

## **Introduction: What Makes for Peace?**

As Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem, that is the city of shalom, the city of peace, the city where he would offer up his life, he wept and he cried out,

*“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!” (Luke 19:42 ESV)*

Instead of embracing the advent, the coming, of Jesus Christ, the city of peace rejected the Prince of Peace. And evil men conspired together how they might have him put to death. For as Jesus says,

*“you did not know the time of your visitation.” (Luke 19:44 ESV)*

The people of God had for generations sought the coming of the messiah. They had placed their hopes in the peace that would be established by his kingly rule. And they prayed for the Peace of Jerusalem in obedience to Psalm 122. But on the day of his coming they did not know the things that make for peace. They were longing for peace, they were anticipating peace, but when peace was offered in the coming of Christ Jesus, they rejected it.

As we celebrate this advent season, we must each ask ourselves, “Do I know the things that make for peace?” Yes, we each long for peace, but do we know how to satisfy that longing?

Now as I look at my December calendar it would seem that I don't know what makes for peace. How many parties? How

many worship services? How much money? How many lights and inflatables this year? How many gifts to buy? How many cards to send? And when is that baby due? Peace on earth? I am not sure if that is going to be a part of the equation this Christmas season.

And yet the ironic thing is that peace is something that we all long to experience. We all have a desire to know security, fullness, rest, completion. We desire to leave aside the anxiety and the anxiousness of this world and in the midst of the holiday frenzy to pause and gaze into the face of the Christ child. To hear the promise that though we live in a world of conflict, but one has been born who will bring an end to our war.

We all have a thirst for peace, but we seem to never quite be able to quench that thirst. We long for it but we fill that longing with the wrong things. We feel dehydrated but instead of drinking water we keep reaching for sugary caffeinated sodas that taste good in the moment but leave us even more thirsty in the long run. We want peace but then we pursue the very things that bring us conflict.

But what we will see in Psalm 122 is that this longing we have may be fulfilled. This longing for peace is truly a desire to know the presence of God. That is when we thirst for peace, the only water that will do is the living water we find in the coming of Christ.

**Point One: Longing for the Place of Peace (1-2)**

The first thing that we see in Psalm 122 is that our longing for peace must be fulfilled in the place of peace. The place of peace.

Look down at verses 1 and 2 of our text there we read,

*“I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!” (Psalm 122:1–2 ESV)*

Throughout the year the people of Israel would have been called to gather in the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the annual feasts at the temple. And so, the Psalmist is recounting his joy in departing and then arriving in Jerusalem to worship with the people of God, in the presence of God.

This longing, this joy connected to a place tends to confuse us, though. Why would the Psalmist have to wait to meet with God at the temple? Isn't God everywhere? Why not just worship God where you are? Is God so tied to Jerusalem that he cannot be met elsewhere?

What we see in our text and throughout God's word is that in fact place does matter when it comes to the manifestation of God's presence. For a time, the presence of the Lord was manifested in the tabernacle, then in the temple at Jerusalem, today it is in the gathering of Christ's body, the Church, and one day his presence will dwell with man in the New Jerusalem the heavenly city to come.

And yet we have so divorced the holy from particular locations to the point that we have lost the truth that God's glory is

manifested in particular places more than in others. That there is holy ground.

Not that there are rocks or wood or geographic coordinates that have special claim to God's presence but rather that God in his providence has chosen places for his people to gather, and as they gather in the name of Christ his glory is manifested among them. His healing and saving presence is felt. Not that these pews and these walls are holy in and of themselves, but they are holy because these pews and these walls that are the place that we gather in the name of Christ to worship, that we gather to hear his word, to receive the sacraments, that we gather to meet with Christ.

And as this place has been set aside for the worship of God by the people of God this place is holy. And we should long to come here. We should long for this place. For these walls for this pulpit for this communion table for this organ for these pews because this place is the place that your church comes to meet with the Lord. We should love the place of the Lord's habitation (Ps 26:8). We should be glad when we are called to gather together to worship the Lord with his people.

Are you longing for peace this advent season? Then you must seek peace in the proper place. And it is definitely not going to be found at Wal-Mart or Target. You can't get it by isolating yourself for the crowds out in the woods. It is not even to be found by getting everything checked off your list or by hanging out on the couch with a snack to binge watch all of your favorite Christmas movies.

The only place of true peace is within the worshipping body of Christ. And this is why the Psalmist was glad when they said, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” If you would have peace then you too must come to the place where Christ has promised to be, the Church.

## **Point Two: Longing for the Blessings of Peace**

To experience peace, you must come to the place of peace, the Church. Second, we see in our text that if you would know peace this advent you must long for the blessings of peace. So, what are these blessings of peace? What are we longing for when we desire peace? Sometimes it is hard to put your finger on. You know you are lacking something but not quite sure what it is. It is like when you go to the fridge and you look in and you think, despite all the food in there, there really isn't anything to eat. So, you move to the pantry and the same thing. Nothing. You know you want something, but you don't know what.

Thankfully in our Psalm we have laid out for us the blessings of coming to the place of peace. Look down at verses 3 through 5. There we read,

*“Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.” (Psalm 122:3–5 ESV)*

First, we see that the place of God's peace is a place of security. The city is bound firmly together. We tend to think of cities as

places of crime and violence. But in the ancient Near East life outside of a city was a life open to attack from any number of enemies. But Jerusalem was a citadel. It was a fortress. The walls were thick. Fortifications strong. The blessing of coming into the city of peace was the security which it provided.

Second, we see that the place of God's peace is a place of unity. The various tribes of Israel would come together into one city. There were many reasons for strife among the tribes, but they were united in the worship of the one true God. And in the city of peace enemies once again became brothers.

Third we see that the place of God's peace is the place of worship. It was in the temple at Jerusalem that worship was offered, that sacrifices were made. It was here that sin was atoned for and forgiveness proclaimed. Those at enmity with God were cleansed and brought back into divine fellowship and acceptance.

And Fourth we see that place of God's peace is the place of justice. Here is where the king, even the son of David, would make rulings. The lower country courts could appeal to the highest court of the land. And when the people of God gathered in Jerusalem cases which needed the king's judgment would be heard. This is the place of peace because this is the place that justice would be given.

What are we longing for when we long for peace? These blessings. We are longing for security, unity, worship, and justice. That is, we are longing for the blessings of God's presence with us in the person of Christ. For Christ alone is our

shield and defender. Christ alone is our bond of union. In Christ alone do we worship God. And it is in Christ alone that justice will be rendered.

What are you longing for? What is the restlessness of your soul? What is the anxiety of the season? Ultimately it isn't all the outward distractions that we might blame. It is our need for Christ's coming. It is our need to find a cover for sin. It is our need to be reconciled with God and with our neighbor. It is our need to be found not guilty before the throne of God. When we long for peace, we are longing for the blessings of Christ's peace.

### **Point Three: Pray for the Coming of Peace**

So then how do we respond? How do we take hold of this peace? Well in some way we need to cease our striving for peace, at least our fleshly means of striving. And we must begin to strive by the Spirit.

The Psalm says in verses 6-9,

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!” For my brothers and companions’ sake I will say, “Peace be within you!” For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.”*  
(Psalm 122:6–9 ESV)

How will we strive for the blessings of peace this season? Simply through prayer: Prayer for peace in the place of peace.

The Psalm has just recounted the blessings of peace that come to those who are in Jerusalem. But now it says that we must pray for those blessings to come about.

Now as the Church is the New Covenant place of God's dwelling, we understand that this command teaches us to pray for the peace of the Church. While it might be good and right for us to pray for the modern-day city of Jerusalem, that is not the proper application of this verse. Because of the work of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit the dwelling place of God is no longer in the city of Jerusalem, it is in the gathering of Christ's body. It is here.

And so, if you want peace this season pray for the peace of the Church. Pray for the peace of this Church, Rivermont. Pray that all who come here would know the security of salvation that comes to all who love Christ. Pray for unity amongst our body, that we would not be torn asunder by rivalry or dispute. Pray for our worship that it might be in Spirit and in truth. And pray that justice would be found in this place. That the elders and pastors would rule well as under shepherds who feed the flock under their care.

Pray for the broader Church. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ across the city and across the state and nation. Pray that the Church in America that has been so divided would find unity in Christ. Pray that mainline denominations would rediscover the beauty of holiness and the truth of the gospel.

Pray for the persecuted Church throughout the world for believers in China and North Korea. Believers in Iran and



Turkey. Pray for their protection and their fruitfulness and growth.

And I encourage you that if you desire peace this season to pray for peace with your Church. We need your participation in our times of prayer. I encourage you to gather with us tonight from 4:00 to 5:00 here at Rivermont for our weekly prayer meeting as we seek to faithfully respond to the call of Psalm 122.

### **Conclusion: Jerusalem and Peace?**

It seems a strange irony of history that a city named the city of peace, Jerusalem, would be the location of so much violence and strife throughout the years. Wars, sieges, destruction, and exile seem to be more closely associated with the reality of this city than anything else.

And there are many of you here this morning that might have the same thought about the Church. Your experience of the Church is judgment and politics, vain disputes and backbiting, gossip, and splits.

Surely peace is to be found somewhere beside the Church. Well, we do need prayer.

But the truth is the full peace for which we long will not come until Christ's return. The ultimate fulfillment will not be felt we come to dwell in the New Jerusalem. As we read in Revelation 21,

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*  
*(Revelation 21:1–4 ESV)*

How are we to long for peace this advent? Pray for the coming peace of the New Jerusalem, the place where we will dwell in the presence of God through Christ Jesus for all eternity.