hallways or camped out in the hospital parking lot just waiting to get a glimpse or a photo of the new baby born to the Bakkers and the Vander Werffs.

And on the day these infants were born, there was no national celebration; there was no volley of canon artillery, no church bells pealing in the distance. But, be that as it may, the birth of these two little girls was nonetheless significant; they were born into a very privileged family--into a royal family that is of greater status and standing and honor than any other family on earth.

These two infants were born into the house and family of Zion. And the Bible tells us this morning that there is nothing in all the world more important, more blessed, more wonderful than knowing that our name, and the names of our children, are written on the royal registry of the household of God.

That is something the world does not understand, that the world does not celebrate; but we do! Today we lift up our hearts, we lift up our voices, we rejoice and sing the glories of Zion. That is exactly what Psalm 87 calls us to do.

God's People Sing the Glories of Zion! We sing Zion's praises because Zion is:

- 1. The Dwelling-Place of God**
- 2. The Hope of all Nations**

1. The Dwelling of our God

Beloved, the word *Zion* can be interpreted in a number of ways. In the broadest sense, *Zion* is a reference to the entire area and city of Jerusalem, the city of David and the city of God. This is clearly what's in view here in these opening verses.

But if you recall your Old Testament history, you'll remember that Zion was not always the city of God. The Bible tells us that Zion was home to the Jebusites until David conquered the city and captured it for himself. The battle for Jerusalem is recorded II Samuel 5. There, the city is described as a great stone fortress situated on a hilltop which stood above the Kidron Valley.

It was so heavily fortified that it was thought to be invincible, impenetrable by its citizens. The Jebusites even scoffed at David and his men, saying *You will not get in here, even the blind and the lame can ward you off. Such was their confidence in the city's natural defenses.*

But David prevailed and the Jebusites were defeated. Thus, Jerusalem came to be known as the city of David. But Psalm 87: 1 tells us that there was a divine claim upon Jerusalem. This city, set high upon a hill, with her strong walls and impenetrable defenses; this stone fortress was chosen by none other than God Himself to be His city.

It was He (the LORD Himself) who has established it; it was He who set His foundations on the holy mountain. About this verse John Calvin writes: while other cities were founded and built by the guidance and power of God, for the sake of civil government, Jerusalem was his peculiar sanctuary, his royal seat.

In other words, we know that God in his wisdom and power has founded other cities, yet of no other city does God say this: *For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it--* (Psalm 132:13-14).

This harkens back to the song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15:17, where they prophesy of the Lord's dwelling place *You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance-- the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.*

So yes, Jerusalem would be known as the city of David, but more importantly, of infinitely greater significance it would be known as the city established and founded by the great High King, the Lord Himself. Zion is the city of God.

And, as is always the case with our God, that which the Lord establishes, that which the Lord has called and claimed as His own, He loves, He cherishes very deeply. Verse two says *God loves the gates of Zion; he loves them more than all the dwellings of Jacob/Israel.*

Of all the tribes, of all the cities and places and villages within Israel, the Lord placed his electing love, his favor, his affection upon Zion. Remember, David reigned as king in the southern town of Judah, in Hebron for 7 years and six months; yet the Lord did not choose Hebron as his dwelling place.

So this begs the question, why? **Why did God choose Jerusalem?** What did God see *in her* that was so special, that was so valuable, that was so endearing that He chose her over all other cities, over all other places, over all other nations on earth to call His own?

For example, why did God choose Jerusalem over Tibet and the mountains of the Himalayas or the Alps or the Andes or the Rocky Mountains in our nation? The mountains of Jerusalem were not really even mountains as such. Sure, for us plains-people, the hills of Jerusalem would look

pretty tall and rugged, but those rocky cliffs couldn't hold a candle to the grandeur and beauty and loftiness of those other mountain ranges.

So again why was God content to call the foothills of Jerusalem *Mt. Zion*, why was He content to make His dwelling there? The answer to that question relates directly to our own election and calling by God!

For, it's obvious that God did not choose Jerusalem because of her intrinsic beauty, or because of her great strength; he did not choose her because she was the most grand and fair and glorious mountain and city in all the earth.

God did not choose Jerusalem because she was more worthy than any other place. No. God chose Jerusalem--He chose to make that mountain His holy habitation, He chose to love her gates, ***for no other reason*** than that it pleased Him.

This was God's sovereign will and good pleasure, just as we sing: *He has **chosen thee most precious**; he delights in thee to dwell.* This is the chief motive and reason why God chose Israel to be His own people (and we ourselves); not because Israel was more numerous than other nations, not because she was more worthy or desirable, not because she had done anything to endear herself to the Lord—but only because God, in his good pleasure, chose her to be His own.

Now notice that verse 2 says *the Lord **loves** the gates of Zion.* The words *gates* very likely stands as a part for the whole; it's a way of saying that the Lord loves everything about the city.

This may be something like us expressing our love for the city of Chicago by saying, *I love the skyline.* Or *I love the magnificent mile.* It's a part for the whole. But this reference to the gates may very well indeed point to something more substantial.

It might have something to do with the fact that these gates were the passage way through which God's worshippers would come and go. There was a constant flow of people in and out of the city gates, as all of Israel came to Zion, to God's temple mount, to God's house, to ***worship Him***

there, to bring their sacrifices, to confess their sins, to lift up their hearts in prayer, to sing their songs of praises, to hear His Word, to receive God's benediction of grace and peace.

People of God, boys and girls and young people, you have to realize that the most precious and sacred moments that you will spend on this earth are not times you will spend in solitude or in secret; they are not times you spend with husband or wife, or with family and friends.

No, the most sacred and precious hours that you will spend on this earth will be the hours you spend in corporate worship of your God. While you might treasure those times you spend alone in prayer and meditation on God's Word, there is no calling that is higher, no duty more sacred than that of God's children, entering into his gates, and worshipping in his holy presence.

This is an excellent time to be reminded of this, as school is out and the days of summer fast approach, as many of us plan our summer vacations, as we take our weekend and head to the camper or cottage on the lake. Remember that God loves the gates of Zion.

God loves to hear Zion rejoice and sing His praises. So don't neglect the worship of God. Don't neglect the sacred assembly of His people. For this is where God dwells; this is where He calls you and wants you; this is where He has chosen to come to us through His Word and Spirit and Sacraments, and fellowship with us and communes with us and feed us and nourish us.

Just listen to these words from Hebrews 12:22-23 says: *But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Beloved, when we come to church, we enter the gates of Zion--the place wherein God delights to dwell; and it is there—it is here—that God pours out His blessing upon His people. And because of that, we all ought to long to be here.

2. The Hope of all Nations

God's People Sing the Glories of Zion. We sing because Zion is the dwelling place of our God. But secondly, we sing because Zion is the Hope of all Nations. Verses 4-8 of this Psalm speak of the sacred registry of Zion, the register within which is written all the names of her children, the names of all her citizens, of those born within her sacred walls, so to speak.

But what we find so shocking is that among the names recorded in Zion's register, among the familiar Hebrew names like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah, Hannah and Rebekkah, there are names of people from Rahab (Egypt), and Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Cush (Gentile nations).

It's almost as if the Psalmist were standing on the highest point of Mt. Zion itself, and--pointing outward in a circular fashion at all the surrounding nations--he declares: *it will be said of this one and that one, and this one here that they were born in Zion!*

The reason that this is so shocking, of course, is that some of these nations were fierce enemies of Israel; they were proud and strong nations and they hated Israel, they strove against her; they tried to annihilate her and crush her and remove the memory of her from off the earth!

Egypt was Israel's enemy at her very inception as a nation—holding her captive for over 400 years; *Philistia* was a thorn in Israel's side all the years in which she lived in Canaan; and *Babylon* was her fierce enemy in the end who destroyed the temple and took her into exile.

But in His amazing grace, by the power of His Holy Spirit, God once again shows His abounding love, His infinite mercy, His unbreakable will and His unstoppable plan of salvation. Even among the nations that once hated Zion and Zion's God, even among the nations that God despised, that were not the people of God, He gathers His elect, His people, his worshippers.

Of course beloved, this is where we see the full *spiritual dimension* of Zion come into view. Zion is no longer a place, a physical location on the map. Zion is no longer the city located in the foothills of Palestine.

Zion is ultimately the church, the fellowship and family God, the fellowship of believers, the church that is built, that is founded upon the **Rock**, the **Firm Foundation** that is Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior.

When it says in this Psalm, *glorious things of thee are spoken*, those glorious things are the prophecies of men like Isaiah and Haggai who tell of the future glories of Zion, who point ahead to a time such as this, when the Christ Himself would come, and His Holy Spirit would be poured out, and when God would call all people and nations to Himself.

And then there's the glorious future beyond that, when Christ will establish His eternal kingdom--the heavenly Jerusalem, a city in which God will forever dwell in fellowship and communion with His people.

And so Zion is not only the hope and consolation of Israel, but it is the hope and consolation of all the earth. It is widely believed that this is what the last line in the last stanza of this Psalm means when it says, *All our fountains are in thee!*

God's people sing and rejoice because Zion is the fountain, the spring of life out of which flows blessings in abundance for all people of all nations, for as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Himself.

Beloved, we sing and rejoice, the angels sing and rejoice, all of Zion sings and rejoices with us this morning because this one and that one—Lydia Marie and Faith Marie were born in Zion. They were born in Christ, into the fellowship of Christ's suffering and death and resurrection.

By Gods grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, their names (and our names as well) are recorded-- they are written--in God's sacred registry. And you know what, that's just as unbelievable and remarkable when you consider that we too were enemies of God, haters of God, rejecters of God.

Yet, in God's grace, He did not treat us as our sins deserve; he did not hold our sins against us, He did not treat us as enemies. Rather, he forgave us our sins, He poured out His love and Spirit upon us, and He made us to be sons and daughters of Zion, through the precious blood of His, Jesus Christ.

This is why Zion rejoices! This is why Zion ceaselessly sings her praises of her Lord. Today we have before us all the reasons why we give thanks and worship. We behold with our eyes the covenant sign and seal of God's promise—that sign of initiation into the covenant.

And then we also have before us the sign of covenant confirmation, the bread and wine which signify and seal unto us that Christ has paid the price and secured the rites of our citizenship. The water and the Word, the bread and wine signify and seal unto us that we are born in Zion and that we dwell in Zion, and that Zion's God dwells in us.

And beloved, that calls for a celebration; that calls for the children of Zion to sing and rejoice, to lift up our hearts in praise and prayer, to sound forth our thunderous shouts of acclamation. For we are born into a noble and royal family; into a position of high status and standing. We are born in Zion. Amen.