

“Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken”  
Psalm 87  
(Preached at Trinity, November 20, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. John Newton was born in England on July 24, 1725. His mother died two weeks before his 7<sup>th</sup> birthday. At age 11 he went to sea. He sailed six voyages before his father retired. He then signed on with a merchant ship sailing to the Mediterranean Sea. In a long series of events that included being pressed into service by the Royal navy and then serving on a slave ship. He would later describe himself during this period as “an infidel and libertine.”  
In 1748 while sailing on the merchant ship, *Greyhound* the ship was overtaken by a terrible storm and was on the brink of sinking. In the middle of the night as the ship filled with water he cried out to God. This began the process that led to his trusting Christ. We know Newton best for some of his hymns—he wrote two in particular in 1779
  - A. Stirred at the wonder of his salvation he wrote, “*Amazing Grace*, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”
  - B. He also wrote,  
*Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*  
Zion, city of our God;  
God, 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.
2. Why do I begin my sermon tonight with this brief biography? Because **Psalm 87** has Zion as it’s subject. It is one of five psalms known as “Songs of Zion.” These psalms are 48, 76, 84, 87, 122. Perhaps none are as wonderful as **Psalm 87**.  
**Verse 3** became the inspiration for Newton’s hymn.
3. What is meant by the name Zion?
  - A. In early Israel it was a name that was applied to the city of Jerusalem, the city of David. We find it used first in **2 Samuel**  
**2 Samuel 5:7 KJV** - "Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same *is* the city of David."
  - B. In time it came to mean the City of God. As time passed it carried the full expression of Israel’s expectation—that God would send forth His Messiah who would rule in Jerusalem bringing all nations under his dominion.  
**Acts 1:6 KJV** - "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"
  - C. Sadly, the Jews missed God’s ultimate meaning behind this glorious city. As we’ve seen over and over, God’s purpose for Israel find’s ultimate fulfillment in Christ and the church. The church is the true Israel of God.

**Galatians 6:14-16 KJV** - "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. <sup>15</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. <sup>16</sup> And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

4. The church is the ultimate fulfillment of Zion. The church IS Zion. And so we can lift our hearts unto the heights of wonder and awe joining with John Newton and with the psalmist: *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*, Zion, city of our God;
5. Tonight I want to read **Psalm 87** through the eyes of the New Testament and the accomplishment of the cross in creating God's glorious church – Zion, the city of God – heavenly Jerusalem.

**Revelation 21:2 KJV** - "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

I. Zion is a city highly favored of God – **Verses 1-2**

A. First we find that Zion is the work of God

**Psalm 87:1 NAU** - "His foundation is in the holy mountains."

1. God laid the foundation – His redemptive purpose has gone forth unchanged from the beginning
2. He chose His people, sent His Son to redeem them, sent His Spirit to change them – it is God's doing

**Psalm 118:23 NAU** - "This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes."

3. Spurgeon – "The foundation of the church, which is the mystical Jerusalem, is laid in the eternal, immutable, and invincible decrees of Jehovah. He wills that the church shall be, he settles all arrangements for her calling, salvation, maintenance and perfection, and all his attributes, like the mountains round about Jerusalem, lend their strength for her support. Not on the sand of carnal policy, nor in the morass of human kingdoms, has the Lord founded his church, but on his own power and godhead, which are pledged for the establishment of his beloved church, which is to him the chief of all his works."

4. Newton  
*Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*  
Zion, city of our God;  
God, whose word cannot be broken,  
formed thee for his own abode.

B. God set His love upon His people from before time began

**Psalm 87:2 KJV** - "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."

1. The "gates of Zion" refer to the city itself just as when Jesus says of the Church, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" He is referring to all of the domain of Satan.
2. God's love is infinite towards His elect.  
If you were to examine every aspect of God's love for His people—the height, depth, breadth, width—you would discover it to be infinite in every way

3. Although God loved Jacob, He has greater love for His church. God delights in His people. He delights in the Church, the true Israel, more than the foreshadow. He loves them for the sake of Christ and the image they bear.
4. Do you know this infinite love of God?

## II. Zion is a city more glorious than all others – Verse 3

- A. Earthly Jerusalem was a glorious city
  1. It was the dwelling place of the Temple of God
  2. From her David ruled with righteousness
  3. From her the teachings and precepts of God went forth to the nations
  4. But earthly Jerusalem cannot compare to the glory of the church.
- B. The Church shines with the radiance of her King.
  1. The people of God reflect the beauty of their King.  
**Ephesians 5:27 KJV** - "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."
  2. Notice that the glory of Zion is spoken. If we are the representation of God's Zion today may we appear so amazing and glorious that multitudes speak of us. May we not be ignored.  
**Matthew 5:14-16 KJV** - "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."  
**Revelation 21:23 KJV** - "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."
  3. The world should look upon us with amazement. Remember the reaction after Paul was converted:  
**Acts 9:21 KJV** - "But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?"
  4. The greatest glory of Zion is the glory of her King.  
 And may we speak of him continually. How marvelous is the Christ of the Church. We must invite people to "come see." Christianity has always been "Come see."  
**John 4:29 KJV** - "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"  
**John 1:45-46 KJV** - " Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. <sup>46</sup> And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see."  
**Mark 5:19-20 KJV** - "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. <sup>20</sup> And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all *men* did marvel." κηρύσσω

- III. Zion is a city that reflects God's transforming power – **Verses 4-6**
- A. First of all, this passage speaks of the great diversity of Zion's inhabitants
1. God's people are not from a single race
  2. The Gentiles are being gathered. God is saving the heathen people.  
**Isaiah 60:3** – "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."
  3. The Book of Revelation also describes it  
**Revelation 21:24-26 KJV** - "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. <sup>25</sup> And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. <sup>26</sup> And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it."
- B. The Gospel goes forth to all nations
1. From Zion flows the "good news" of the Gospel which is offered to all men – not for the Jews only but for people from every tribe and nation. The Gospel of great joy is for all men  
**Genesis 12:2-3** – "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."
  2. The incarnation of Christ is a blessing upon all men. The atonement is a blessing upon all men in that it is a demonstration of God's mercy upon all men. All men are being preserved because of God's redemptive plan in Christ Jesus
  3. The atonement may be a blessing unto all men, but it has a particular design. God is saving HIS people—one by one. His counting is perfect.  
**Psalms 87:6 KJV** - "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people"
- C. We also see in this passage the mighty transformation that takes place upon those entering the city
1. The Psalmist describes all manner of Gentiles born into Zion  
Rahab represents Egypt, the Babylonians, Philistines, people of Tyre
  2. Notice he speaks of those who were previously the enemies of the people of God. As they are born into Zion they are radically changed  
God's people are changed from wickedness to righteousness
  3. Many today embracing Premillennialism insist that this looks to a future fulfillment during the 1000 year millennium. But this misses the glory of and power of the Gospel. Through the Gospel of Christ the enemies of God's people are transformed.
  3. Isaiah described the transformation in terms of the nature of animals  
**Isaiah 11:7-9 KJV** - "And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, <sup>9</sup> and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

**Isaiah 65:25 KJV** - "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust *shall be* the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD."

- a. This can best be seen in Saul of Tarsus  
Before his conversion he was a ravening wolf bent on destroying every Christian. He hated the church of Christ.  
**Acts 8:3 KJV** - "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison."  
**Acts 9:1 KJV** - "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"  
After his conversion he was transformed into a lamb. He lost his hatred for Christians and became their defender. Peter would later refer to him as:  
**2 Peter 3:15 KJV** - "our beloved brother Paul"
- b. Men formerly cruel and hateful are changed by the Gospel to gentle, loving, humble members of the kingdom.  
**2 Corinthians 5:17** – "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
- c. **Calvin:** "*By these images, the Prophet indicates that among the people of Christ there will be no disposition for injuring one another, nor any ferocity or inhumanity*"

#### IV. The Citizens of Zion will march in glorious joy and triumph – **Verse 7**

- A. The psalm closes with a scene of great rejoicing
  1. Isaiah describes it  
**Isaiah 51:11** – "Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting **joy** *shall be* upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and **joy**; *and* sorrow and mourning shall flee away."
  2. The psalmist describes singers and the sound of instruments  
Remember, this is a psalm for the sons of Korah—Israel's musicians
  3. The people of God are filled with song – sounds of rejoicing  
*"The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets  
before we reach the heavenly fields,  
before we reach the heavenly fields,  
or walk the golden streets, or walk the golden streets."*
- B. And what are they singing?
  1. They are singing the joys of Christ – He is the foundation, the fount of every blessing .
  2. Springs have a source. Our Springs begin in Christ  
**John 7:38 KJV** - "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

3. Our lips are filled with His praises  
Newton adds in the second verse:

*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.*

4. We sing another great hymn by Baptist scholar *Robert Robinson*

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing,  
tune my heart to sing thy grace;  
streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
sung by flaming tongues above.  
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,  
mount of thy redeeming love.*

#### Conclusion:

1. The greatest of all blessings is the blessing of being a part of Zion.  
*Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*  
Zion, city of our God;
2. To know Christ is greater than anything else this world has to offer.  
If you know Him give yourself to serving Him.  
Keep marching joyously towards your final rest.
3. If you don't know Him give yourself to seeking Him.