

Great is the Lord!

Sermon Text: Psalm 48

Study Texts: Ephesians 2:17-22

Sermon Recap: The main idea of this week's sermon is: The people of God praise the LORD for who He is, for what He has done, and for what He will do. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

Sermon Connection: Psalm 48 celebrates the power of God. Specifically, the power of God as it is displayed in the protection and keeping of His people. In the Psalm, written originally for the people of Israel concerning the physical city of Jerusalem, the reader is invited to look upon the physical protection of the city of Jerusalem. And having considered its defenses, the Psalmist reminds the reader that the ultimate defense of the City of God (a reference to God's people) is found in God Himself. The physical defenses are reminders of God's ultimate power. In like manner, the New Testament Church is invited into the same activity of reflecting God as our eternal protection; He is our great defender and He will not be overthrown. Ephesians 2:17-22 invites the Church to reflect on Her place in the City of God by means of the gospel, our greatest defense and our great salvation.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: to see that God saves His people and keeps His people through the power of the gospel

The Context: Ephesians is a wonderful letter that Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus. In the letter, he addresses a number of issues that build on the foundation of God's gospel salvation (chp. 1). Specifically, in chapter 2, he shows that no man achieves salvation for himself. It is, rather, a gift of God that comes through faith. In the section in which we will study, Paul is explaining how the gospel creates divine unity and steadfastness for the people of God.

Opening Question: Why do people seek shelter when they are frightened? What types of shelters are most appealing?

Transition Statement: As Christ-followers, we recognize that our hope is not found in the physical protection of buildings but in the eternal salvation that comes through King Jesus.

Life in the Gospel

In v. 17, Paul speaks of peace. Who is the “*he*” in this verse and what is Paul explaining? See also Eph. 2:13-16.

If we back up a few verses (v. 13), we note that Paul says, “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” Paul is explaining how Christians have come to know Christ, peace, and salvation. It is only through the work of Jesus—His sacrificial death on the cross, His burial, and resurrection—that we are saved. This is what Paul means when he states in v. 17, “*And he came and preached peace to you...*” Furthermore, Paul mentions those who were far off and those who were near. This is a reference to the Gentiles (the far off) and the Jews (the near).

The idea of this verse is that our place in the people of God is not because we were either far off or near, rather, our place in the people of God is solely on the basis of Jesus’ work on the cross. He is our peace, our hope, and our salvation.

How does this peace help to develop the idea of God as our protection? See also Ps. 48:14. The word translated “*peace*” in v. 17 is the counterpart to the Hebrew word “*shalom*.” The word certainly means peace, but its implications are far-reaching. The idea of shalom is one of harmony and tranquility; it means to live without trouble. Therefore, when Paul says that Jesus came and preached peace, the point is that Jesus preaches salvation and peace with God. The heart of Jesus’ message is peace, harmony, and tranquility with God. This is the fullness that stands behind Ps. 48:14, “*For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end.*”

How do we see Paul explaining the Trinity’s work in salvation in v. 18?

Paul writes, “*For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*” Paul highlights the work of the Trinity is the process of salvation. It is God the Father Who ordained that mankind be saved. It is God the Son, Jesus Christ, Who carried out the work of salvation on the cross, and came preaching the gospel of peace following His resurrection, and it is God the Holy Spirit Who applies that salvation to our hearts, thus bringing us to God the Father. The language Paul uses here is very similar to his language in Romans 5:1, “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

How does this Trinitarian understanding of salvation help us to understand God’s protection over His people? See also Col. 3:3-4.

As we see that God’s protection of His people is primarily in salvation through Jesus Christ, we come to realize that because God has saved us eternally, no earthly thing can ever harm that. We are held fast in the eternal City of God because of Jesus Christ; the entire Godhead

worked to accomplish our salvation, and that is not something any man, nor any earthly power, nor any demonic power can ever undo. Further explaining this point, Paul writes in Col. 3:3-4, *“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”* Our lives are held by and hidden in God. There is no safer place.

In v. 19, Paul develops the idea that Christians share full citizenship in the people of God. They belong to the eternal City of God. Why is this important to grasp?

In the context of Ephesians, Paul is addressing a racial/ethnic divide between Jews and Gentiles. The gospel overcomes these differences by uniting us as one holy, chosen race—the people of God. Paul’s point is that something greater than racial divide has come, and that is unity as we are brought into the eternal kingdom of God. Paul’s language communicates that through the gospel we become part of the “holy ones” of heaven. We are held eternally secure because of Jesus Christ.

Verses 20 speaks of the solid and sturdy nature of the people of God. What imagery does Paul use, and what does his reference to the prophets and apostles mean?

Paul says that the Church is, *“...the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone...”* Paul here compares the Church to a house that is built on a strong foundation. The apostles are those men who walked with Jesus, who wrote the New Testament, and many of them gave their lives in testimony to Jesus’ faithfulness. These were the men whom Jesus commissioned to go and build His Church. The prophets, like the apostles, have laid down a solid and coherent testimony about Jesus Christ—which leads us to Paul’s statement, *“...Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone...”*

How does this further explain being within God’s protection? See also 1 Tim. 3:15b. The picture is of a house built on a sturdy, robust foundation that cannot be moved. The eternal God, the second member of the Trinity, holds the whole structure together. It cannot be moved. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 3:15, *“...the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”* We need to note the images—a pillar and buttress of truth. Truth is immovable; the imagery communicates that, because of the presence of God, the church is immovable.

Verse 21 speaks of the centrality of Jesus Christ to the gospel of salvation and to the eternal City of God. What is Paul saying here with regard to Jesus and to the Church?

Paul’s point here is to hold forth Christ as the centerpiece of the City of God. Or, to use Paul’s language from the preceding verse, Christ is the cornerstone in Whom all things hold together (Col. 1:17). Our place in the eternal City of God comes through, and is held secure, by Jesus Christ. It is He Who joins us together through the gospel and grows us into a holy temple of the Lord.

How does the message of v. 22 parallel the hope of Psalm 48:12-14?

In Psalm 48:12-14, the Psalmist writes, *“Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end.”* And in Ephesians 2:22 Paul writes, *“In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”* The Psalmist invites the people of God to come out from within Jerusalem, the City of God, and to look upon its defenses. But, his point is that the ultimate hope for the people of God is that God Himself is with them in the City. And in a greater way, Paul’s point is that through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are held in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can look upon the Church and see how God is in Her and holds Her safe and steady.

What is Paul explaining for the Church in v. 22?

Stated plainly, Paul wants the Church to know that God dwells with her through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The people of God gained hope in knowing that God dwelled in the holy city of Jerusalem with them. And yet, in a far greater way, the Spirit of God indwells every Christian as He works to bind us together as the people of God. We are held eternally safe while also being empowered to live faithfully in the world. We need not fear, for our God is always with us, always keeping us, always holding us fast.

The Big Picture - Life in the City of God

The writer of Psalm 48 wanted the people of Jerusalem to love their city, to look upon its defenses and walls, and to feel safe within its borders. But, in a greater way, the Psalmist wanted to help the people see that beyond any protection the walls could provide, God dwelled in the midst of the city, and for that reason, they dwelled securely. In the same, yet greater way, Paul helps us to see that God dwells in the midst of His people by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is not the sturdiness of physical protection or the far-reaching nature of any laws that offer us hope; it is the power of the gospel of God. God dwells with His people.

Application Questions

- How am I trusting in God every day? Is my first response to danger to turn to God?
- How does my life display an abiding, steady trust in God?
- In what ways am I leading my family to know and trust in God’s presence?
- How can my life serve as a witness of God’s goodness in my neighborhood?