

“THE REDISCOVERY OF THE CHURCH”

INTRODUCTION: There are a group of songs in the Psalter known as “The Songs of Zion.”

1. They celebrate the beauty, the wonder and the joy of *Zion*: The City of God
 - a. Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122
 - b. What made Zion so wonderful were three things:
 - i. It was the *City of David* (Jerusalem)
 - ii. It was the *City of the Temple*: The spiritual and religious headquarters for Israel.
 - iii. God was in that city, in the *Shekinah Glory*, in the Temple, thus it was, indeed.
 - iv. ...**The City of God**
 - c. *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.* (Psalm 46:4-5)
 - d. *Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress.* (Psalm 48:1-3)
In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. (Psalm 76:1-2)
How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. (Psalm 84:1-2)
On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. (Psalm 87:1-3)
I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD! Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.” (Ps. 122:1-2)
2. **Personal note:** *They are my favorite set of Psalms in the Psalter.*
3. When Babylon took Judah into captivity, they mocked the people of God: “*Sing us one of your songs of Zion! How great is your ‘holy city’ now?*”

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy! Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, “Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!” O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be

destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock! (Psalm 137)

- a. **Elmer A. Leslie:** *The Psalms: Translated and Interpreted in the Light of Hebrew Life and Worship; p. 31.*

Zion emerges into historical record in the era of David. It was a Jebusite stronghold when David captured it from the Canaanites and made it his capital, “the city of David”. To it he brought the ark of the Lord, the most ancient symbol of His presence, and set it there “in its place” in the sacred tent which he had pitched for it. When Solomon’s Temple was built, the ark was brought up in festal procession from the sacred tent and was housed permanently in the “most holy place”

- b. Seventy years later, the Persians defeated the Babylonians, sacked the city of Babylon, and let the Jews return to Zion.
- c. *On the way home, they sang a different song about Zion! When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126)*

4. **Zion** emerges in the story of redemptive history in the era of David.

- a. It was a *Jebusite hill town*; a stronghold David captured from the Canaanites and made his own headquarters and the capital of Israel.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off”—thinking, “David cannot come in here.” Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him. (2 Samuel 5:1-7, 9-10)

- b. He built a palace for himself and then he brought up the *Ark of the Covenant* to the city of Jerusalem.

And it was told King David, “The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.” So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. And when those who bore the ark

of the LORD had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. And David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn. As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart. And they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. (2 Sam 6:12-17)

- c. David then decided to build God a grander and greater “Palace” – The Temple of Jerusalem. But God said, “Not you, David. But your son!”

For David said, “Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands. I will therefore make preparation for it.” So David provided materials in great quantity before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon, “My son, I had it in my heart to build a house to the name of the LORD my God. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.’ (1 Chron. 22:5-10)

- d. Solomon built a magnificent Temple for the Lord. And God inhabited that Temple as He had promised!

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. (1 Kings 8:1-7, 10-11)

5. **Elmer A. Leslie:** *The Psalms*; pp. 31-32.

Zion gradually comes to be the designation for the Hebrew center of worship up until the Exile, and after the Exile represents the rallying center of Judaism, always with a religious connotation. It is then

viewed as the capital of Judaism and stands for the Temple worship and worshipers conceived as a social entity.

6. **“Zion”** (Hebrew: *Tsion*) is a rich word with an even richer symbolism for Jews and Christians
 - a. Originally it was the *hill*, in the center of Jerusalem, where the Jebusites built their fortress (high point of the area)
 - b. A hill between the valleys of *Kedron* (east) and *Tyropoeon* (west)
 - c. David’s city grew up to the south of Zion.
 - d. So Zion sets to the north and at the highest point of Jerusalem.
 - e. *In Zion, God lives with His people, and in Zion the nations may come to find the true and living God. Zion, therefore, is a blessing to all the nations of the earth.*
 - f. **Zion becomes an emblem of the church of God**
 - g. **Jean-Pierre Prévost: A Short Dictionary of the Psalms; p. 81.**

The role of Zion is not limited to that of a national symbol. The psalmists also sing of Zion as the spiritual capital of humanity. On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush— “This one was born there,” they say. And of Zion it shall be said, “This one and that one were born in her”; for the Most High himself will establish her. The LORD records as he registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” Selah Singers and dancers alike say, “All my springs are in you.” (Psalm 87)

7. When the Christian sees the word “Zion” he should think **“church.”**
 - a. The New Testament speaks of “*The City of God*” that Old Testament saints share with the New Testament saints...
 - b. *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)*

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living

God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:18-24)

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (Hebrews 13:14)

- c. The **City of God** is the crowning jewel of redemptive history and last great redemptive work of Jesus Christ...

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." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:1-5)

8. So...you and I, and all Christians in the world of all times, are moving on a *spiritual trajectory* toward the **City of God**...

- a. From Zion, to Jerusalem, to the church, to the New Jerusalem: *and all are "the City of God."*
 b. **Derek Kidner:** *Psalms 1-72; TOTC; p. 179.*

Here too, whatever the occasion that immediately inspired the psalm, we are conscious of a bigger setting than the hills of Judah. Zion is more than a local capital; the struggle concerns the whole earth and the whole span of time. The outlines of 'the Jerusalem above', with its great walls and foundations which are 'for ever', are already coming into view.

- c. This is why I love the *Songs of Zion* so much: they are the "Songs about the church," which I love so much.

9. **John Newton:** "*Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken*"

*Glorious things of thee are spoken,
 Zion, city of our God;
 He, whose word cannot be broken,
 formed thee for his own abode.
 On the Rock of Ages founded,
 what can shake thy sure repose?
 With salvation's walls surrounded,
 thou mayst smile at all thy foes.*

*See, the streams of living waters,
 springing from eternal love,*

*well supply thy sons and daughters,
and all fear of want remove.
Who can faint while such a river
ever will their thirst assuage?
Grace which like the Lord, the giver,
never fails from age to age.*

*Round each habitation hovering,
see the cloud and fire appear
for a glory and a covering,
showing that the Lord is near!
Thus deriving from our banner
light by night and shade by day,
safe we feed upon the manna
which God gives us when we pray.*

(Hymn: stanzas 1-3)

10. This lovely little Psalm was chosen by the Second Temple Levites, to be memorized, recited, prayed and sung on **Mondays...**
 - a. LXX: “A Psalm for the Second Day of the Week”
 - b. A reminder about how marvelous it is that God has chosen you to belong to *The Church*, and...
 - c. **How lovely is your local church:** *a piece of Zion, the City of God, right here in Matthews, NC.*
 - d. A lovely little Psalm with 3 stanzas and 3 truths about your church
 - e. *Psalm 24* (Sunday): A Recalibrating of Life
 - f. *Psalm 48* (Monday): **A Rediscovery of the Church**

I. REDISCOVERING THE BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH (Psalm 48:1-3)

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress. (Psalm 48:1-3)

1. Notice: *A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah*
 - a. *A song:* This Psalm is less a prayer and more a hymn for singing
 - b. A love song to the church like the “*Star Spangled Banner*” is a love song to America
 - c. *A Psalm of the Sons of Korah:* Levites who wrote Psalms in the Second Temple period (post-exilic Israel)
 - d. Or may be in the time of King Hezekiah (c. 201 BC)
2. **Key truth:** *What makes the church great is her God!*

- a. “*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the City of our God...*” (v. 1)
 - b. The church exists to extol the greatness of our God!
 - c. *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* (1 Peter 2:9-10)
3. **The church is truly the dwelling place of God, in the Spirit, in the world today.**
- a. Not so much a *building*, but a *people*: a congregation of saints in worship, work and witness. Not an institution!
 - b. *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 2:4-5)
 - c. *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.* (1 Timothy 3:14-15)
 - d. *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* (2 Cor. 6:16)
 - e. *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.* (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
4. When you came into this building this morning, you came to the **greatest place on earth...**
- a. Not because of the Preacher, the music, the people, the structure, the theology or denomination...
 - b. ...and certainly not because *you* are here...
 - c. ...but because *God is in our midst...right now!*
 - i. *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.* (Psalm 46:5)
 - ii. *Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress.* (Ps. 48:3)
 - iii. *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.* (Matthew 18:20)
5. The Sons of Korah describe the great *beauty* of the church in **seven descriptions** of the church, piled one upon the other:
- a. *The City of our God*: “our God,” the Covenant-keeping God
 - b. *His holy mountain*: made sacred by Christ, His work and His presence with us – on Zion Jesus died for our sins!
 - c. *Beautiful in elevation*:

i. **A. F. Kirkpatrick:** *The Book of Psalms*; p. 263.

Its elevation is remarkable; occasioned not from its being on the summit of one of the numerous hills of Judaea, like most of the towns and villages, but because it is on the edge of one of the highest tablelands of the country. To the traveler approaching Jerusalem from the west or east, it must always have presented the appearance...of a mountain city; breathing, as compared with the plains of Jordan, a mountain air; enthroned, as compared with Jericho and Damascus, Gaza or Tyre, on a mountain fastness.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD. (Isaiah 2:1-5)

d. *The joy of all the earth:* salvation for all mankind

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3)

e. *Mount Zion in the far north:* North of the city, but also a reference to the dwelling place of the true God

i. For the Canaanites, Mount Zaphon ("north") was where the gods lived

ii. Like *Olympus* for the Greeks

iii. **Derek Kidner:** *"This was a traditional expression in Israel and among her neighbors, for God's royal seat."* (p. 179)

iv. *You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;* (Isaiah 14:13)

v. **H. C. Leupold:** *The Psalms*; pp. 375-376.

When he uses the descriptive phrase "in the far north" he seems quite definitely to be making an allusion to another hill which traditionally was a kind of Olympus for the Near Eastern nations even as the Greeks were wont to think of their whole pantheon as dwelling on Olympus. The writer seems to use the expression as one

that is generally known and by the use of it implies that what the fables of the Gentiles imagined was a reality in Zion: God really dwelt there.

- vi. i.e., God **really** does live in His church. It is there (in Zion) that the peoples of the nations can find God.
- f. The City of the Great King: David, but also the King of Kings – God and His Princely Son
Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. (Psalm 2:1-8)
- g. *Within her citadels, God has made Himself known as a fortress: The place of security and protection for God’s people*
God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46:1-7)
- 6. Every once in a while (but increasingly in this age), I hear people speak of being “*embarrassed by*” or being “*ashamed of*” the church. It always **infuriates** me to hear this.
 - a. I am **not** ashamed of my family, my home town and the state of Ohio, of the Ohio State University, of America, of the PCA, or of *Christ Covenant Church*.
 - b. You are **never** ashamed of those whom you love.
 - c. They are **not perfect**, but they are gifts of a gracious God to you and to me.
 - d. **God** put me in the Ross family; in Columbus, Ohio; in the Ohio State University, in America and in the church – the PCA and at Christ Covenant.
 - e. *I could never be ashamed of the wife of God, the Bride of Christ, or the mother of my soul! Never!*
 - f. I am not blind...just deeply in love!
- 7. **Thomas Peter Wahl:** *The Lord's Song in a Foreign Land; p. 48.*

God still works in her midst in word and sacrament. Despite all the failure of compassion that I have known in the church – and which I have myself committed in the church’s name – all the blindness to issues of justice, despite all the arrogance, greed, and exploitation, still it is in this same Church that I have been challenged by the Gospel, that I have seen something of the living

Christ in our lives and work and wisdom of men and women who have been touched by that Gospel. It is in this Church that I have known pardon and love.

8. **Listen to me:** You do not need to be embarrassed by Christ Covenant Church, or ashamed of who we are, because God is not. And God is still with us...and loves us!
 - a. *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers... (Hebrews 2:10-11)*
 - b. We are the Family of God.
 - c. We are the City of God.
 - d. We are the School of Christ.
 - e. We are the Kingdom of God.
 - f. We are the House of God – *where Jesus lives.*
9. **What is there to be embarrassed about or ashamed of?**
10. Our embarrassment comes from *the world*. But look at how the world relates to the church...next stanza of the Psalm.

II. REDISCOVERING THE VICTORY OF THE CHURCH (Psalm 48:4-8)

For behold, the kings assembled; they came on together. As soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they were in panic; they took to flight. Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor. By the east wind you shattered the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever. (Psalm 48:4-8)

1. Many scholars conjecture that this Psalm was written when Hezekiah was king (c. 722 BC), when Assyria invaded the Holy Land, conquered Israel (the northern kingdom), and besieged Jerusalem in Judah (the southern kingdom). These “*kings assembled*” would have been the Assyrian General **Sennecherib** and his vassal lords.
2. This is quite possible: A great miracle of deliverance was worked that day by God to rescue Jerusalem and route her enemies...

And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. (2 Kings 19:35-36)

And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. (2 Chronicles 32:21)
3. In truth, we cannot be certain of any *specific* historical reference behind Psalm 48.

4. **James Montgomery Boice** is correct: “*So the specific reference in this Psalm, as well as those in the others (Psalms 46 and 47), are inconclusive.*” (Psalm; vol. 2, p. 403).
5. What I think is this: The Sons of Korah are making reference to the many times God’s people were beset by enemies all around them, and each time God gave them deliverance.

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. (Psalm 27:1-3)

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. (Psalm 91:1-8)

6. The “*ships of Tarshish*” make reference to Spain. The imagery is used elsewhere in Scripture for proud, godless and foreign enemies set against God and the Holy City.
 - a. *For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.* (Isaiah 2:12-17)
 - b. **H. C. Leopold:** “*Ships of Tarshish represent any man’s proud structures. All this becomes more vivid when we realize that ‘Ships of Tarshish’ were the mightiest of the sea going vessels of those days.*” (Psalms; p. 377)
 - c. Mighty enemies apparently invincible
7. We sing of the same truth in our own Christian hymns:
 - a. **Sabine Baring-Gould:** “Onward Christian Soldiers”

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane, but the church of Jesus constant will remain. Gates of hell can never gainst that church prevail; we have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail. (Stanza 4)
 - b. Where are the church’s enemies after all these ages? Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Rome, the Ottoman Empire, the Papal States, Nazi Third Reich, Communist Russia or China, Islam and its *jihad* against the church?
 - c. *Any unholy war against the City of God (church) will ultimately fail in utter defeat and destruction.*
 - d. **This is the whole message of the Revelation of John.**

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:7-10)

8. These kings were **not** Julius Caesar. There was no *veni, vidi, vici* for them.
 - a. *veni, vidi, vici*: I came, I saw, I conquered (Gaul)
 - b. They came, they saw, they fled in fear and in disarray.
 - c. *For behold, the kings assembled; they came on together. As soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they were in panic; they took to flight. Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor. (Ps. 48:4-6)*
 - d. What they saw was **Zion**: the City of God, the Church in which *God was powerfully present to protect.*
 - e. *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Ps. 46:4-7)*
9. God breathes on His enemies and the persecutors of the church. His “breath” (*ruach; pneuma*) is His Holy Spirit. It is the Third Person of the Trinity who confuses, confounds and scatters the enemies of the church, age after age.
10. **Every decade or so**, some pundit forecasts the demise and vanishing of the Christian church.
 - a. **George Barna** and **Harold Camping** have been the latest to do so.
 - b. *They are wrong.*
 - c. Nothing, no power in the world, visible or invisible, will cause the church to go away.
 - d. Because Jesus has promised just the opposite...

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)
11. The Church of Jesus “*constant will remain.*” In the end, the Church, through Christ, conquers all her enemies:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)
12. And we will live to tell our children about this Victory in Jesus!

III. REDISCOVERING THE LEGEND OF THE CHURCH (Psalm 48:9-14)

We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments! Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.

(Psalm 48:9-14)

1. The Sons of Korah think about all God’s deliverances, they revel in the name of God that is known throughout the world, they walk around the City of God admiring her strength, beauty and majesty. And they, “*tell the next generation*” (v. 13) the **Legends of the City of God...**
2. We call this “**Church History**”: The record of the mighty acts of God, among the nations, as He spreads the Gospel of Christ around the world and reshapes history by means of His Church.
 - a. The acts of the Apostles
 - b. The history of the Church Fathers
 - c. The stories of the early martyrs
 - d. The ascendancy of Christendom and the Holy Roman Empire
 - e. Reformation and Revivals
 - f. **Cotton Mather**: “*The Great Works of God in America*”
 - g. The records of brave missionaries
 - h. The biographies of great preachers, church leaders, evangelists, and theologians
 - i. **The story of the church has become legendary!**
3. **Reginald Heber** (1827): “*A noble army, men and boys, the matron and the maid, around the Savior’s throne rejoice, in robes of light arrayed. They climbed the steep ascent of heaven, through peril, toil and pain. O God, to us may grace be given to follow in their train.*”
4. **Saint Augustine**: *The City of God*; Book 22, ch. 6, 3:428.

An uncounted multitude of martyrs, under duress of the most savage torture, have chosen death rather than to deny that Christ is God...they have not merely refused to give up worshipping Christ, but they have defiantly preached Him openly to every people in the world. And, note, too, that though the City of Christ, still pilgrimaging on earth, has a population big enough to make up many battalions, it has never taken up arms against its persecutors for any merely temporal gain. On the contrary, for the sake of its eternal salvation, it has repudiated military self-defense. Christians have been chained and put in prison, scourged and tortured, burned and torn to pieces, killed in countless ways—but their number continued to increase. Their idea of going to war for worldly security is to prefer their Saviour to the saving of their skin.

5. I often hear of people, especially younger folks, who are somewhat embarrassed, by the church...
 - a. ...so full of geeks, hypocrites, losers and “uncool” people
 - b. But I don't see it that way...not at all.
 - c. I could **never** be ashamed of *The Apostles, Martin Luther, John Calvin, or John Knox; Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, Charles Hodge, Amy Carmichael, Billy Graham, James*

Montgomery Boice, Imbumi and Martha Makkuku and my friends John Shane and Tom Austin – 30 year missionaries in Africa. And the people I’ve known all my life in the church!

- d. *Ashamed? Never! What I want to do is tell my grandchildren their stories in hopes that Hannah, Harris, Mattie-Jane, Liam, and little Abigail will be numbered among them!*
6. I want to tell them the “God story”...
 - a. *Gotts spiel...Gospel*
 - b. *Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever. (Psalm 48:12-14)*
 - c. For the story of God and His City, Christ and His church, are indeed inseparable!
 7. **The bottom line:** The greatness of the City of God is the God of the city...
 - a. *Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever. (Psalm 48:12-14)*
 - b. The glory of the church is the Lord of Glory – *Jesus Christ*
 - c. *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)*
 - d. **Note:** “...glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations...”
 8. Proof of this: “*Generations in Community: 50 Days of Prayer*” (2012)

CONCLUSION: The Psalms of the Day are daily lessons we tend to forget, vital lessons about **God** and His beloved Son, **Jesus Christ...**

1. Psalm 24: *A Recalibration of Life*
 - a. *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. (Ps. 24:1-2)*
 - b. All of life and all of me belong to God
 - c. Lesson #1 for Sundays
2. Psalm 48: *A Rediscovery of the Church*
 - a. *Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. ...consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever. (Psalm 48:1-2, 13-14)*
 - b. The Center of history is the church

- c. Lesson #2 for Mondays
3. A lesson especially in this age where Americans, and even evangelical and reformed Christians, have such a *low view of the church*...
 - a. There **is** a beauty to the church – “a glory” as St. Paul calls it – that comes from the Holy Spirit in and among His people.
 - b. There **is** a victory for the church that is rooted in Jesus Christ and His building and sustaining of the church through all trials and tribulations.
 - c. There **is** a legendary story about the church because God has placed His church at the center of redemptive history and through it has reshaped all of human history.
 4. **If this is so – and Psalm 48 says it is! – then you and I ought to rediscover three things:**
 - a. **One:** the joys, pleasures and treasures of God in our beautiful Christ Covenant Church – the beauty of grace.
 - b. **Two:** the heroic way that God is working in and through Christ Covenant Church – the victory of Christ.
 - c. **Three:** the amazing story that God is writing about Christ Covenant Church – the legends of redemption.
 5. Like a man who takes for granted, then ignores, and soon falls out of love with a beautiful, noble, and good wife, so we have taken for granted, ignored, and fallen away from Christ’s **Bride** – the Church.
 6. It is time for “*Zion’s children*” – the people of the church – to rediscover all that God has for them in, with and through their local church.
 7. **John Newton:** “*Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken*”

Savior, if of Zion’s City, I through grace a member am

Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in thy Name

Fading is the worldling’s pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show

Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion’s children know! (Stanza 4)