

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Do you find it easy to praise God whilst you are doing something else? The question raises an important issue, which is about how conscious we are of the work of God in our lives on a daily or hourly basis. Some find this easy to accept, and some find it very hard. In truth, whatever we feel, God is indeed always there, and when we accept this, we are liberated because we thereby give Him spiritual access into our lives, whatever we feel. He will bless us if our hearts (not our feelings) give Him priority and the right to guide us in every aspect of our lives.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In this season of the year, think about how you will praise God during the festivities of Christmas. Ask the Lord to help you to find appropriate ways to honour Him within all you do at Christmas.*
- *Pray and fast for all who find it hard to praise God because they do not feel able to raise their spirits in praise. Ask God to bless them and help them see beyond their personal circumstances to greater things.*

Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have given me so much. You have often challenged me, You have filled me with love, You have pointed out my errors, You have guided me through pain; You have led me to do Your will. Keep going, Almighty Father, and when I grow old, may I still feel the power of Your Spirit driving me on, into Your Kingdom! AMEN

Psalm 48

No: 10 Week: 170 Tuesday 16/12/08

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You bear the marks of humanity, and the mystery of divinity. Help me, therefore, as Your disciple and follower, to be faithful in all I do for You, and may I always keep in mind the eternal destiny You have won for me. I long to reflect Your love, compassion and justice, my Lord, in everything I do; so by the power of Your Holy Spirit, may I never fail You, Lord Jesus. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Fire Services

Pray for those who in the course of their work, have had to deal death and loss of life due to fire, whether people they know or people they do not know. Pray for their blessing.

On-going prayers

- *Thank God for the joys of preparing for Christmas*
- *Pray for the safety of young children in schools and institutions*
- *Pray for small businesses struggling to keep going*

Meditation

Protect us, Lord God, in the paths we take;
May we be wise in all our decisions.

Protect us, Lord God, from the company we keep;
May we be careful to keep close to You.

Protect us, Lord God, during all our conversations;
May we be wise in the things we say.

Protect us, Lord God, while we do our work;
May we build Your glorious Kingdom.

Protect us, Lord God, when our passions overflow;
May we be committed, sincere and faithful.

Protect us, Lord God, guard our hopes and dreams;
May we accept Your plans for our future.

Bible Study - Psalm 48

A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

he has shown himself to be her fortress.

¹ *Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.*

⁴ *When the kings joined forces,
when they advanced together,
⁵ they saw her and were astounded;
they fled in terror.*

² *It is beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth.
Like the utmost heights of Zaphon
is Mount Zion, the city of the Great
King.*

⁶ *Trembling seized them there,
pain like that of a woman in labour.*

³ *God is in her citadels;*

⁷ *You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish
shattered by an east wind.*

⁸ As we have heard, so have we seen
in the city of the LORD Almighty,
in the city of our God:
God makes her secure for ever.

Selah

⁹ Within your temple, O God,
we meditate on your unfailing
love.

¹⁰ Like your name, O God,
your praise reaches to the ends of
the earth;
your right hand is filled with
righteousness.

¹¹ Mount Zion rejoices,
the villages of Judah are glad
because of your judgments.

¹² Walk about Zion,
go round her, count her towers,
¹³ consider well her ramparts, view her
citadels,
that you may tell of them to the
next generation.

¹⁴ For this God is our God for ever and
ever;
he will be our guide even to the
end.

Review

This is one of the most famous psalms of praise to God. It is structured around the idea of Zion as the dwelling place of God, but we should not be fooled; in ancient times as well as now, people praised God Himself, not a place. There is little in this Psalm to help us locate it to any particular events in history, apart from the sense of pilgrimage and festival (see 48:11f.), but nothing specific; and the picture of foreign kings trembling before Zion (48:5f.) is entirely general. In addition, after the Babylonians destroyed the city (587BC), the people of God had to come to terms with the fact that their beloved Jerusalem (Zion) was no more, and 'where God dwelt' could no longer be thought of merely as a place.

The Christian community can learn a great deal from this Psalm if we will read it in this way, and join with the Old Testament traditions which teach us about God's dwelling on earth with His people, the Church. In days when the church has bad press, for whatever reason, perhaps we need to be reminded that the Zion of the Old Testament is the Church of the New Testament. We will know that revival has broken out in our midst when God's people again love the Church as God's dwelling place, not as a place but as a people, and with all the meaning of both the Old and New Testaments.

The dwelling place of God Hebrew, unfortunately, has no punctuation, and the end of verse 1 is not clear. I give you below an alternative translation, and you will see that it gives a start to the Psalm that is more consistent with the theme of the praise of God, because the first sentence is about God and not Zion.

¹ Great is the LORD. He is most worthy of praise
in the city of our God, His holy mountain.

² It is beautiful in height, the joy of the whole earth ...

The city is of course Zion; but in verse 2, there is a strange reference to Mount Zaphon, which is translated in a variety of ways by Bible versions, including the phrase 'on the side of the north', which also occurs in some song versions of this Psalm. Briefly, there were ancient beliefs in Caanan going back into antiquity that the 'god's' lived in the mountains to the 'north', long before Jerusalem (actually in the South of Israel) was chosen by David for his capital of Israel. The translation I have given above helps us to see what the psalmist is saying, that ancient beliefs in the presence of gods in holy northern mountains (Zaphon) have now been replaced by the presence of one true God with His people in Jerusalem.

Interestingly, in verse 3, it says 'God is in her citadels ...' which literally means her 'palaces' or 'homes'. We might have expected the Psalm to say, God is in His Temple, but it talks of God as being with His people, where they live in buildings. This is a strong pointer to the

New Testament picture of God's people as a building in which God dwells (1 Cor 3:9,10; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph 2:21).

The panic of the kings Verses 4 to 7 describe the terror of kings as they see Zion, and it is difficult to understand what this means. Clearly, whilst there may have been one or two instances of kings fleeing from Jerusalem in ancient history, in general, the Mount of Zion was more often invaded and pillaged by foreign kings, so what does this mean? Even if Mount Zion stands for the church of today, there are few kings who are afraid of the church!

There are, however, two ways we can use this passage meaningfully. Firstly, the terror of the kings stands as a contrast to the delight that God's people have for His dwelling place. For them, the sight of Zion is beautiful and appealing, a place of pilgrimage and joy where God will be met and worshipped. However, for kings and rulers of this world, the presence of God, if real, is a matter of fear; for if God is truly present in the world, then He is a threat to their own power and wealth which is based upon commerce (see 'ships of Tarshish' verse 7). Secondly, the belief of God's people is that in due time, He will make His presence known to the whole world, and that the fear of Psalm 48:5 will become a reality (Matt 24:43, 1 Thess 5, 2 Peter 3:10 and Revelation 16, for example). The trembling 'like a woman in labour' is a picture Jesus uses in his description of the end times (Matt 24:8), and it is used as a powerful picture of the inevitability of God's final plan, which is as inevitable as the birth of a child, once labour pains have begun.

Worship in the presence of God However, the purpose of this Psalm, and the purpose of those who have come to Zion and observed its beauty, is to offer worship to Almighty God. In verse 8, within the security of Zion; God protects His people as they worship Him. The worship that is described is that of meditation within the Temple (48:9), the only time that the Temple is mentioned in the Psalm; and notice, it does not talk of sacrifices and offerings, but of spending time in contemplation. You may not have expected this of the Old Testament! It is probably an indication of the influence of the prophets who declared time and time again that it was a clean heart and not sacrifices that reflected true worship (e.g. see Hosea 6:6).

The Psalm also expresses the universal call of God to all people to worship Him (48:10), as we have seen yesterday in Psalm 47 (verses 2,3,7) and includes in its call the villages around Jerusalem. These villages often lived in tension with the city, so verse 11 is a subtle request for peace amongst the God's people under His universal rule.

Finally, all are called to walk around Zion and see the whole city. Today, the call is for God's people to honour our Lord Jesus by becoming aware of the whole body, by getting to know everything there is to know about how the Lord is working and inspiring His people throughout the whole world. From this we will gain our true perspective, and find balance and perspective in our worship. It is vitally important, because the more we know of Him, the more we will worship our God, 'who is for ever and ever, who will be our guide even to the end' (48:14).

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you come across views about 'Zionism'? How important is it to believe in the uniqueness of Jerusalem as a place where God is worshipped today?
2. How may the worship of God be enriched amongst the Body of Christ today, according to this psalm?
3. Are there any aspects of worship within this Psalm that you feel are important; prophecy, meditation, pilgrimage, reflection etc.?