

January 26, 2025

Psalm 122

Has church become a chore to you? Has church become something you *have* to do rather than something you *get* to do? Would you rather be somewhere else? Do you end up coming because that's what you're *supposed* to do or because no one else is going to do this or that task unless *you* come, or because your spouse has nagged you that you need to come, or you feel like God might do you a solid if you come, so you *have* to be here? Has church become a chore for you? Well, if it has, you're not alone, and you're not the first people in history to feel that way. John Chrysostom was a Christian pastor in Constantinople, modern day Istanbul in the late 300's AD, and this is from one of his sermons:

Christ says, "Come to me, all who are tired and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"
What is more longed for than [to hear] this Voice? What sweeter than this invitation? The Lord is calling you to a Banquet when he invites you to church. He urges you to be comforted from toils and He transports you to a place of comfort from pain, because He lightens you from the burden of sins. He heals distress with spiritual enjoyment, and sadness with joy. Despite all this, few people come to church. How grievous! We run eagerly to dances and amusements. We listen with pleasure to the foolishness of singers. We enjoy the foul words of actors for hours without getting bored. And yet when God speaks we yawn, we scratch ourselves and feel dizzy. Most people would run rabidly to the horse track, although there's no roof there to protect the audience from rain, even when it rains heavily or when the wind is lifting everything. They don't mind the bad weather or the cold or the distance. Nothing keeps them in their homes. When they are about to go to church, however, then the soft rain becomes an obstacle to them. And if you ask them who Amos or Obadiah is, or how many prophets or apostles there are, they can't even open their mouths. Yet they can tell you every detail about the horses, the singers and the actors. What kind of state is this?

That was written more than 1500 years ago... Wow. If that describes you, and church has become a chore for you, I don't want to shame you. I don't want to make it seem like anyone's looking down on you, because, if we're honest, we've all looked at church as a chore, even me because this is my job! But I would like to challenge you. Is it possible that there are things about church that you may have forgotten? Is it possible that you don't quite understand the full picture of what church is and what it can do for you? This Psalm is for you. This Psalm is given to us by God through his servant King David to tell us what exactly church is and isn't. The point of this Psalm that David wants us to learn is this: **Church is Not a Chore. 1. Recognize THE Church. 2. Invest in YOUR Church.**

1. Recognize THE Church. This Psalm was sung as Old Testament believers climbed up Mt. Zion to worship God in the Temple for Passover in Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. It was written by David, but here's the thing. Historically, the temple in Jerusalem was built after he died, so he actually wrote this not for himself, but for those who would come after him, who would get to experience this powerful thing- worshipping God with all the believers in Jerusalem

is something that gave Christians joy and gladness- it wasn't a chore. Sure, the journey to Jerusalem was difficult and dangerous, but it was worth it for the opportunity to worship God with all of God's people. When you look at verse 2, you see that they likely sang this when they finally arrived in Jerusalem at the gates- "Our feet are standing in your gates." What an odd detail- why would they need to say that? Because the joy that God wants to give you in his Church is given when you are physically with his people. Presence matters. Sure, you can pray to God in your house, you can get theological content from your TV or Computer, and you can certainly read your Bibles at home by yourselves- in fact, I would encourage that! But in order to feel the joy of God's Church- you have to be with God's Church.

Now, what do I mean by that- "The Church?" When the Bible talks about The Church, it's not the building, but the people of God. Those who trust in God, who are saved by God, who love and worship God- *that is the Church*. And this Psalm, when it talks about Jerusalem, it's partially talking about the city itself, but really, it's talking about The Church. You see, Jerusalem was a special city because that's where God dwelled- in his temple. But the Temple was destroyed, where does God dwell now? With his people. We, God's people, are the true Temple of God where God dwells. And look at what David writes about Jerusalem. It's built as a city, "closely compacted." The Hebrew there is difficult to translate, the word *chabar* is used to describe when things are bound together into one- it's actually used when describing how all the different poles of the Tabernacle, the temple before the temple, all came together to form one tent. You see, David isn't simply making a statement about Jerusalem's city planning, although when you look at it, it is a compact city. He's saying that God has built his church to be a church that's close to each other. A close community of people intertwined with each other. Yet, we don't just meet for the sake of meeting- there's a common purpose that unites God's Church: To praise the name of the Lord as the Lord has commanded. What unites the Church of God? What makes us One? You just sang it! "Once you were an alien people, outsiders, sinners, outside of God's family." And God has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Do you remember what they would do at the temple? Atonement sacrifices. Each of the people that would sing this Psalm would go to the Temple and offer a sacrifice knowing that this animal's death would appease God's wrath over their sins, but they also knew that this sacrifice would have to be made again. And then Christ came, and he offered himself as the perfect sacrifice as he was punished for the sins of all people, and do you remember what happened when he died on the cross? The curtain in the temple, separating God's holy place, his presence, from the people, was torn in two. Because of what Christ did, God and sinners have been reunited and made one once again, and the Church is made up of sinners who have been forgiven and brought close to God, and close to each other. That's what atonement really means- at one. We are now at one with God and with each other all because of what Jesus did. And look at what David says next! Here in the Church are the judgement seats. Since Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to God's right hand, he rules over all things and he blesses us and strengthens us and helps us- but how? Where can that help be found? Where is the seat of his justice? The Church. His people. My friends, when you want to

feel close to God, don't go out in the woods by yourself. When God wants to comfort his people, love his people, encourage his people, rebuke his people, humble his people, sustain his people, cherish his people, guide his people, he uses his people. God's people, His Church, is his tool for blessing you. So, what should we do?

2. Invest in YOUR Church. What I just said applies to all Christians everywhere, here in Whitewater and all over the world who love Jesus and believe his teachings and obey his Word. That's THE Church- all those who believe in Christ. But we also talk about YOUR church- your community of believers, this pocket of God's Kingdom that God has put you in. David actually gives us very practical, powerful things to do that help us enjoy the blessings of our church.

Firstly, pray for your church. Pray for your pastor- pray that I stay steadfast and faithful to God's Word, that I continue to grow in my faith and that I serve faithfully as a pastor, and serve my wife and children faithfully- because Satan is always on the attack and if he can strike the shepherd, he can strike the sheep! I need your prayers. Pray for the people at church you get along with, and especially for those you don't get along with. Pray for the people who rub you the wrong way and annoy you. Pray for them! It's really hard to hate people, be envious of people that you're praying for. Pray for the people of your church! Pray for their peace- that God holds them close and they never forget how deeply Jesus loves them and they grow in their faith! David really hammers this home when he says, let peace be upon both the walls and palaces. Every inch of God's church, the leaders and the followers, pray that they know and love and grow closer to Jesus and reflect him more clearly in their words and actions. Pray that they grow in love for each other. Look at church not as something you get out of it, but as an opportunity for God to use you to serve him and his people, and as your opportunity to be served by God through his people. This is not a club. This Church is a family of people brought closely together by God's grace.

Secondly, seek, do things for the peace of God's church, and notice what David says, for the sake of his brothers, and for the sake of the Temple, he will seek peace. What's he talking about? To help you understand exactly what he's getting at, let me ask you a question: How many of you have been hurt by the unloving words or actions of a pastor or leader at a church? And when that happened, how did it affect your walk with God? How did it affect your prayers and your view toward God? How did it affect your listening to sermons? How did it affect your view of church? It probably made it more of a chore. What David is saying is that our words and actions matter and deeply and profoundly impact both the Christians who are in this building, and those who will be in the future. I'll be the first to repent- if I show through my actions and words that I don't really care much about the Word of God and I don't really care much about you, how will that affect you? And if members of this church are persnickety, unkind, rude, only thinking about themselves, someone, at least one, will walk away scathed. Never, ever underestimate your impact. But think about it positively- have you considered how even the smallest acts of

kindness, love, and generosity might impact the souls that make up your church? There might be people who are in Heaven with you because you invited them to church, or because you shook a visitor's hand and told them you were happy they were there, or because you gave a gift that enabled a pastor to preach the Gospel, or you did the work it takes to keep this building up and running, or because you forgave your brother or sister and the power of that forgiveness made an impression on someone and they thought, "what is different about these people?" That's the power and glory of God's Church- you- that it's through the love you show that he works and brings people into his family forever. Church is not a chore- it is God's most precious possession and his tool for shining his light into a dark world. Amen.