

Sacred Practice of Worship

Psalm 122

By pastor Ken Keyte

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1

Psalm 122

¹ I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

² Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

³ Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

⁴ That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel.

⁵ There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David.

⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure."

⁷ May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels."

⁸ For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."

⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

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In *Eugene Peterson's* book *A Long Obedience in the same direction*, he introduces the *third Psalm of Ascent*, like this:

"One of the afflictions of pastoral work has been to listen, with a straight face, to all the reasons people give for not going to church:

"My Mother made me when I was little."

"There are too many hypocrites in church."

"It's the only day I have to sleep in."

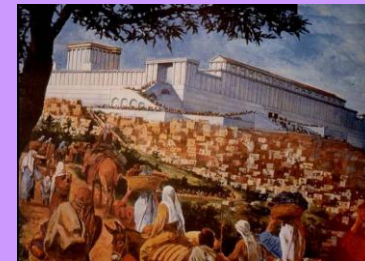
There were times when I responded to such statements with simple arguments that exposed them as flimsy excuses.

Then I noticed that it didn't make any difference. If I showed the inadequacy of one excuse, three more would pop up in its place. So I don't respond anymore. I listen (with a straight face) and go home and pray that person will one day find the one sufficient reason for going to church, *which is God!*

I go about my work hoping that what I do and say will be usable by the Holy spirit to create in that person a determination to worship God in a Christian community. Because what is far more interesting than the excuses people give for *not* worshipping is discovering the reasons *they do!*"

Here's an artist's impression of what it might have been long going to the temple for worship back then.

2



Psalm 122 is the song sung by a *Jerusalem temple goer*, who is *going to church* (as it was back then) for the sacred practice of *worshipping the Lord*.

And in this song he tells us about his:

- *attitude* of worship,
- his *stance* in worship
- his *reason* for worship
- and his *response* to worship

As he tells about *these*, we find *four good reasons* why we too should regularly join in the sacred practice of *worshipping the Lord!*

Our attitude of worship: *delight!*

Delighted to be going up together to the "house of the Lord."

3

Our attitude of worship: <i>Delight!</i>			
Psalm 122			
<i>Delighted to be going up together to the "house of the Lord." (v1)</i>			
Membership of:			
Church or religious organisation	Sport or recreational organisation		
• Non members: 54%	41%		
• Inactive members: 25%	18%		
• Active members: 18%	37%		

When you *wake up* Sunday morning,
the day that followers of Jesus *all over the country* and *all around the world* will be going to church to *worship the Lord*.

How do you usually feel about that?

Do you jump out of bed with a,
"Yes!" It's Sunday, the one day of the week set apart from all other days of the week, especially for worshipping God?"

Or is your attitude more likely to be,
"Oh it's Sunday! What shall I do today, head for the beach, go to the shops, do the lawns, get some housework done, or maybe I'll go to church?"

In *The Message* version of Psalm 122 we can *sense the attitude* of the man who wrote it, who's been *invited to go to Jerusalem* to worship the Lord.

"When they said, "Let's go up to the house of God," my heart leapt for joy!"

The Psalm writer expresses *sheer delight* at being invited to join a group of worshipers on their way to one of the *three annual worship festivals* in Jerusalem: the *passover*, *pentecost*, or *feast of tabernacles*.

You might be thinking at this point,

"Yeah I'd be delighted too if I only had to go to church three times a year!"

But that'd be *missing the attitude* this psalm writer has *for worship*. He was *absolutely delighted*, he was *thrilled to bits*, at joining a group of *fellow worshipers* on their way to the *house of the Lord!*

In 2011 a survey was conducted in New Zealand as part of an international study of the changing values of society and their impact on social life.

The survey included a *question* about the *status of New Zealanders' membership in voluntary organisations*:

First on the list of voluntary organisations was *"Church or Religious organisation"*. **3a**

The results showed that:

- 54% of New Zealanders are *not* a member of any Church or religious organisation. **3b**

- 25% of New Zealanders are *inactive members* of a church or religious organisation. **3c**

- And 18% of New Zealanders are *active members* of a church or religious organisation. **3d**

Next on the list of voluntary organisations was *Sport or recreational organisations*. **3e**

The results showed that:

- 41% of New Zealanders are *not* a member of a sport or recreational organisation. **3f**
- 18% of New Zealanders are *inactive members* of a sport or recreational organisation. **3g**
- And 37% of New Zealanders are *active members* of a sport or recreational organisation. **3h**

No surprise that there's about *twice* as many *active members* of a *sport or recreational organisation* as there are *active members* of a *church or religious organisation*.

But what *did surprise me* is that there are significantly more *inactive members* of a *church or voluntary organisation* than there are *active members*.

Whereas there are considerably more (in fact twice as many) *active members* of a *sport or recreational club* as there are *inactive members*.

Now I've been an *active member* of a Harrier & Athletic club for over 40 years and if I was asked, "*why?*"

The answer I'd give is *very simple*.

"I've been an active member of a harrier & athletic club for over 40 years because I'm delighted to participate in this sport!" I love to run!

So *what about you, active members* of Te Puke Baptist church?

Why did you come to church this morning?

Was it to sing some nice songs together?

Was it to hear a great sermon from the pastor?

Or maybe to catch up with friends afterwards?

All of which are *fine reasons* for coming to church today, but they *aren't* the *main reason* why anyone should want to go to church!

If we could ask the *active member of the Jerusalem temple*, who wrote Psalm 122, *why he was going to church*

he'd probably say,

"I've already told you that in the *first line* of my Psalm!"

Because there he says that he's going up to the house of the Lord because *he's delighted to worship the Lord!*

Why have you come to church today?

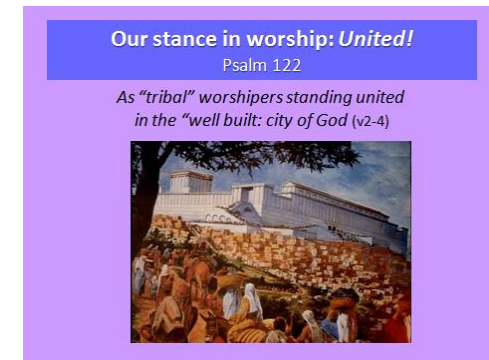
I hope it's because you're *delighted to worship the Lord!*

But that's *not the only reason* for joining in the sacred practice of worshipping the Lord.

Our stance in worship: (united)

As "*tribal*" worshipers standing united in the "*well built city*" of God.

4



From describing his *delighted attitude* in going to the house of the Lord, the psalm writer then moves on to tell us about *his stance* upon *arrival* at Jerusalem where God's temple was.

² Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

³ Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

⁴ That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD,...

I *haven't* thought of worship as being a "*tribal*" activity before until reading this Psalm!

The nation of Israel was made of *twelve tribes* named after the twelve sons of Jacob:

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, Benjamin.

The Psalm describes these *tribes of Israel* making their way up to Jerusalem, and *upon arrival* standing beneath the gates looking up in admiration *at this well built city*, where they've come to *worship the Lord*.

He's describing *their stance* as "*tribal worshipers*" who've just arrived at the city gates.

And it's *here* that their *tribal differences* somehow become *united together* into *one people*, God's people, *ready to worship the Lord!*

But what's really interesting is, the description the Psalm writer gives of Jerusalem as a "*well built city*" because he's using it as an *architectural metaphor* for what happens when these *tribal worshipers* stand *united together* in the "*well built city*" of God."

All the pieces of masonry fit *compactly*, all the building stones fit *harmoniously*. There are *no loose stones*, *no left over pieces*, *no awkward gaps* in the walls of the towers. Jerusalem was a "*compactly*", "*well built city*" at unity with itself."

On the *other end* of the architectural scale of craftsmanship, is my attempt at *rebuilding the roof of our letter box!*

5



The roof of which had rotted through and blown away in the last storm.

Using my *sadly lacking DIY home handyman skills*, I cut enough slats of wood to length, that I had in the garage to be able to make a letter box roof with.

I beveled the ends so they'd *butt together* at *the apex of the roof* and then I nailed and glued each of the slats into place, to form a new roof for our letter box.

At a distance the new letter box roof looks OK, (I think) but on closer inspection you'll notice some nails sticking through the side of the letter box and the beveled edges that were supposed to butt neatly together at the apex of the roof, *don't actually line up very well*, leaving a *gap at the top of the roof!* Which I'm going to *fill with sealer*, so our newspapers don't get wet!

Jerusalem on the other hand is a *fine example* of a *well built city* making it an *excellent metaphor* for what happens during worship.

Because *what's true architecturally* is *also true socially!*

United in their *stance of worship* all the different tribes functioned as a *single people* in *harmonious relationship*.

In worship, *all of our "tribal" differences*, whether that be, our wealth, ethnicity, educational qualifications, occupation, family relations, friendships and rivalries, become *insignificant*, as we gather into a *single body of people*.

In *similar fashion* to how the psalm writer describes these *tribal groups* arriving at the gates of Jerusalem and being *united in worship*, we can envisage *ourselves* arriving in our *various "tribal groups"*, but as we *enter the doors* for worship we *form up* in a *stance of unity* with each other, because we've all come to *worship the Lord!*

Something that *I think* can *help unify* the various social groupings of our church in worship,

is the *selection of songs* for worshipping the Lord.

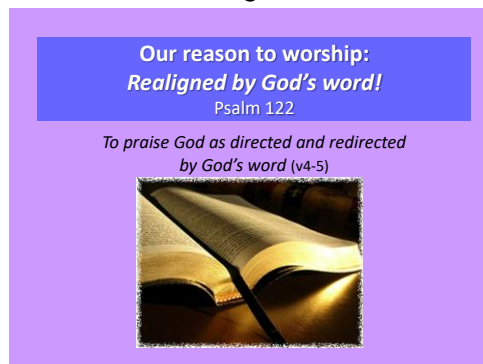
Here's a few suggestions for us and our *worship leaders* to think about.

- Selecting a *children's praise song* for the start when the kids are still with us, one they can sing and wave the flags to, would help them feel *united in worship* together with us at the start of church.
- Adding in a *well known hymn or chorus* that our older worshipers love and cherish, would help them feel included and *united together* in our worship.
- Learning a song or two in *Maori, Samoan, Fijian, Bislama, Nepalese, Hindi, or Mandarin* would help those of *different ethnicity* to the majority of us, feel *unified as worshipers together of the Lord*.
- And of course singing some of the *popular worship songs of today*, even if some of you find them a bit hard to sing, binds young and old together *in unity* as we worship the Lord!

Our reason to worship: (Realigned by God's Word)

To praise God as directed and redirected by God's word

6



So we worship with an *attitude of delight*, and with a *stance of unity*, what then is our *reason to worship*?

The psalm writer answers that question by *saying it straight* and then using *another worship metaphor*.

He says it straight when he first explains that the *reason to worship* is *to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel*.

You see, although we worship *because we want to*, we don't worship because *we feel like it*. If Christians *only worshipped* whenever they *felt like it*, there'd be *precious little worship going on in the world!*

So we worship because *the Bible says we should praise the name of the Lord* not because we *feel like praising God*.

But as *we do so*, don't be surprised to find that *when we start obeying the command* to praise God in worship, *our deep, essential need to be in relationship with God* is nurtured and we begin *feeling like* worshipping God!

That's because worship *isn't a feeling for God* that's expressed in an *act of worship!*

Worship is an *action* that develops *feelings for God!*

The *other reason* for worshipping God is expressed by the psalm writer in *another worship metaphor*.

He writes:

⁵ *There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David.*

The biblical definition of *judgment* is "*the decisive word by which God straightens things out and puts things right.*"

Remember worship *isn't just the songs we sing to God*, worship *also* involves having our lives *realigned by God's word*.

But not *just in the sermon*, like you're listening to now.

Most of the worship songs we sing have words that are *either taken directly from scripture*, or have been *inspired by scripture*.

As we worship, whether in *song, sermon, testimony or prayer*, the *decisive word by which God straightens things out and puts things right is realigning our lives!*

Sue Wilks told me the other day they've just had to get the wheel alignment done again on their car, she reckons she should *send the bill for the wheel alignment bill to the District Council* for not fixing all the *pot holes* in the roads that have their cars wheel alignment out!

The *good news* however, is that there's *no bill to pay* for getting our lives *realigned by God's word* as we *worship the Lord!*

Our response to worship: (peace & security making)

As peace & security makers for God's people, our neighbours, family & friends (v6-9)

7



So we worship with an *attitude of delight*, and with a *stance of unity* and for the *reason of being realigned by God's word* - how then do we *respond to worship?*

The writer of Psalm 122 says we do so by:

⁶ Pray[ing] for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure.

⁷ May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels."

⁸ For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."

⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

The psalm writer uses *three very significant words* in these *closing verses* that describe his response *to worshipping God*.

The first significant word is "*pray*", it's the word that *segways us from the giddy heights of worship back into the everyday world*. It does so because it's *not* the word *ordinarily used in formal worship*, but *is* used as the *everyday Hebrew word* for "*ask*". But it *is* still *prayer*, because *that's what we're doing* when we *ask for God's help* in our everyday world.

The *second significant word* is "*peace*" which in Hebrew is *shalom*, one of the *richest words* in the Bible.

Shalom is the word the Bible uses to *gather together all aspects of wholeness resulting from God's will being completed in and through us*.

Shalom is the *work of God that when complete, releases streams of living water in us and pulsates with eternal life*.

Every time Jesus *healed, forgave, or called someone*, he was demonstrating *shalom*.

And the *third significant word* is translated as either "*prosperity or security*" from the Hebrew word *shalvah*. Which has *nothing to do with large bank accounts, insurance policies or burglar alarms!*

The *route meaning* of *shalvah* is *leisure* - the *relaxed stance* of someone who knows that *everything is all right because God is with us, and for us, and over us, in Jesus Christ*. It is the *security* of knowing that *God has righted everything that's wrong with the world right, on the cross*,

and it's the *prosperity* of knowing that *Jesus is and will make everything new again forever, for everyone who worships him as Lord!*

So with these three significant words, the psalm writer tells us that we respond to worship by *returning* to our everyday world as *prayers*, and as *peace & security makers*, but not for *our sake*, according to his psalm,
for the sake of those who love the Lord,
and for the sake of our neighbours, family and friends,
and for the sake of the house of LORD!

A few months ago my Saturday afternoon chores were disturbed by the sound of an angry husband's voice yelling abuse and obscenities at his wife, coming from a neighbouring house. It wasn't the first time we'd heard this. And we haven't been sure what we should do about it when we've heard angry voices coming from their house.

This time, I went to the window and called out to our neighbour's wife whether she wanted me to call the police.

No answer, and the angry yelling continued.

So I called out again in a louder voice, "*Do you want me to call the police?*" Still no answer but this time the angry yelling stopped.

Then I heard the wife go out to her car and drive off.

Because she was now safely out of the situation, I carried on with my Saturday afternoon chores.

But a few minutes later the phone rang, it was our neighbour's wife, phoning from the safety of her Mum's place. She'd phoned to thank me for being concerned about her and said how much she appreciated me being willing to do something to help.

Then a couple of weeks ago the same thing happened, except this time the husband wouldn't let her get her car out of the garage to drive away, so she came over to our house very upset to ask if she could phone the police. Raewyn comforted her and cared for her until the police arrived.

We *respond* to worship by *transitioning* back into our everyday world as *prayers* and as *peace & security makers*, which is the fourth good reasons from psalm 122 why we should be *regular worshippers of the Lord!*

We worship because we delight in worshipping the Lord
because we're united by worship
because we're realigned by God's word
and because we respond to worship as prayers and as peace & security makers.

This is why we worship the Lord!

So *may we respond* to worshipping the Lord today by transitioning back into our everyday worlds-

as prayers for the *peace* of *Te Puke*,
as providers of security for those who love the Lord.
as peace & security makers within the boundaries of our homes.

"Peace be within you", for the sake of our family and friends,
And *prosperity* to you, for the sake of the *house of the LORD our God*.

Amen